

# KNOWN™

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Resource Management *Session 1—Taking Care of Business*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **What do I need to know about stewardship?** and to drive home this one truth: **Stewardship is managing our resources in a way that honors God.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. God provides our resources. (Matt. 25:14-15)**

- > A wealthy man entrusted his servants with vast sums of money with the expectation that they would use it to act in his interests.
- > The sum of money given to each servant was huge.
- > The story has everything to do with what Jesus' followers would do with the resources He had entrusted to them as they waited for His ultimate return.
- > Money was not the only resource Jesus meant for His followers to use well.
- > Resources are not distributed evenly; regardless, all resources come from God and belong to God.

#### **B. We are responsible to manage God's resources. (Matt. 25:16-18)**

- > The first two servants got to work immediately.
- > The third servant hid the money.
- > Regardless of how much we are given, we are called to industrious investment.
- > The point for believers is the expansion of God's kingdom, not the development of wealth.
- > Despite all God has entrusted to us, we act as if we bear no responsibility for it.

#### **C. We are accountable for our stewardship. (Matt. 25:19-30)**

- > The first two servants were affirmed.
- > Faithful servants are given more responsibility.
- > Faithful servants also share in the Master's joy.
- > Students need to understand that how much they produce is secondary to how faithfully they act.
- > The third servant justified his inaction.
- > Unfaithfulness with the talents entrusted to us shows a lack of faith.
- > Faith in Christ should be demonstrated in the way we handle the resources He gives us.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

American teenagers are a significant part of the American economy. The amount of disposable income teenagers spend totaled \$179 billion just a few years ago. That is significantly more than the entire economy of some developing countries. Economists estimate that teenagers who hold a part-time job have discretionary spending of a little more than \$100 per week. (Again, keep in mind that over half of the world lives on less than \$2 per day; so American teens spend 10 times that each week.) So, what do teenagers spend their money on? Ask your students. You will probably find that they spend money on things like food, entertainment, clothing, and sporting equipment.

Largely, teenagers have bought into a consumer mindset prevalent in America. Their desire for more and more material goods—and their spending habits to buy them—seem to indicate that many teenagers have come to believe that life is all about the acquisition of stuff. Teenagers may not spend their money frivolously. Many save money for college. Some are saving for a bigger consumer product ... such as a car. But few of them (as well as many adults) view their money as an issue of stewardship from God. Perhaps it is time for us to visit what the Bible teaches about money.

Over the next four weeks, as you lead students in Bible study related to God's view of money, begin to evaluate your own life. How important are things to you? Do you see what you have as a trust from God? Are you satisfied with the way you use the money God has given you? Are you, personally, reflecting these Life Principles to your students—or is this just another topic to teach?

The teenagers you teach may see issues like support for the ministry of the church and relief of the poor as something God expects of adults. Many often dismiss teaching on stewardship as something for their parents. However, this generation of American teenagers is among the wealthiest people to ever inhabit planet earth. The teenagers in your Bible study group may not feel wealthy. Still, few people have ever had as much buying power as these young consumers with so little personal responsibility. What do you think God expects of teenagers in the sphere of money and possessions? How can you guide teenagers toward a more spiritual consideration of money? What do you think motivates teenagers to selfless giving and careful stewardship?

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### **A. God provides our resources.**

Matthew 25 includes three stories Jesus told as the time of His arrest, trial, and crucifixion approached. All three of these stories focused on His return. While Jesus certainly was teaching His disciples, it is important to note that Jesus was also talking to many of the religious leaders who considered their own religion completely unblemished. The first of these stories, the Parable of the Ten Virgins, focused on people being unprepared for the return of Christ. The second story, the focus of this Bible study, addressed how Jesus' servants are to handle the resources He has given them as they await His return. The chapter ends with the story of the sheep and the goats, depicting the separation for glory or punishment in the coming future judgment. As mentioned, this session focuses on the resources—His resources—that God provides for us to use for His glory.

<sup>14</sup> *“For it is just like a man going on a journey. He called his own slaves and turned over his possessions to them. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents; to another, two; and to another, one—to each according to his own ability. Then he went on a journey. (Matt. 25:14-15)*

The wealthy man in Jesus' story was going on an extended journey. He entrusted his servants with vast sums of money with the expectation that they would use it to act in his interests. The slaves understood that

they would benefit from the increase of the master's income, but they also understood that the money was not theirs and they would not keep the returns they received.

A *talent* referred to a specific weight, but it is not clear whether the weight was of gold, silver, or perhaps even copper. The word used for money in verse 18 can also mean *silver*, leading some commentators to think Jesus expected His hearers to understand the slaves received talents of silver. If that is true, the sum of money given to each servant was huge. A man might have worked for nearly 20 years to earn that much money. Even the one talent of the third servant would have been a significant amount of money.

Jesus had already told the disciples that He was going to be crucified. He would soon return to His Father. The story has everything to do with what Jesus' followers would do with the resources He had entrusted to them as they waited for His ultimate return. Perhaps Jesus intended his hearers to understand that God had given His people significant resources. Jesus entrusted all of His followers with great things.

Clearly, money was not the only resource Jesus meant for His followers to use well. The parable can have numerous applications. Christ's followers are entrusted with spiritual gifts, intellect, natural abilities, and positions of influence. All of these should be used with the best interests of the Master in mind. Certainly, the parable also applies to our material resources. Jesus was saying that those of us He has entrusted with resources are to use all of those resources to benefit His kingdom. The kingdom principle in this parable is not the amount however large it might have been—the principle is that the giver of these possessions is God Himself. We are the stewards of His resources.

How do your teenagers view the money they receive? Do they see money given to them by their parents as something to simply consume on themselves? Do they see the money they work to earn as a gift from God? While God does give them lavish gifts, the expectation is that they view themselves as stewards over the money and use it according to the interest of their Master, not simply their own interest.

One more point should be made. Jesus said the master in the story gave talents to each "according to his own ability" (v. 15). While the master gave much to all of his slaves, he gave considerably more to some than others. Teenagers may be frustrated with the fact that so many of their friends have so much more than they do. Jesus seemed to be saying that God doesn't give us more resources than we can handle. Regardless of the amount received, the Master expects all to be using what he or she was given. Also note, the Master gave something to everyone, again emphasizing that what was given belonged to the Master regardless of the amount each person received.

## **B. We are responsible to manage God's resources.**

*Immediately*<sup>16</sup> the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more.<sup>17</sup> In the same way the man with two earned two more.<sup>18</sup> But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money. (Matt. 25:16-18)

The first two servants got to work immediately. This seems to indicate that they took the trust they had received from the master seriously. Contemporary thought might suggest that a person put his or her money to work by investing it...perhaps in stocks or in some venture from which they hope to get a return. Slaves in Jesus' day probably would not have taken such a hands-off approach. Jesus' hearers probably understood Him to mean that the first two slaves started business endeavors with the money and that they worked hard for a return. The first two servants doubled the investment.

The third servant hid the money in a hole. He was lazy. Perhaps the slave thought he wouldn't benefit very much from the use of the money. He ignored the large trust of money he had received and continued to live as he had before. How common is that among Jesus' followers today? Despite all God has entrusted to us, we act as if we bear no responsibility for it.

What are our primary objectives in the way we handle our money? We spend money on a lot of things. We

must meet basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter. Most of us incur some expenses because of our jobs—things like transportation, clothing, and training to stay on top of trends within our field. Many of us invest in things that help us to feel fulfilled: playing golf, leading a Boy Scout troop, and going to educational events. We spend money to create a comfortable atmosphere at home and we plan an occasional vacation. Of course, we give money to support the work of the gospel through the church. The question is not whether these expenditures are appropriate...they are. But, is our goal in life comfort and plenty, or do we choose a simpler lifestyle than those without Christ so that we can use the ample resources God has given us for His priorities and His objectives? (While discussing the things we purchase, we must also admit that we make a lot of impulse purchases on things that we could probably live without.)

Discuss spending patterns with the teenagers you lead. You may also want to discuss questions such as: How do we manage God's resources in a way that honors Him? What are some other ways we could use our money in a way that might promote the growth of the kingdom of God? God provides good things for His children, and students should not feel guilty about having an iPod or more than one pair of jeans. Still, help them to see that God has called them to manage their money as stewards of God—and His resources. Surely, that means they do not always respond to the latest advertisement by robotically saying: Yes, I need that! (And the same goes for you, too!)

### **C. We are accountable for our stewardship.**

Ultimately, the master in the story returned. Jesus meant for His hearers to understand that, at some point, they would be called to account for what they had done with what God had entrusted to them—regardless of the amount.

<sup>19</sup> *“After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. Look, I’ve earned five more talents.’ <sup>21</sup> “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!’ <sup>22</sup> “Then the man with two talents also approached. He said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. Look, I’ve earned two more talents.’ <sup>23</sup> “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!’ (Matt. 25:19-23)*

The first two servants were affirmed. God affirms the work of those who are faithful in their stewardship. How much the servants produced is probably secondary to the point. Jesus applauded their faithfulness to His interests. Students need to understand that how much they produce is secondary to how faithfully they act. Had the third servant worked hard with his one talent and produced even a meager return, he would have undoubtedly received a positive response from his master.

Because the first two servants had proven faithful with the talents they received, they were given additional responsibilities. We might have expected the reward to be rest from their labor, but instead their work was multiplied. Faithful servants are given more responsibility. God's intention for your students (for all believers) is that they continue to faithfully invest in His kingdom. Greater wealth has benefits, but it also comes with greater responsibility for management.

Faithful servants also share in the Master's joy. Perhaps this was the greater reward for the servants in the story. As we are faithful with what God has given us—supporting a ministry that reaches people for Christ, serving Him among an unreached people group in a distant land, helping someone who can't afford what they need—we share in the joy God takes in seeing His people cared for and His kingdom expanded.

<sup>24</sup> *“Then the man who had received one talent also approached and said, ‘Master, I know you. You’re a difficult man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup> “But his master replied to him, ‘You evil, lazy slave! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t sown and gather where*

*I haven't scattered,<sup>27</sup> then you should have deposited my money with the bankers. And when I returned I would have received my money back with interest.<sup>28</sup> "So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has 10 talents.<sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.<sup>30</sup> And throw this good-for-nothing slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* (Matt. 25:24-30)

The third servant justified his inaction. Like many today, he blamed the master for his own shortcomings. As Jesus often did, He turned the words of the servant back on himself and condemned the servant for not acting on what he claimed to believe. God's expectation is that believers will be faithful with what we have been given. If we act in ways that are "evil" or merely "lazy," God may well choose to take away those resources as the master in the story did. In fact, losing what you have may be a natural consequence of inadequate stewardship.

The third servant was sent to a place that appears to be final and eternal judgment. That may seem like a terrible consequence for poor use of a talent of silver. Jesus was not indicating a works-based approach to salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of His death and resurrection. However, it is important to consider that unfaithfulness with what has been entrusted to us—our resources, talents, gifts, and so forth—is evidence of a lack of genuine faith. Faith in Christ should be demonstrated in the way we handle the resources He gives us.

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# KNOWN

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Resource Management Session 2—From the Heart

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **What should be my attitude about giving?** and to drive home this one truth: **It's about the heart, not the amount.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Give generously. (2 Cor. 9:6)**

- > Paul began to gather a collection of relief for Jerusalem from believers around the Aegean Sea for the victims of the famine.
- > To describe how the Christians should give financially, Paul used an agricultural image: sowing and reaping.
- > Paul pictured the gifts of the Corinthians as seed sown in the spring. In the fall, the believers would have a significant harvest.
- > Finances are certainly one way God may choose to bless His children. But, Paul probably also intended for them to understand that God would pour out spiritual blessings.
- > We cannot manipulate God into giving us what we want. He blesses us as He sees fit.
- > Paul called *greed* idolatry.

#### **B. Give willingly. (2 Cor. 9:7)**

- > The Bible places great importance on our motivations when it comes to giving.
- > Giving should be an act that flows from a full heart.
- > An inability to give cheerfully is a spiritual problem. Selfishness and greed are sins to be repented of, not attitudes to be held on to.
- > Giving joyfully may begin as an act of the will. Believers choose an attitude of joy as they give
- > Giving is an expression of our trust in God.

#### **C. Give expectantly. (2 Cor. 9:8-9)**

- > The goal of giving is that all would have enough.
- > God has not called most of us to starve to death, but He may be calling us to give up some of our extravagance when others have such incredible need.
- > God calls us to give generously because giving is a testimony to His goodness.
- > God calls us to give because giving is practical.
- > God calls us to give because giving is appropriate service.
- > Giving generously of ourselves and our possessions is an appropriate response to all that God has done for us.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Teenagers are pushed and coerced into all kinds of things they don't want to do. They are forced to read books they don't want to read for English class, work problems they don't want to work in math class, and learn to speak languages they have no interest in speaking. They have to get up early when they would rather sleep in and sit in class when they would rather be outside. After school they have to wash dishes or mow the grass if they want to be able to do what they want on the weekend. At church, we may be subtle, but we often pressure them to sit quietly when they would rather talk to their friends or engage in Bible study when they would rather be playing video games.

And they do all of this grudgingly.

Yes, they need to do homework and chores at home. And yes, the Bible holds wonders for them they are only beginning to understand. We certainly don't want them to miss things with eternal significance for them. But in all of the pushing and cajoling parents, teachers, and youth workers do with teenagers, we may give them the idea that it doesn't matter what the attitude of your heart is as long as you do what is expected. Our own service may communicate that same idea if we are not careful (of if we have improper motivations for our own service and giving). That isn't what the Bible teaches. God is interested in what we do, but He is also incredibly interested in the inner attitude with which we do it.

As you continue to study personal stewardship with your teenagers, help them to see the importance of their hearts. Students can be influenced to give money to the church, to the poor, and to mission causes. But using their money to accomplish the priorities of Christ is only valuable if they give with the right heart and from the right attitude and motivation. What does that look like for a teenager?

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### A. Give generously.

A famine swept through Jerusalem. People in the church were suffering from the affects of it, and Paul began to gather a collection of relief for Jerusalem from believers around the Aegean Sea. The collection was one of the reasons Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. The churches at Philippi and Achaia had already given to the offering, and it seems the Corinthians had given some. Paul encouraged them to give liberally. The call to give to the Jerusalem church was probably complicated by the fact that the church at Jerusalem was still primarily Jewish. Many of these Jewish Christians still seemed to treat Greek converts with distance and suspicion. Christians from Corinth might have refused to help the Jewish believers because they felt the sting of prejudice from them.

Paul strongly encouraged the believers to give...and not just a little. He called on them to be generous in their gifts to their brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> *Remember this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. (2 Cor. 9:6)*

To describe how the Christians should give financially, Paul used an agricultural image: sowing and reaping. Paul was not a farmer and it is unlikely he had spent much time on a farm. Corinth was a large city, not a farm community. The people Paul wrote to would not have been farmers. It may be surprising, then, that Paul used this imagery with the Corinthians. The people of Paul's day lived closer to the land than we do. While they were not farmers, they understood the picture Paul was sketching. Each year, a farmer would save a large part of his crop to seed the farm for the next year. A farmer might be able to save money in the short term by using less seed. Scattering the seed thinner would cost the farmer less to plant his land. The problem was that when the seed took root, fewer plants would grow. At harvest time, the return would be significantly less. The farmer saved money as he was sowing, but it cost him when he reaped the harvest. If the farmer used a generous supply of seed, it would cost him more in the short run. As the seed took root,

however, the land would become rich with produce. The farmer would reap much more at harvest time.

Paul pictured the gifts of the Corinthians as seed sown in the spring. In the fall, the believers would have a significant harvest. Give a little, Paul was saying, and you will receive little. Give much, and you can expect a tremendous return. What kind of return could the giver expect? Paul probably meant for his readers to understand that God would pour out material blessings on them. Finances are certainly one way God may choose to bless His children. But, Paul probably also intended for them to understand that God would pour out spiritual blessings. We cannot manipulate God into giving us what we want. He blesses us as He sees fit. He may reward the generous giving of His children with joy, peace, and depth of faith.

The Bible pictures faithful believers as free with what they possess. In contrast, Paul called *greed* idolatry (Col. 3:5). Hungering for and hoarding possessions, longing for what we do not have, is an attitude toward possessions the Bible condemns. Christians should be free to give their money and other possessions away. Students today might not see their attitude toward possessions as greed, but many of them constantly are driven toward more for themselves. For some, it may be clothes. For others, it may be electronic gadgets. Always hungering for the newest video games can be an expression of greed. That kind of hunger causes students to be bound by their money and lack the freedom to be generous.

### **B. Give willingly.**

The Bible places great importance on our motivations. People may be impressed by the outward actions of a person. But, as God once told the prophet Samuel, “man sees what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Or, as Paul told the Corinthians ...

<sup>7</sup> *Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:7)*

Imagine two teenagers that both put a ten dollar bill in the offering plate after they have been presented with a need to help provide clean water to a people group in Africa. One gives because she longs to help. The other throws the money into the plate because he won't really miss it and would feel bad if others were giving and he wasn't. Is there a difference in the two gifts? Absolutely.

Giving should be an act that flows from a full heart. Paul challenged the Corinthian believers to be generous, but he would not decide for them what they should give. They would have to decide that for themselves. God delights in offerings given with joy. Believers should not give because they feel coerced or forced. To give willingly means that I want to give—it is my desire to give my money, regardless of how much, because I want to express my heart to God. Is that your attitude when you sit down to write out your check for your tithe or offering?

Some Christians might use this as an excuse not to give. “Well, if I don't feel like giving, then it would be wrong to give, so I'm right to keep my money,” one might say. Paul's instructions on how to give should not be an excuse for selfishness. This kind of thinking totally misses Paul's point. An inability to give cheerfully is a spiritual problem. Selfishness and greed are sins to be repented of, not attitudes to be held on to. The instruction of Paul is not to selfishly hold on to everything God gives you, but to be a cheerful giver. Giving joyfully may begin as an act of the will. Believers choose an attitude of joy as they give.

Ultimately, giving is an expression of our trust in God. Holding on to money can provide a certain sense of security. Even teenagers sometimes think they might need their money later. When we give of our possessions, we indicate that we trust God more than our resources to provide for our needs.

### **C. Give expectantly.**

<sup>8</sup> *And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work.* <sup>9</sup> *As it is written: He scattered; He gave to the poor; His righteousness endures forever. (2 Cor. 9:8-9)*

The goal of giving is that all would have enough. There are great stories of missionaries who sacrificed everything they had, even what they needed to live, so that others might have something to eat. While these are stories of incredible faith and compassion, Paul wasn't really calling the Corinthians to give the food from their children's mouths so people of Jerusalem would have food. But, the Corinthians were wealthy people, relatively speaking. If they sacrificed some of their wealth, others would have what they needed. America is the land of the \$5 cup of coffee. We are concerned about money, but that doesn't stop us from getting our triple-shot-raspberry-latte from the local coffee house drive-thru. God has not called most of us to starve to death, but He may be calling us to give up some of our extravagance when others have such incredible need.

Paul seems to indicate the Corinthians would have tremendous relational blessings. In the Book of Acts, Luke described the Jerusalem church as selfless and generous: "No one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. ... For there was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed for each person's basic needs" (Acts 4:32,34-35). The result of this generosity was that when one was hurting, others could help. Then, when they were in need, those they had helped would in turn help them. During this famine, the Corinthians would help the church at Jerusalem. Because of their generosity, should they fall on hard times, they could expect those they had treated generously to be generous with them.

God calls us to give generously because giving is a testimony to His goodness. Giving points to a God who loves enough to care for others. It displays faith that reaches beyond our own clutching desires. Every time we give, we express greater trust in God's goodness.

God calls us to give because giving is practical. Many of us would like to believe we can stand on our own. We won't take anything from anyone. We will take care of our own needs. However, that kind of rugged individualism doesn't really work over the course of life. Someone loses a job. Someone has an accident that ends their ability to work. Someone has a spouse with a prolonged illness that makes her choose between caring for her spouse or keeping her job. They can no longer be financially independent. Teenagers may not understand how difficult life can be and most of them have not faced the hardest experiences they will face in life. But, at some point sooner or later, most of us will encounter a situation in which we cannot meet our own needs. Can the church be a place where those in need receive help from those with plenty?

God calls us to give because giving is appropriate service. God has called us to invest in His work. Giving generously of ourselves and our possessions is an appropriate response to all that God has done for us.

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# KNOWN™

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Resource Management *Session 3—The Tenth Degree*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **What is tithing and why should I do it?** and to drive home this one truth: **Tithing is obedient giving.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. God calls for a tenth. (Mal. 3:8)**

- > The Old Testament Law called God's people to give a tenth of their increase to God.
- > Malachi equated withholding the tithe due to God with theft from God—a startling concept.
- > Jesus seems to call His followers to give sacrificially (Mark 12:41-44)—for us, that may mean giving well beyond the tenth called for in the Old Testament.
- > The tithe, as practiced by Christians, is an act of stewardship that indicates that all we have belongs to God.
- > The New Testament encourages Christians to live simple lives so that they may be able to participate in the support of God's priorities.

#### **B. Bring your tithe to the church. (Mal. 3:9-10a)**

- > Nehemiah directed the Levites to collect the tithe and place it in the Temple treasury storehouse (Neh. 10). There the goods could be used to provide for the needs of the Levites.
- > We are called to support those who lead us in the church.
- > We give through the church to extend the gospel to the world.
- > We give through the church to care for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.

#### **C. God will bless your giving. (Mal. 3:10b-12)**

- > There is a clear difference between testing God through disobedience and testing God by faithful obedience.
- > When God told the people He would “pour out” blessings “without measure,” He indicated He would bless them materially as they obeyed Him.
- > They were primarily an agrarian people so His blessings would be agrarian.
- > The abundant provisions God would provide for His people would be a way for them to make His love known to the peoples around them.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Mission organizations all over America are making hard decisions about where to cut costs. The Southern Baptist International Mission Board is no exception. Do we send missionaries to the immigrants of Europe, the unreached people groups in the Pacific Rim, or tribal peoples of the Congo? Why should we have to choose? Most mission organizations simply lack the funds to do everything they would like to do to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ and address human needs around the world. Certainly, the economic downturn of recent years is to blame...at least in part. Most mission organizations depend on the gifts of individuals or churches to finance their ministries. With many unemployed or underemployed, they simply do not have the ability to give as they once did. Churches feel the crunch when members are giving less, and may cut the amount they send to mission causes in favor of supporting their own ministries. Do we really not have the resources to support the ministry of Christ both at home and around the world? Or is there a problem with the stewardship of God's people? How much should a believer give to God through the church?

The needs for ministry around the world can feel insurmountable, but if those of us in the church gave a tenth of what God has provided us, much could be accomplished. If your church is average, the percentage of people in your church who actually tithe is probably pretty low. How well do students understand the importance of giving a portion of what they receive to support the ministry of Christ through the church? What can you do in this session to emphasize to students the importance of giving a tithe to the church?

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### A. God calls for a tenth.

The Old Testament Law called God's people to give a tenth of their increase to God. They were to give a tenth of the increase of their herds and flocks, as well as a tenth of their grain and the fruits of their land, and a tenth of money they received. The Levites were not given a tribal land as the other tribes of Israel were. Instead, they would devote themselves to God and would be supported by the tenth given to God (Num. 10).

During the exile, after Jerusalem was sacked and many people were carried off to Babylon, the Jews appear to have ceased giving the tithe. Levites left their duties at the temple in order to work. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the walls, he reinstated the practice of the tithe and put the Levites back into service of God (Neh. 10:37-39). The people willingly accepted this as they saw the sacred practices return. They gave willingly to the storehouses the tenth of their produce, as well as the first fruits that were produced and other offerings. Regardless, when Nehemiah returned to Babylon, corruption among the leaders of the Temple led people to once again withhold their giving. The Levites failed to receive their share from the offerings to the Temple and began to leave their positions in the Temple and return to their fields to work (Neh. 13:10).

It seems likely that Malachi was addressing the same problem Nehemiah addressed (Neh. 13). If not, his message certainly dealt with the same problem.

<sup>8</sup> *"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!" You ask: "How do we rob You?" "By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions." (Mal. 3:8)*

Malachi equated withholding the tithe due to God with theft from God—a startling concept. God had blessed the people with the food they ate, the homes they lived in, and the clothes they wore. God's requirement of a tenth of their increase seemed meager compared with all they were given. And yet, they chose to disregard his clear requirement. Since it all comes from God and it all belongs to God, He could certainly ask us to give back 90% of everything.

By the time of Jesus, religious leaders had become meticulous in how they gave the tithe. They would even give a tenth of the herbs they grew. Of course, Jesus often condemned the religious leaders for their legalistic practices. His approach to the tithe, however, is interesting. He addressed the religious leaders concerning the practice in Luke 11:42: “But woe to you Pharisees! You give a tenth of mint, rue, and every kind of herb, and you bypass justice and love for God. These things you should have done without neglecting the others.” Jesus condemned the attitude of the Pharisees—their lack of compassion and injustice in dealing with people. However, he affirmed their careful practice of the tithe.

Obviously, Christians no longer give to support the Levites. It is likely that Jewish Christians of the First Century continued to give a tithe to the temple; of course, Gentile Christians did not. However, believers are called to give. In fact, Jesus seems to call His followers to give sacrificially (Mark 12:41-44)—for us, that may mean giving well beyond the tenth called for in the Old Testament.

The tithe, as practiced by Christians, is an act of stewardship that indicates that all we have belongs to God. We are holding His wealth, and while God entrusts wealth to us partly to meet our needs, we are to focus on His priorities as we determine how to use it. Because God has given us so much, we dedicate the first portion of what He has given us to Him. But our stewardship should never involve legalistically giving away a tenth of what we receive to hoard the rest for ourselves. Rather, the New Testament encourages Christians to live simple lives so that they may be able to participate in the support of God's priorities.

Teenagers often find ways to generate their own income in addition to what they are given by their families. Consider how you can help them view the money they earn as a blessing from God. How does gratitude to God for His provision affect the way we view giving?

## **B. Bring your tithe to the church.**

Nehemiah directed the Levites to collect the tithe and place it in the temple treasury storehouse (Neh. 10). There the goods could be used to provide for the needs of the Levites. They could also be used to help when emergencies arose and for other needs in the temple. Malachi also insisted that the tithe from the people be brought into the storehouse. He even told the people they were “suffering under a curse” because of their failure to do so.

<sup>9</sup> *You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing Me.* <sup>10a</sup> *Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house.* (Mal. 3:9-10a)

Why do we give through the local church? At least three reasons: First, we are called to support those who lead us in the church (1 Tim. 5:17-18). God calls people into the ministry so that they can devote their lives to the gospel. Churches are called to support those who effectively lead us in ministry. Not all pastoral leaders will receive their entire support from their churches. Paul worked as a tent-maker to help support his ministry. Church leaders today may work outside the church to support themselves and their families. However, the church has a responsibility to provide for their leaders as they have ability to do so.

Second, we give through the church to extend the gospel to the world (Phil. 4:15-18). The need for Christ is desperate, and we must do all we can to make Him known to the ends of the earth. We give to support the proclamation of the gospel around the world. We give to support the advance of the gospel to our communities through the ministries of our churches. The resources churches buy, the space they use to proclaim Christ, the ministry projects they support—all are ways for our churches to make Christ known. However, Christ also called His followers to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Most churches determine a percentage of the offerings they receive to go toward global evangelism and missions. The Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention receives contributions from Southern Baptist churches all over America and uses the funds to make Christ known to people groups around the world, as well as planting churches in America and providing support for the training of church leaders for the future.

Most students don't really understand what their church does with tithes and offerings—even many adults misunderstand the expenditures of the church. Discuss with your students the ministries of your church (perhaps after your own investigation) and how your church is participating in global missions through the Cooperative Program and in other ways. You may want to peruse the website of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention ([imb.org](http://imb.org)) and the North American Mission Board ([namb.net](http://namb.net)) before the study to get examples of how Southern Baptists are impacting the world for Christ.

Third, we give through the church to care for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. The Jerusalem church provided support to widows who could not support themselves (Acts 6). The Book of James calls believers to provide for those who lack food or clothing (James 2:15-16). Jesus emphasized the importance of caring for the poor. The church has a responsibility to help those who are in need. Many state Baptist conventions operate disaster relief ministries. Volunteers provide food and shelter to people affected by earthquakes, fires, tornados, and floods. The International Mission Board's World Hunger and Relief Funds have provided over \$230 million in relief since the 1970s. In addition to these efforts, churches may also support local food banks or other relief ministries. Discuss with students what your church does to address human needs.

Certainly, believers are able to give to ministries outside our churches to address these concerns. Many individuals choose to support a disadvantaged child in a developing country through an organization like Compassion International ([compassion.com](http://compassion.com)). However, by bringing our offerings to the church, we dedicate a portion of what we have received to God and work together in accomplishing God's priorities in our communities and around the world.

### **C. God will bless your giving.**

The apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers that freely giving from their wealth was a demonstration of their love (2 Cor. 8:8). In the same way, for the Jews to disobey God by not giving their tithe was a clear statement about their lack of love for God and their lack of trust in His love for them. How should they respond to the harsh word from Malachi? Of course, they should begin to do what they had been failing to do. They should begin bringing their tithe to the storehouse. God even called them to "test" Him.

<sup>10b</sup> *"Test Me in this way," says the LORD of Hosts. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure. <sup>11</sup> I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit," says the LORD of Hosts. <sup>12</sup> "Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land," says the LORD of Hosts." (Mal. 3:10b-12)*

It may seem strange that God told the Jews to "test" him. After all, when Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple—an event that would surely be a miraculous display of God's power to save His Son—Jesus replied, "Do not test the Lord your God" (Matt. 4:7). Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 in which Moses commanded the people not to test God. In that passage, Moses referred to how the people had tested God at Massah. The event is found in Exodus 17. The people had left Egypt and gone into the desert. They became thirsty and began to grumble against God. God responded by miraculously providing water from a stone, but not before Moses issued a strong warning not to test the Lord. At Massah, the people tested God by grumbling against Him. Their actions indicated a lack of faith in God and a lack of obedience to Him. Similarly, Satan tempted Jesus to act in a way that would have been disobedient to the plan of God. When God tells the people to test Him in Malachi, He was telling them to act in obedience and see how He would respond.

There is a clear difference between testing God through disobedience and testing God by faithful obedience. Imagine a father telling a child, "Don't eat that!" The child continues to put the forbidden item into his mouth, watching his father to see what he will do. The father might respond, "Don't test me." The father

warns his son that discipline will follow his disobedience. On the other hand, the same father might offer his child his first taste of ice cream. "Try it; it's good," the father tells him. The child watches the father as he brings the food to his lips, testing to see if the father is right and the food really is good.

When God told the people He would "pour out" blessings "without measure," He indicated He would bless them materially as they obeyed Him. When the people gave of their possessions, God would give them even more. Giving us material possessions is surely one way God blesses His children. It will be beneficial to teenagers, however, to understand that God may also choose to bless them in other ways. In addition to material possessions, God blesses people with joy, spiritual depth, greater responsibility and opportunity, and a deep sense of love from Him and from other people.

God told the people how He would bless them materially. They were primarily an agrarian people so His blessings would be agrarian. First, he would keep away those pests that destroyed their crops. Just as God commanded a plague of locusts to destroy the fields of the Egyptians (Ex. 10:12-14), He would keep them from the fields of the Jews. Second, He would ensure the plants would have a fruitful year. Lack of sun, rain, or inappropriate soil could cause a meager harvest. It appears that God was telling the Jews He would give them all that was needed for an abundant harvest.

Many have said we live in an information economy. For us, knowledge is the most valuable commodity. When God pours out His material blessings on people today, how do you think He does it? How can you help students understand that economic issues are not blind forces, but rather they need the blessings of God to produce in abundance?

The abundant provisions God would provide for His people would be a way for them to make His love known to the peoples around them. Students need to understand that when they receive His blessings, they need to give credit to God so others will see God's goodness.

Opportunities for impacting the world are tremendous, and the Church has significant opportunities to demonstrate the incredible love of God. The church today may lack the funds to pursue opportunities God has given us because believers choose to give little. American consumerism encourages students to spend every bit of money they have buying new possessions ... many of which will be obsolete in less than two years. Use this lesson to call your students to selfless giving beginning with setting aside for God a tenth of what they receive.

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# KNOWN™

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Resource Management Session 4—No Sweat

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **What should be my attitude about my money and stuff?** and to drive home this one truth: **Learn to be content.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Remember you start and end with nothing. (1 Tim. 6:6-7)**

- > Paul warned Timothy that some leaders were false and greedy teachers.
- > A godly person should be content with what God provides.
- > It seems unlikely that Paul was suggesting a contented person will gain wealth. More likely, a person develops a life that is rich in both joy and faith.
- > Contentment is an inner attitude that considers whatever we have as being sufficient.
- > Ultimately, all of the possessions we acquire in life add nothing to us.
- > Truly valuable things are those that are eternal.

#### **B. Be content with your needs being met. (1 Tim. 6:8)**

- > Food and clothing are descriptive of the basic needs of life.
- > The amazing thing is that God often chooses to bless us far beyond our basic needs.
- > Survey all that God has provided for you. It will probably seem that God has lavished you with tangible expressions of His love.
- > There is no special value in being poor, but being content with whatever God chooses to provide leads to a satisfying life.
- > Measure life not by possessions, but by the contentment with what God has provided.

#### **C. Stay away from the trap. (1 Tim. 6:9-10)**

- > American culture is largely built on consumerism.
- > Contentment does mean you put material possessions in their proper perspective.
- > Paul described the pursuit of wealth as a trap.
- > Neither money nor material possessions provide the happiness they promise.
- > Wealth also entices us because we think it will provide security.
- > Real security is found only in Christ.
- > Material possessions entice people to serving self rather than God.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Surely you have witnessed it: A child is at the store with his mother. She just wants to get what she needs and leave. The child wants something—something that seems overwhelmingly important. “Can I have this, Mommy?” No. “Aw. What about this?” NO. “Pleeease! I really want it.” I said NO. “Aw. What about this?” It goes on and on. Is the child asking for something he needs? Unlikely. Is he asking for something that will make his life easier or better? Probably not. He just wants something—and in many instances, anything.

It would be great if we outgrew our desire for things. Instead, we want to trade in last year’s iPhone® for a newer one. It has more memory and is faster. The old black and white Kindle® isn’t good enough now that the color Nook® is out. There is always something else we want.

The Christian life is not supposed to be about the acquisition of stuff. There is nothing wrong with having an iPhone, but there is a problem when our appetite for more keeps growing insatiably. What relationship to possessions should believers have? As you prepare to teach this lesson, think about how teenagers view their possessions...and the possessions they would like to have. How can you help them to see “stuff” with eyes of faith?

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### **A. Remember you start and end with nothing.**

Paul saw Timothy as his son in the faith. When he wrote to Timothy, he encouraged him to stand firm and be a leader worth following. In 1 Timothy 6, however, Paul warned Timothy that some leaders were false and greedy teachers. They claimed to be Christians, but their lives were filled with conceit, envy, and slander (1 Tim. 6:3-5). From the very beginning of the church, there were preachers who were more concerned about their own wealth and comfort than about the people they were called to serve. While the Bible calls the church to support those who lead, godliness should not be a means to acquire wealth. So, what is the appropriate relationship between godliness and money? Paul addressed the issue in verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> *But godliness with contentment is a great gain.* <sup>7</sup> *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.* (1 Tim. 6:6-7)

Being spiritual is not the same as being poor. Having wealth is not a sin. Rather, Paul suggested that a godly person should be content with what God provides for him or her. The word for “contentment” literally means to be self-sufficient, but not in the sense most Americans approach self-sufficiency. We tend to desire to generate enough income to take care of our own wants and needs and those of our families. We don’t ask anyone for anything, and we don’t expect anything from anyone else. That is not the picture at all.

Contentment is an inner attitude that considers whatever we have as being sufficient. A missionary from a developing country told a story of a local pastor who explained to her, “God is so good. He always provides what I need. He never makes me wait more than two days to eat unless he wants me to fast.” That is close to what Paul meant. Paul described contentment in Philippians 4: “I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me” (vv. 12-13). We may have much wealth; we may have little. Whatever our state, we see what we have as all we really need.

How is contentment “great gain” (v. 6)? What does a content person gain? It seems unlikely that Paul was suggesting he will gain wealth. More likely, a person develops a life that is rich in both joy and faith. Students need to understand that being content with what they have is not giving up something. In fact, it makes them richer. Stuff can never give them a full life. When a baby is born, he is naked. He has no cloth-

ing, no food, and certainly no gold tucked away under the mattress. Everything he needs must be provided by his parents. The child can spend his life accumulating stuff, but when he dies he leaves this world with nothing. In Manila, there is a Chinese cemetery with huge, opulent tombs. Some of the tombs have multiple rooms. Many family members of those entombed in the cemetery leave food, money, and other offerings in the tombs for their departed relatives. The bodies that inhabit those tombs, however, care nothing for the stuff that surrounds them and could do nothing with it if they did. Ultimately, all of the possessions we acquire in life add nothing to us.

What is ultimately valuable? Truly valuable things are those that are eternal. Believers should focus on eternal things. When a person leaves this world, his relationship with God continues. That is ultimately valuable. Friends and family who have experienced God's grace will be reunited with us in the next life. That is ultimately valuable. Moments of life invested in making money are wasted in eternity. Moments invested in prayer continue to have value. Moments spent making Christ known have eternal value. Jesus said it this way: "Don't collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

Your teenagers are probably very focused on their lives here and now. They may have difficulty thinking about what they will take with them at the end of their days on earth. How can you help them to think beyond the value things have in this world?

### **B. Be content with your needs being met.**

<sup>8</sup> *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.* (1 Tim. 6:8)

Food and clothing are descriptive of basic needs of life. (The word translated "clothing" could more literally be translated "covering." Perhaps the word was meant to indicate both clothing and shelter.) These items are not exactly all we need in life. For example, we need water in addition to food. However, Paul was emphasizing that the basic needs of life are simple. We don't have to have extravagant things to live ... or to be happy. Perhaps Paul had in mind the words of Jesus concerning how God feeds and clothes the birds of the air and the flowers of the field (Matt. 6:25-34). God knows that we need food and clothing. If He provides for our basic needs, what more do we need?

The amazing thing is that God often chooses to bless us far beyond our basic needs. Survey all that God has provided for you. It will probably seem that God has lavished you with tangible expressions of His love. Certainly, some people have more than you and some people would love to have all you have. God does not give us all the same amount of material blessings, but the appropriate response to all He chooses to give us is gratitude. There is no special value in being poor, but being content with whatever God chooses to provide leads to a satisfying life.

As I write, I am traveling in the Philippines. Last night, I saw a man with a T-shirt that said, "Count Your Blessings." It was followed by hundreds of hash marks—in other words, plenty of blessings. To stay out of poverty in the Philippines, it is estimated that a family of five needs about 231 Philippine pesos per day, about what you would spend on coffee and a muffin at Starbucks. With that definition, a little over one quarter of the population lives in poverty. Have you considered how much you have lately? What could you give away and still have plenty?

Think about the students in your group. Some of them may come from tremendous wealth. Others may be struggling with their basic needs. As you guide students through this session, help them to measure their lives not by their possessions, but by their contentment with what God has provided. Discuss with them what it takes to have a life of contentment.

### C. Stay away from the trap.

American culture is largely driven by consumerism. Our lives seem to be about selling and buying products. Of course, commerce is a good thing. The Apostle Paul provided for his own needs by making and selling tents (Acts 18:3). Being content doesn't mean you never buy things. But contentment does mean you put material possessions in their proper perspective.

<sup>9</sup> *But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction.* <sup>10</sup> *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.* (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

Paul described the pursuit of wealth as a trap. Verse 10 is often misquoted. Money is not the root of all kinds of evil, but "the love of money" is. Why do so many of us make the acquisition of wealth the focus of our lives? There are several likely reasons.

Some believe money will make them happy. Advertisers feed the false notion that material goods can provide happiness. Neither money nor material possessions provide the happiness they promise. Wealthy teenagers are at least as likely to commit suicide as poor teenagers. People who think the new convertible will make them happy usually end up lonely, lost, and bitter. True happiness in life is found most often in relationships. People who invest in their relationship with God and build solid relationships with family and friends normally feel fulfilled and joyful.

Wealth also entices us because we think it will provide security. This, of course, is another false claim. Wealth may give us access to excellent health care, but it doesn't insulate us from life-threatening disease. It may provide us with the opportunity to live in a nice house, but many have discovered that houses can be easily lost. Real security is found only in Christ.

Ultimately, material possessions entice people to serve self rather than God. Perhaps that is why Paul said that the pursuit of wealth will "plunge people into ruin and destruction" (v. 9). The two words Paul uses are actually quite similar in meaning. The word for "destruction" is a little stronger and may suggest eternal destruction. Paul uses both for emphasis. Those who make the pursuit of money their life's pursuit are headed for ruin in this life and destruction in the next. Two words are used for emphasis: ruin and destruction.

Paul's warning in these verses is significant for teenagers. Erik Erikson suggested that the development of a sense of identity is the most significant task of adolescents. If he was right, then students are now in the process of determining what kind of person they will be for their lives. Teenagers of this generation often develop an identity based on the possessions they have rather than the character of their heart. If living for possessions really carries the dangers suggested in Scripture, how can you make the warning something students will hear?

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# KNOWN™

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Media Mania *Session 1—Danger Zone*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **What is the danger in media?** and to drive home this one truth: **The world is full of deceptive messages.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. There are those who want to deceive you. (Eph. 5:6-7)**

- > There were people in Paul's day who preached a gospel of permissiveness. The same message can be found today. Paul labeled this idea as pure deception.
- > Christians are not to be "partners" with those who live blatantly sinful lifestyles.
- > Christians are not to shun the people who live sinful lifestyles, but we are to shun the sin.
- > There are many deceptive people in the world today, but ultimately all deception comes from one source—Satan himself. He is a liar, and because he is crafty he often uses subtle lies.
- > Satan will use any means available to him to deceive Christians.
- > Satan cannot take away our salvation, but he can make us ineffective, useless, and even detrimental to God's kingdom by deceiving us.

#### **B. There's a difference between darkness and light. (Eph. 5:8-10)**

- > Christians are "light in the Lord." This is only possible because of our relationship with Christ.
- > We are not just in the light, we are the light because of who we are in Christ.
- > As children of light, we are to figure out continually what pleases God and be busy doing those things.
- > Being a thinking Christian is critical in today's society because the media often portrays right as wrong and wrong as right.
- > We must make a conscious effort to think about what we see and hear to determine if God is pleased.

#### **C. We are in a spiritual battle. (Eph. 5:11-14)**

- > Christians must remember that we are in the middle of a spiritual battle.
- > Both good and evil are at work in our world, but they're not always easy to recognize.
- > Even though we've made attempts at a ratings system for things like movies, television programs, and music, there still is no clear-cut way to label good and evil.
- > It's our responsibility as Christians to think about what we see and hear, to discern whether or not something pleases God, and to expose the "fruitless works of darkness."
- > Light from the sun, moon, and fire makes things visible—light exposes whatever is in the darkness.
- > Jesus exposed the sin of the world simply by living in it. The things Jesus said and the way He treated people were so radically different from the words and actions of everyone else that His behavior exposed their hidden sin.
- > The music we listen to, the things we watch or read, and the words we express through social media will illuminate the darkness in our community.
- > Our job is to expose "the fruitless works of darkness." It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict the world of sin.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

A well-known piece of writing has been described by a biblical commentary as addressing “the practical demands of Christian living in a hostile society.” This is a description of the apostle Paul’s letter to the church in 1st century Ephesus, but it is also a perfect description of the condition of Christians living in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. While American Christians may not face physical persecution, we do live in a society that often ridicules people of faith.

There is no better place to begin this study of media than the book of Ephesians. Paul was adamant about Christians being different. Not necessarily odd, but different. We are called to live a lifestyle that reflects Christ, and in Paul’s society as well as ours, if our lives reflect Christ then our lifestyles will definitely be different.

One of the ways our lifestyles will be different is our response to media. “Media” refers to methods used for communication, and for years the term simply referred to newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. That was about it. Today, however, “media,” encompasses all those things plus additional means of communication via the Internet such as Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, blogs, and YouTube.

The influence of today’s media is mind-boggling and, for many parents, terrifying. Many of us would like to have a list of rules to follow that would ensure protection from the media. If we obediently follow the rules, then we will never stumble across pornography on the Internet, and we will never hear a news anchor spout his opinion disguised as factual news. There is, however, no such list of rules.

In the absence of a list of rules, one crucial thing to do is to think and to teach our kids how to think. The Bible says that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Loving God with our mind means that we use our mind to think about what we see and hear. As we approach each session in this unit, our challenge is to think about the danger in media, how media can be used for good, the proper way to handle social media, and the standards that guide our viewing choices. Obviously, the Bible does not contain a list of “Thou shalt not”s related to media (since the prophets and disciples didn’t have the Internet yet), but there are plenty of biblical principles that can guide us to make wise choices in our use of media.

So with our minds in gear, let’s enter the danger zone.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### **A. There are those who want to deceive you.**

Two of the main ideas in the fifth chapter of Ephesians are that we are to imitate God (vv. 1-2) and that we are to stop living lifestyles of sin (verses 3-14). Obviously, we can’t imitate God and willingly commit sin. One is the opposite of the other.

In verses 3-5, Paul made it clear that those who chose to follow Christ were not to be involved in sexual immorality, impurity, and greed. The point was one of identification. Early Christians had to belong to one group or the other—followers of Christ or followers of the world. They couldn’t identify with both groups. Paul was saying, “You are now followers of Christ, so act like it. You should not behave like people who do not know Him.” Sounds like a message and principle that is still applicable today, right?

The problem was that there were people in Paul’s day that preached a gospel of permissiveness. The same message can be found today. Some say that Christian standards are too high and since we are free in Christ and our sins are forgiven, we should live however we want to live. Paul labeled this idea as pure deception.

<sup>6</sup> *Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.* <sup>7</sup> *Therefore, do not become their partners.* (Eph. 5:6-7)

Paul strongly warned against being “partners” with those who live blatantly sinful lifestyles. Divine punishment is coming “because of these things.” “These things” refers to the categories of sins mentioned in verses 3-4. While we are not to shun the people who live sinful lifestyles, we are to shun the sin.

There are many deceptive people in our world today, but ultimately all deception comes from one source—Satan himself. In John 8:44 Jesus described the Devil as “a liar and the father of liars.” He is a liar, and because he is crafty, he often uses subtle lies. Satan twisted God’s words and led Eve down a path of destruction (Gen. 3:1-5). Centuries later he took God’s words out of context and tried (though he failed miserably) to lead Jesus to sin (Luke 4:1-13).

Satan will use any means available to him to deceive Christians. He cannot take away our salvation, but he can make us ineffective, useless, and even detrimental to God’s kingdom by deceiving us.

One of Satan’s favorite techniques is to get Christians to focus on one portion of Scripture while overlooking the rest of Scripture. For example, the categories of sin mentioned in Ephesians 5:3-4 include sexual immorality, impurity, and greed. While we certainly should fight sexual immorality, should we not also fight greed? That’s hard to do in a society that depends on its citizens wanting and buying more than they need, however, so greed is often overlooked.

Satan deceives us when he gets us to dwell on one Scripture and ignore the rest. Others in our society want to deceive us by trying to water down God’s Word. We are bombarded daily with deceptive messages in the media. We must constantly be on our guard if we are to detect Satan’s presence in what we see and hear. If we are to successfully navigate this danger zone, we must make a conscious effort to love God with our minds and think about what we hear and see. Satan is behind the deception, and we must rely on God’s Spirit for spiritual discernment.

## **B. There’s a difference between darkness and light.**

I used to teach in a well-respected public high school. Parents would move into our district just so their kids could go to this school. The students who transferred into my school, however, often had a difficult time adjusting. Their former school had lower expectations. Attendance policies and dress codes were not enforced, and yelling profanities in the hallway was overlooked. Many students who transferred to my school invariably wound up in the principal’s office where they were given a quick reality check. They no longer attended their old school, the principal reminded them. They were at a different school—one that had higher standards and a culture of respectful behavior. We were not going to change our standards for them. They had to change their behavior to reflect their new school’s standards. Period. End of discussion.

Paul gave the early church a similar reality check. They had once attended the school of darkness, but not anymore. They now attended the school of light, and the two schools were quite different.

<sup>8</sup> *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—<sup>9</sup> for the fruit of the light results in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—<sup>10</sup> discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.* (Eph. 5:8-10)

Christians are “light in the Lord.” This is only possible because of our relationship with Christ. In John 8:12, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.” In Matthew 5:14-16 He declared, “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” We are not just in the light, we are the light

because of who we are in Christ.

Perhaps Paul had Jesus' words about "good works" in mind when he wrote that "the fruit of the light results in all goodness, righteousness, and truth." The fruit of "goodness" refers to high moral standards combined with a spirit of generosity. "Righteousness" means giving people what is rightfully theirs, and "truth" refers to honesty, not only in our words but also in our actions. These qualities are the effects of light.

As children of light, Christians are to continually figure out what pleases God. Once again, we are required to love God with our minds. We must think and discern what pleases Him. Being a thinking Christian is critical in today's society because the media often portrays right as wrong and wrong as right. We must make a conscious effort to think about what we see and hear to determine if God is pleased. We must also make a conscious choice to realize that just because something appears on television, the big screen, or on the Internet does not make it true.

### **C. We are in a spiritual battle.**

Later in Paul's letter to the Christians at Ephesus he wrote, "For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens" (6:12). We must remember that we are in the middle of a battle. Both good and evil are at work in our world, but they're not always easy to recognize. Satan is the master of disguise. What may look like good on the surface may really be evil. In an understanding of the battle of right and wrong and how media portrays wrong as right and right as wrong, we must recognize that this battle for our minds is a spiritual battle.

Part of the battleground of good and evil is the media. Even though we've made attempts at a ratings system for things like movies, television programs, and music, there still is no clear-cut way to label good and evil. It's our responsibility as Christians to think about what we see and hear, to discern whether or not something pleases God, and to expose the "fruitless works of darkness."

<sup>11</sup> *Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead, expose them.* <sup>12</sup> *For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret.* <sup>13</sup> *Everything exposed by the light is made clear,* <sup>14</sup> *for what makes everything clear is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you.* (Eph. 5:11-14)

Paul told his readers that they were not to "participate in the fruitless works of darkness." We are children of light and we do not belong anywhere near the "works of darkness." Instead of participating in "works of darkness," Paul said that we are to "expose them."

As we consider what it means to be light that exposes the works of darkness, it's important to remember the sources of light available to people in New Testament times. People who heard Jesus and Paul teach had just three sources of light: sunlight, moonlight, and fire. So it's safe to assume that being the light of the world does not mean that we are supposed to be blinding floodlights or searing lasers. Light from the sun, moon, and fire made things visible. In other words, light exposed whatever was in the darkness.

So how are Christians supposed to be light in a dark world? Let's look at Jesus' example. He exposed the sin of the world simply by living in it. The things Jesus said and the way He treated people were so radically different from the words and actions of everyone else that His behavior exposed their hidden sin. Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders simply by living in their midst. He was life, He was truth, and He was light. Any unholy thing was exposed when it came into His presence.

When we are living our lives in step with Jesus, we will be light in a dark world. The music we listen to, the things we watch or read, and the words we express through social media will illuminate the darkness in our community. Our job is to expose "the fruitless works of darkness." It is the Holy Spirit's job to "convict the

world about sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). Think of it this way: We are the surgical nurse responsible for illuminating the diseased tissue so that the surgeon can successfully remove the cancerous tumor. When we do our part and live lives of light that expose the sin around us, the opportunity for repentance and salvation emerges.

There’s no doubt that we live in a danger zone of media mania. The world is full of deceptive messages, and we must be on our guard to discern what is pleasing and displeasing to God. When you begin to consider all the variety of tools that are available for our spiritual deception, you may struggle with feelings of being completely overwhelmed. As we will see in the next session, however, this same media can be used for good and for our spiritual edification.

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# KNOWN™

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Media Mania

#### Session 2—Positive Medium

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **How can media be used for good?** and to drive home this one truth: **Media can be used to tell God's story.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. To understand the times. (1 Chron. 12:32)**

- > As believers in this world, we can't stick our heads in the sand.
- > We need to understand culture (not become immersed in it) so that we can best minister to the people in it and meet their needs.
- > If we totally ignore the media, we'll eventually be out of touch with our society.
- > Christians must make a conscious effort to actively think about what we see and hear.
- > Christians must actively think when we listen to news reports, watch news programs, and read news stories that offer additional commentary. We need to ask ourselves, "Who or what is the source of my news? Is this a conservative or liberal source? Is what I'm hearing fact or opinion?"

#### **B. To teach the truth. (Mark 4:33-34)**

- > When Jesus taught the crowds, He used parables the people could understand. Jesus told them stories to get their minds in gear so they could grasp the full truth of His words.
- > Jesus used whatever method of communication He knew would reach His audience. He used one method with crowds of people and a different method with His disciples.
- > One way to use the media is to take some of the things we see and hear and use them to illustrate and teach truth.
- > Wise adults will use the topics of today's media as springboards to discuss topics such as bullying, friendship, dating, sexuality, hypocrisy, loyalty, and courage.

#### **C. To proclaim the message. (2 Tim. 4:2-5)**

- > Christians are to use every opportunity available to share the gospel, and we are to share it persistently.
- > We can use whatever means of communication available to us to tell others about the Lord.
- > Christians must be careful not to rebuke and correct others to the point that they leave someone spiritually beaten down.
- > Paul included the command to "encourage" others when sharing the gospel.
- > Our efforts will be useless if we do not share the gospel with patience and love.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

I've been thinking about getting a Kindle® or a Nook®.

Too late. Word on the street is that they won't be around for much longer. Laptop computers are getting so small that a separate device for reading books will soon be obsolete.

Then there's the never-ending quest to have a phone that's in style. Phones are changing so rapidly that it's almost impossible to have the latest and greatest. By the time I got a Blackberry and figured out how to use it, a newer and better phone had hit the stores.

I remember when MapQuest was the best way to have driving directions. And remember when a GPS mounted on your windshield or dashboard? Today it's simpler and cheaper to just download a navigation app to your smartphone.

The constant advances in technology reflect the constant changes in our society. Our world is changing at an astounding rate, and we can use the media to help us understand the changes. Whether we get news from the Internet, television, a newspaper, or your phone, Christians can, and need, to use media for good. When used correctly, media can help us understand the times, teach the truth, and proclaim the message of the gospel.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### A. To understand the times.

While Saul was still on the throne of Israel, God named David as Israel's next king (1 Sam. 16). However, the succession did not take place immediately. It would be 20 years before the transition was complete, and the years of transition did not go smoothly. After all, David was not one of Saul's sons, and Saul had plenty of sons standing in line to inherit the throne.

During the years between David's anointing and his ascension to the throne, Saul tried repeatedly to kill David. David spent years in hiding, just trying to stay alive long enough to become king. During this time, the people were divided. Some supported Saul and some supported David. After Saul died in battle, David was made king over Judah and he made Hebron his capital. David and his followers stayed there for the next seven and a half years as they engaged in a war with Saul's son, Ish-bosheth.

Clearly this was a time of major political unrest. People had to decide whom they were going to follow. First Chronicles 12:23-37 lists men who joined David at Hebron, armed and ready for battle. The men of Issachar were among those who joined David and supported him as Israel's king.

<sup>32</sup> *From the Issacharites, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do: 200 chiefs with all their relatives under their command. (1 Chron. 12:32)*

You may be wondering why in the world we're reviewing Old Testament history in a study of media. Good question. The answer lies in the description of the Issacharites. They "understood the times."

As believers in this world, we can't stick our heads in the sand. We need to know what our culture is like so that we can best minister to the people in it and meet their needs. If we totally ignore the media, we'll eventually be out of touch with our society.

The important thing to remember with media is that we must make a conscious effort to actively think about

what we see and hear. If we believe that television sitcoms accurately portray American society then we'll start to believe that half the population is homosexual and that every teenager is sexually active. Contrary to television's portrayal of American life, on average less than four percent of Americans are homosexual and approximately 46 percent of teenagers have had sex. While 46 percent is an unacceptable rate, it is still quite different from the media's portrayal that "everybody's doing it."

Christians must also be on guard when they open their e-mail. I get countless forwarded messages via e-mail, especially in an election year. Over the years I've learned two valuable lessons. If the message is written in 20-point font and uses multiple colors, the author is not a credible news source. In my opinion, 20-point font (or all caps) in an e-mail is the equivalent to screaming in person. And since I'd never listen to someone screaming at me in person, I refuse to let them scream at me via e-mail. Thank goodness for the delete key.

The second thing these e-mails have taught me is to research the facts for myself. E-mails are a breeding ground for lies and innuendo. It's my job as a responsible Christian to double-check the facts before I pass along any information.

Finally, Christians must actively think when they listen to news reports, watch news programs, and read news stories. This takes a bit of work because news programs that simply report the news are becoming a thing of the past. Today's news programs often include commentary in addition to the news stories. We need to ask ourselves, "Who or what is the source of my news? Is this a conservative or liberal source? Is what I'm hearing fact or opinion?"

Because we use media to understand our times, we must approach it with our brains engaged, and we must seek to discern the truth in what we see and hear.

Christians need to use the media to understand what's going on in our world. Teachers who understand the times will create more relevant lessons for their students. Voters who understand the times will be better prepared to make good choices at the polls. Church leaders who understand the times can better meet the spiritual needs of their members and make the Sunday worship experience relevant to their lives.

## **B. To teach the truth.**

Years ago, a man named Jim Henderson took on the challenge of teaching choir at a new high school. The choir consisted of a random group of students from several different schools in the district. They had no vision, no structure, and no rhythm. Jim quickly realized that he would have to start with the basics if the students were ever going to evolve into a performing choir. So instead of distributing sheet music to the students, he lined them up and marched them around the room while they sang "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." He took a song they knew well and used it to teach them how to keep a steady beat.

Jesus, the Master Teacher of all time, started with the basics—He used stories. After recording a series of parables, the writer of the Gospel of Mark explained Jesus' style of teaching:

<sup>33</sup> *He would speak the word to them with many parables like these, as they were able to understand.* <sup>34</sup> *And He did not speak to them without a parable. Privately, however, He would explain everything to His own disciples.* (Mark 4:33-34)

Two groups of people are mentioned in these verses. "Them" refers to the crowd of people that was drawn to Jesus. The second group of people is Jesus' disciples. When Jesus taught the crowds, He used parables that the people could understand. When He taught His disciples, He took a different approach.

In verse 33, "parables" refers not only to stories but to riddles, similes, and other figurative language. Jesus used what He knew would communicate with His audience. The people who comprised the crowd could not

handle straightforward truths. Since they were not ready for direct revelation, Jesus told them stories to get their minds in gear so that one day they could grasp the full truth of His words.

With Jesus as our example, we need to use media to teach truth by taking some of the things we see and hear in media and using them to illustrate and teach truth. For example: Jesus said of His return, “Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son—except the Father only. ... the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt. 24:36,44b). Many Christians used the news stories leading up to May 21, 2011—the day that some declared would be the day of the rapture—to remind others that no one knows the day or the hour. The media provided a great story many Christians used to illustrate and teach the truth of God’s Word.

Another way to use the media is to reference song lyrics or common themes on television episodes. You don’t have to play the entire song or watch an entire episode for students to know what you’re talking about. While many parents would like to completely shelter their teenagers until they reach adulthood, protecting them from current music and television programs, that is a difficult proposition. Wise adults—parents and teachers—will use the topics in today’s media as springboards to discuss issues such as bullying, friendship, dating, sexuality, hypocrisy, loyalty, and courage.

### **C. To proclaim the message.**

Paul’s charge to Timothy applies as much to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it did to Timothy and the early church in AD 66-67. We are to proclaim the gospel of Christ.

*<sup>2</sup> Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. (2 Tim. 4:2)*

“Proclaiming the message” simply means that we publicly state what God’s Word says. We are to use every opportunity available to us to share the gospel, and we are to share it persistently. We don’t necessarily have to stand on a street corner and yell Scripture to those who walk by, but we are to use whatever means of communication available to tell others about the Lord.

Proclaiming God’s Word involves not only telling others about His love, but also telling them what His Word says about sin. This is often where “rebuking” and “correcting” come into play. Christians must be careful that they do not rebuke and correct others to the point that they leave someone spiritually beaten down. Perhaps that’s why Paul included the command to “encourage” others when sharing the gospel. It’s important to share the whole message and not just bits and pieces.

Above all, Christians are to “rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.” Our efforts will be useless if we do not share the gospel with patience and love.

*<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. <sup>4</sup> They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup> But as for you, be serious about everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim. 4:3-5)*

We are living in times when people constantly turn away from the truth. People only want to hear things that make them feel good. Many churches put on great shows rather than offer true worship experiences because an entertaining show draws larger crowds. I believe if Paul were here he’d say, “Proclaim the message. Be persistent whether you’re known as the greatest show in town or not. Stick with the gospel.”

Because many people are turning away from the truth, we need to use whatever means we have to proclaim the message of the gospel, and that includes using media. Numerous Christians have proclaimed their faith openly on television programs such as *Survivor* and *American Idol*. Matt Elrod and Krista Klumpp,

competitors on CBS's *Survivor: Redemption Island*, used their on-camera experience to live out their faith and speak openly about their Christian beliefs. And, much to the surprise of some Christians, the network did not edit out references to the Christian faith. Chris Sligh, Jason Castro, and Mandisa are just a few of the Christian musicians who have taken their faith on stage as *American Idol* contestants. They endured a unique type of hardship and shared their faith in an effort to fulfill what God had called them to do at that time. Over the past two seasons of *American Idol*, we have seen Chris Allen and Scott McCreery boldly display and discuss their faith as well as honor God when they were announced each season's winner.

There's also social media. Talk about the need to "keep a clear head about everything"! We'll take a closer look at this topic in the next session, but it needs to be mentioned here as well. Christians who use Facebook appropriately can have a powerful impact for the gospel. The same is true for blogs, e-mail, photos, and Twitter. Media is powerful. It's up to us to use it to tell God's story.

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# KNOWN

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Media Mania *Session 3—Social Conscience*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **How should I handle social media?** and to drive home this one truth: **Reflect Christ as you interact online.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Don't be consumed by it. (Matt. 6:21)**

- > We often think of a “treasure” as something that money can buy. But treasures can also be possessions that are not purchased. Treasures are simply possessions that we value highly.
- > The things we think about constantly and care about deeply are the things we treasure.
- > One of the ways to determine what we value is by noticing what we spend time with and what we ignore. If we value social media, if it has become a treasure to us, its high value will show up in the large amount of time we give to it.
- > The things on which we spend much of our money on could be treasures.
- > Social networking sites are a part of our culture; we need to avoid letting the sites consume our lives.

#### **B. Be careful what you say and post. (Prov. 17:27)**

- > Never put something in writing if you don't want the whole world to read it.
- > Fewer words are better than many. Smart people say what they need to say and end the conversation.
- > Never write something in anger. Never. Writing something in anger is extremely dangerous.
- > Angry people often say things they don't mean or say damaging things they would never have said when they were calm.
- > Be careful of repeating what other people say. Forwarding untrue information is as bad as speaking a lie.
- > We are responsible for how we handle information that comes our way through online communication.

#### **C. Remember you are always a witness. (1 Pet. 2:11-12)**

- > Christians are to stand out from the crowd. People should observe the way we live and know that we are followers of Christ.
- > In the age of social media mania, we must conduct ourselves honorably among those who are unbelievers. What we say in emails, what we post on Facebook, and the comments we leave on other's walls is a witness—good or bad—to a lost world.
- > Christians need to resist the temptation to join in the griping, complaining, and bashing that so often appears in online chatter. We need to resist the urge to click “like.”
- > Christians are to reflect Christ in their lives, and that includes when we interact online.
- > Jesus said that the world will know we are His followers by our love.
- > Imagine what would happen if Christians used social media to express love for others, both believers and unbelievers.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Fire is a good thing, right? You can roast marshmallows over a fire. You can cook char-grilled hamburgers over a fire. You can light candles when the power goes out during a storm. People who prefer to cook with gas need a good flame. But fire can also cause great harm, so parents teach their children to be careful around open flames. “Be careful, that’s hot.” “Watch out, that can burn you.” “Matches are not toys.” Parents teach their children to treat fire appropriately because they know that fire, left unattended, is dangerous and can be deadly.

In the third chapter of James, the Bible compares the tongue to fire. Because we use the tongue for speech, we often think of the spoken word whenever we read the passage in James. And it’s true that when James wrote his letter in the first century, very few people communicated in written form. But the truth of James 3:1-12 applies to all forms of communication, written and oral. The tongue is a fire, and it is deadly.

When I was a kid, my mother taught me never to play with fire. She also taught me never to put something in writing if I didn’t want the whole world to read it. Back then, she was referring to writing and passing notes in school. Today, the principle is the same but the arena of communication includes blogs such as Blogspot, microblogging such as Twitter, and social networking such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn.

The challenge of controlling our words is greater today than ever before. Children, teenagers and adults need to handle social media as though they were handling fire. Just like fire, social media can be a good thing or it can be dangerous and even deadly. Christians must be careful that they reflect Christ in all of their online communication.

As has been mentioned previously, we will not find a Scripture verse that specifically mentions Facebook or any other form of social media. However, the following Scripture verses and Life Principles are powerful biblical guidelines to help each of us—and our students—handle social media responsibly.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### **A. Don’t be consumed by it.**

When I first set up my Facebook page, my cousin wrote on my wall and said, “Be careful. It can be addicting!”

He was right. People on Facebook and other social media sites can easily be consumed by them. Jesus warned against being consumed by such things.

<sup>21</sup> *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matt. 6:21)

We often think of a “treasure” as something money can buy. But treasures can also be possessions that are not purchased. They may have no monetary value whatsoever. Treasures are simply possessions we value highly.

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The two go hand in hand. “Heart,” as Jesus used the word, refers to our entire being—our mind, our emotions, and our will. The things we think about constantly and care about deeply are the things we treasure. These treasures are the things that receive our time and money.

One of the ways to determine what we value is by noticing what we spend time with and what we ignore. If we value a friend then we spend time nurturing that relationship. If we value a car then we spend time keeping it clean and well maintained. If we value travel then we spend time taking frequent vacations. If we

value social media—if it has become a treasure to us—its high value will show up in the large amount of time we give to it. We must beware that we do not become consumed by our treasures, including social media.

Being consumed by social media has negative consequences. A student at the University of Oregon recently said that “Facebook is actually quite detrimental to my studies and my social life. It is strangely addicting and time consuming and creates another world of drama.” A study by researchers at Ohio State University indicates that this student is not the only one whose grades are affected by excessively using social networking sites. According to the study, students who participated in the study and were Facebook users had lower GPAs than the participants who were not Facebook users. The study also found that students who were Facebook users studied one to five hours a week while nonusers studied an average of 11 to 15 hours per week.

Another negative consequence of an obsession with social media is what the American Academy of Pediatrics calls “Facebook Depression.” While social media sites alone do not cause depression, doctors believe that the sites can harm children and teenagers who already have low self-esteem. That’s because most posts to social networking sites depict people having fun with their friends. Few people post things to their Facebook page that make them look like a loser. People on the sites typically show the good, positive, fun parts of their lives. When children and teens sit at home alone and scroll through their friends’ status updates, they don’t stop to think that what they’re seeing is only part of the picture. Instead, they feel lonely and sad because they’re not part of the party.

The key is not to boycott all social networking sites. Social networking sites such as Facebook® and Twitter® are part of our culture. The key is to avoid letting the sites consume our lives.

### **B. Be careful what you say and post.**

My dear mother is in her mid-eighties and has never touched a computer. But her rule of thumb mentioned earlier in this session is still the best rule for all written communication, especially online communication: Never put something in writing if you don’t want the whole world to read it.

There are countless stories about people who have lost their jobs because of remarks they’ve made in e-mails or posted online. Other people never got the job in the first place because of remarks or photos posted online. And still other people have lost boyfriends, girlfriends, and even spouses because of inappropriate e-mails and text messages.

Solomon clearly recognized the power and danger of words and advised against using too many of them.

<sup>27</sup> *The intelligent person restrains his words, and one who keeps a cool head is a man of understanding.*  
(Prov. 17:27)

If Solomon were alive today, I think he’d look at some people and say, “Really? You thought it was wise to put that in writing?” Just imagine Solomon writing this verse today in regard to our online activities. It certainly fits, doesn’t it?

As online communication becomes an integral part of our everyday lives, we need to be careful about what we say and post. Proverbs 17:27 provides biblical basis for two online communication guidelines. First, fewer words are better than many. Smart people say what they need to say and end the conversation. There may be more that they could say, but they “restrain” their words because they know it’s better to leave some things left unsaid. Perhaps they’ll come back and say more at a later time, but even then they will be in control of their words.

The second guideline for online communication is based on the idea that “one who keeps a cool head is a man of understanding.” When it comes to writing e-mails, texts, posting a comment, or writing on someone’s

wall, never write something in anger. Never. Writing something in anger is extremely dangerous. Never write something in anger. Never. (Is this point clear?) Writing something in anger is extremely dangerous. Angry people often say things they don't mean or say damaging things they would never have said when they were calm. That's why it's important to cool down before responding. The whole process of cooling down can help us gain a better understanding of a situation. As Solomon wrote in Proverbs 21:23, "The one who guards his mouth and tongue keeps himself out of trouble."

Recently someone sent me a message that hurt and angered me. Luckily I was at home when I got the message, so I was able to rant and rave in private. Only my husband knew how upset I was. Instead of responding to the message online, though, I opened a new document in Word and vented. I wrote out my thoughts and said everything that came to mind. It was a therapeutic exercise, but I never sent the response. After a day or two had passed and I had regained a "cool head," and I had a better understanding, the situation had not changed but I was able to see things from a calmer and clearer perspective. Had I sent a response in anger, I'm sure the relationship would have been irreparably damaged.

There's one more guideline to keep in mind when using online communication. Be careful when repeating what other people say. It happens like this: You receive an e-mail concerning a hot topic and you're urged to forward it to everyone in your address book. Or perhaps you're on Facebook and you're urged to repost something. Stop! Before you hit the "forward" key or repost something on your wall, check the validity of the information before you pass it along. Is it factual? Is it true? Forwarding untrue information is just as bad as speaking the lie. We are responsible for how we handle information that comes our way through online communication.

### **C. Remember you are always a witness.**

<sup>11</sup> *Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you. (1 Pet. 2:11)*

Christians are "strangers and temporary residents" on earth. This is not our home. We don't belong here. We're merely passing through on our way to our eternal home with God. Peter reminded his readers of this truth and urged them "to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you." These "fleshly desires" refer to more than sexual sins. They include sins such as slander and envy. Ten verses earlier Peter had written, "So rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander." Christians are to stand out from the crowd. People should observe the way we live and know that we are followers of Christ.

<sup>12</sup> *Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:12)*

Peter called his readers to a higher standard. They were to live "honorably" in a non-Christian society. We know from 1 Peter 4:3-4 that the believers did not behave the same way as the unbelievers. They refrained from "unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry." This "surprised" the unbelievers, who responded to such honorable behavior with suspicion and slander. In the midst of this persecution, however, Peter challenged the believers to pursue virtue and goodness so that their lifestyles would point others to God.

In the age of social media mania, we must conduct ourselves honorably among those who are unbelievers. What we say in e-mails, what we post on Facebook, and the comments we leave on other's walls is a witness—good or bad—to a lost world. The challenge for Christians is to resist the temptation to join in the griping, complaining, and bashing that so often appears in online chatter. It's so easy to click "like" or to leave a negative comment. We say things online that we might not say in person. It's so easy to join in and add a few words here and there that we forget those words are as powerful as the spoken word.

Social media is a powerful tool that can be used for good or evil. Make no mistake about it, Satan would like

nothing more than to use social media to discredit the cause of Christ. Satan is not stupid. He's subtle. He's dangerous because he's deceptive, and somehow he's convinced many Christians that it's acceptable to post on Facebook slanderous remarks about people they disagree with. In so doing, they confirm what the lost world thinks about Christians—that we are narrow-minded and judgmental.

Christians are to reflect Christ in their lives, and that includes when we interact online. If unbelievers judge Christ by what they read on many Christians' Facebook pages, they will think He is a judgmental God who has condemned them for all of eternity. But Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world "but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17). Jesus said that the world will know we are His followers by our love. Imagine what would happen if Christians used social media to express love for others, both believers and unbelievers.

A guideline to ask yourself before any post is, "Does this post honor and glorify God?" If it doesn't, don't hit the "Share" button. Perhaps the words of Paul should be our guide for interacting online. "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

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# KNOWN™

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Media Mania

#### *Session 4—Higher Standards*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **What should be my standard for what I watch?** and to drive home this one truth: **Use holy standards to guide your viewing choices.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Be above reproach with your choices. (Ps. 101:1-2)**

- > Though David was completely human and battled sin throughout his life, his desire was to serve God with integrity.
- > We need to develop holy standards that reflect our relationship with the Lord.
- > When Christians remember who God is and what He has done, the standards that guide our viewing choices will be standards that set us apart from the rest of the world.
- > Integrity has to do with high moral principles and honesty. People who have integrity are people of their word. They obey Jesus' command and let their yes mean yes and their no mean no.
- > You never have to read between the lines with people of integrity. Their motives are honest and their lifestyles godly.
- > Integrity doesn't happen by accident and it isn't something that we can put on and take off at a whim. Integrity must be an inward quality that is nurtured and cultivated daily.

#### **B. Don't look at inappropriate stuff. (Ps. 101:3)**

- > If Christians are going to survive the sordid side of media mania, we must arm ourselves with godly principles. Like David, we need to commit ourselves to avoid watching "worthless" things.
- > There are some good television programs worth watching, and there is a lot of valuable information available on the Internet. It's up to us to choose what we will watch.
- > When we watch something we need to ask ourselves, "Is what I'm watching promoting truth? Does it promote honor and justice? Is it morally excellent?"
- > We should hate godlessness so much that we attack it with a righteous fury.
- > When we recognize the evil of immoral media, we will refuse to look at any vile thing. Such hatred will be apparent to those who observe our lives not only by what we do, but by what we refuse to do.
- > In a world full of violent and sexually explicit media, we will stand apart from others when we turn from wicked, worthless media and watch media that is edifying rather than degrading.

#### **C. Don't associate with evil. (Ps. 101:4)**

- > Christians must run from those who are devious and deceitful. "I will not be involved with evil" is a clear declaration of separation.
- > It makes sense that Christians hate much of what is in the media, and likewise, much of the world hates Christians because they refuse to associate with evil.
- > Refusing to associate with evil does not mean that we condemn those around us. It means that we refuse to participate in evil when confronted with it in our everyday lives.
- > If we are going to handle the media in a spiritually healthy manner, we must develop holy standards to guide our viewing choices.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

There's always disagreement over what age is best to begin dating. But there's one basic principle that everyone can agree on: Decide what you will and will not do before going on a date. Once you're on the date, it's too late to start making those decisions. The flow of hormones will cloud your judgment.

The same idea is needed with media. Christians need to decide what they will and will not view before decision time arises. Accidentally stumbling across pornography on the Internet is not the time to decide what you will watch. I know from personal experience that it's possible to type one wrong keystroke in a URL and suddenly find yourself staring at immoral images. Even with a "clean" search for a Christian video on YouTube, you are only a couple of clicks away from inappropriate material that you had no desire to view when you first started your search. With inappropriate media material available at every turn, it's important that Christians develop holy standards to guide viewing choices before the choice must be made. Like David in Psalm 101, we must commit to integrity and a hatred of evil.

Allow the following Life Principles to become a basis for making wise viewing choices for you and your students.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### **A. Be above reproach with your choices.**

Psalm 101 is called a vow of integrity. It is a commitment to excellence and holiness made by David to God. While the psalm pertains directly to a king's desire to lead Israel with justice and righteousness, the principles expressed in it apply to every believer. We would be wise to look at David's standards of integrity as we strive to use holy standards to guide our viewing choices.

<sup>1</sup> *I will sing of faithful love and justice; I will sing praise to You, LORD.* <sup>2</sup> *I will pay attention to the way of integrity. When will You come to me? I will live with a heart of integrity in my house.* (Ps. 101:1-2)

David's commitment to God is his response to God's "faithful love and justice." The road to the throne had been a difficult one for David. He knew that God had set him aside as Israel's king, but it took many years for him to actually ascend the throne. During those years David fought and killed Goliath and served in Saul's army. But as David grew popular as a war hero, Saul grew insanely jealous of him and tried to kill him on two occasions (1 Sam. 18:6-11; 19:8-10). Through it all, David was aware of God's "faithful love and justice." He recognized God's hand on his life and responded to God with deep love and devotion. Though David was completely human and battled sin throughout his life, his desire was to serve God with integrity.

As we consider standards to use in determining what we watch, we need to develop holy standards that reflect our relationship with the Lord. We also need to teach teenagers to develop their standards based on their personal relationship with God. Parents can enforce strict viewing standards at home, but what happens when the teen is at a friend's house or the teen is home alone? In order to survive in today's society, teenagers need to have standards that come from within. This means that teenagers need to be aware of all that God has done and is doing in their lives. They need to remember His love and His forgiveness. They need to remember the sacrifice Jesus made in order for them to have eternal life. When Christians remember who God is and what He has done, the standards that guide our viewing choices will be standards that set us apart from the rest of the world.

In verse 2, David declared that he would "pay attention to the way of integrity." The *New International Version* says "I will be careful to lead a blameless life." Integrity has to do with high moral principles and honesty. People who have integrity are people of their word. They obey Jesus' command and let their yes mean yes and their no mean no. You never have to read between the lines with people of integrity. Their

motives are honest and their lifestyles godly.

Notice that David declared that he would “pay attention” to integrity. Integrity doesn’t happen by accident. Living a lifestyle of integrity certainly doesn’t happen by chance. We have to “pay attention.” Hebrews 12:2 instructs us to keep our eyes on Jesus. Studying His life and seeking the guidance of His Holy Spirit is the only way we will develop lifestyles of integrity.

Integrity doesn’t happen by accident and it isn’t something that we can put on and take off at a whim. Integrity must be an inward quality that is nurtured and cultivated daily. When we “pay attention to the way of integrity,” the choices we make will reflect a higher standard.

### **B. Don’t look at inappropriate stuff.**

Thirty years ago I heard a mother say that she had printed the following verse and set it on top of the family television:

<sup>3</sup> *I will not set anything worthless before my eyes. I hate the practice of transgression; it will not cling to me.*  
(Ps. 101:3)

Not a bad idea. If this same mother were raising children in today’s society, I imagine she’d print copies of the verse and put them on every television and computer in the house. (This sounds like a good idea. You might want to do that very thing.) The battle against godless television programming and Internet pornography has grown progressively difficult. In the past few years, a new genre of television programs has appeared—reality TV. These shows strive to portray reality without censorship. The result is that programs often portray physical and sexual violence, substance abuse and strong language. The reality, however, is that reality TV is not truly reality, though it does give a good glimpse into the true carnal nature of humans apart from Christ. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed.”

If Christians are going to survive the sordid side of media mania, we must arm ourselves with godly principles. Like David, we need to commit ourselves to avoid watching “worthless” things.

Another principle to help us avoid watching inappropriate media is found in Philippians 4:8. We closed the previous session with this verse, but it bears repeating: “Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things.” Is what you are watching promoting truth? Does it promote honor and justice? Is it morally excellent? There are some good television programs worth watching, and there is a lot of valuable information available on the Internet. It’s up to us to choose what we will watch.

A third principle to keep in mind when choosing what to watch is based on Psalm 19:14: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.” What we watch and what we listen to influences our words, our hearts, and our minds. So the question we need to ask is this: Is what I’m watching acceptable to the Lord?

To help ensure that his words and thoughts were pleasing to God, David declared that he would “not set anything worthless” before his eyes. David also declared that he hated “the practice of transgression.” No wonder he refused to look upon “anything worthless.” He hated it!

When my children were little, I found a snake in our backyard. It would be an understatement to say that I hate snakes. I am terrified of snakes! But my love for my children is greater than my fear of snakes, so I got a hoe and went after that snake with a vengeance. One chop would have taken care of the danger, but that snake had come into the backyard where my children played and I was mad. My kids have a right to play in

safety! (chop, chop) I shouldn't have to come out and check for stupid snakes every time my little girl wants to swing! (chop, chop) My little boy should be able to play in his sandbox without a dangerous creature lurking nearby! (chop, chop) Needless to say, by the time I finished with the hoe, the creature was unrecognizable. (chop, chop) That's what happens when you realize the danger of something and hate it with a passion.

That's how Christians should respond to evil in our society. We should hate godlessness so much that we attack it with a righteous fury. When we recognize the evil of immoral media and the danger of pornography, we will refuse to look at any vile thing. Such hatred will be apparent to those who observe our lives not only by what we do, but by what we refuse to do. In a world full of violent and sexually explicit media, we will stand apart from others when we turn from wicked, worthless media and watch media that is edifying rather than degrading. There is a powerful scene about attacking vile media in the movie *Fireproof* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2009) where Caleb destroys his computer. Wow!

### **C. Don't associate with evil.**

<sup>4</sup> *A devious heart will be far from me; I will not be involved with evil.* (Ps. 101:4)

Being "devious" is closely related to being deceitful, and Satan is the master at deception. Christians must run from those who are devious and deceitful. "I will not be involved with evil" is a clear declaration of separation. David had drawn the proverbial line in the sand and he's made it clear that he was standing on the God side of the line. On the other side of the line is evil, and the two sides are clearly enemies.

This is what Jesus was referring to when He said, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you" (John 15:19). It makes sense that Christians hate much of what is in the media, and likewise, much of the world hates Christians because they refuse to associate with evil.

Refusing to associate with evil does not mean we condemn those around us. It means we refuse to participate in evil when confronted with it in our everyday lives. It means we refuse to join in the office gossip or crude jokes. It means we avoid inappropriate magazines and websites. It means we reflect the love of Jesus in our words and actions. It means we refuse to jump on the bashing bandwagon, even though it seems everyone else is badmouthing a public figure.

For one teenage girl, refusing to be involved in evil meant that she got up and left a movie when she realized how inappropriate it was—and she was on a date! She literally turned to her date and said, "I'm uncomfortable with this and would like to leave." Before he could answer, she got up and headed to the lobby.

Imagine what would have happened had this teenage girl had a "devious heart." She probably would have sat through most of the movie arguing with herself. Every time she felt convicted by the Holy Spirit, Satan would have planted deceptive thoughts in her mind and she would have come up with a reason why it would be wrong to leave. Reason #1: Her date had just bought tickets and popcorn and drinks. It would be inconsiderate to have him waste all that money. Reason #2: This was the first date she'd had with this guy, and if she insisted they leave he'd think she was some Victorian prude who didn't know how to have any fun. Reason #3: If she insisted they leave, she'd probably never hear from this guy again. And then she'd never get the chance to witness to him! Reason #4: Can you imagine what he'll tell his friends? They'd make fun of her and all of her friends in youth group. So really, staying at the movie was the best way to protect her friends in youth group.

We've all been in similar situations where we've been tempted to rationalize our actions. Those situations are not unique to adolescence. Adults must face them as well. If we are going to handle the media in a spiritually healthy manner, we must develop holy standards to guide our viewing choices. Because this teenage girl had a heart for the Lord and a firm commitment not to associate with evil, she developed holy

standards long before her standards were put to the test. By the time she found herself on a date at a movie that turned out to be inappropriate, she had no trouble telling her date that she was leaving and she left. She didn't give Satan time to plant any deceptive thoughts in her mind.

We need to follow the example of this Christian teenager and cultivate a heart for the Lord. Only when we have committed ourselves not to be involved with evil will we develop holy standards to guide our viewing choices.

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# KNOWN

## BASIC INSIGHTS

### **Purity Matters** *Session 1—Pure Living*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **Why should I be concerned about living pure?** and to drive home this one truth: **You are called to live a holy life.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. God calls you to it. (1 Pet 1:15-16)**

- > The purity of His people has always been important to God.
- > The Greek word for holy means different.
- > As children of God, we should display His nature. Our lives must be different from the lives of the people in the world around us.
- > We are set apart from sin and set apart to God.
- > In displaying the nature of our Father, our lives bear two distinct marks. One is a concern for the hurting and the other is moral purity.
- > As we walk in His light and live pure lives, we are rewarded by growing closer to God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “The pure in heart are blessed, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8).

#### **B. Your purity is a testimony. (Prov. 20:11)**

- > Our lives reveal our values. If we are following God’s call to live a holy life, then our lives will reflect a growing concern for others and an increasing aversion to sin.
- > Our purity is a testimony to others, a statement of the difference that Christ has made in our lives.
- > A holy life becomes a winsome expression of our faith as we display God’s likeness in our daily lives.
- > As we move through our day, the principle of glorifying God in all things should guide us. Purity should mark our lives at work and at play to such an extent that we are more focused on others, more gracious, and more loving than we could be in our own strength.
- > The moral purity and the character of God that we model can be a statement of our faith that will lead to opportunities to explain the difference that Christ has made in our lives.

#### **C. Your purity is an example. (1 Tim. 4:12)**

- > Paul wanted Timothy to realize that other believers were watching him. The choices he made impacted not only his life, but also the lives of those who were observing him.
- > Paul exhorted Timothy to be as disciplined in his pursuit and practice of godliness as an athlete is to excelling in his sport.
- > Like Timothy, young people have the opportunity to provide a pattern for others to follow as they live pure lives that avoid entanglement in sin and that reveal the character and the purposes of God.
- > The world needs the example and influence of believers who are set apart from sin and set apart to God. Their sphere of influence may be more far-reaching than they realize.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Have you ever heard anyone say, “Do as I say, not as I do”? In making this statement, the speaker is admitting that although he or she knows the right action to take in a given situation, his or her example is not worth following. The words of this person usually carry little influence. The apostle Paul had something else to say when he wrote to encourage new believers. His instructions were “Join in imitating me” (Phil. 3:17). In other words, follow my example. Paul could make such a claim because, to the best of his ability, he followed Christ’s example.

Our passage this week reveals a call that God places on our life—the call to holiness. When we are obedient to this call, our life becomes a testimony and an example that others can follow.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### A. God calls you to it.

<sup>15</sup> *But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; <sup>16</sup> for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.* (1 Pet. 1:15-16)

In these verses, Peter recalled an early command that God gave to the Israelites through Moses and Aaron: “For I am Yahweh your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy...I am Yahweh, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44-45). The purity of His people has always been important to God, and it remains important to Him today. Commentator William Barclay explains that *hagios*, the Greek word for holy, means different. To illustrate this concept, he writes, “The Temple is *hagios* because it is different from other buildings; the Sabbath is *hagios* because it is different from other days; the Christian is *hagios* because he is different from other men.”

How is the Christian different? Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 1:4 that as believers in Christ we “share in the divine nature.” In observing children, we note that they often display the nature of their parents. As children of God, we should display His nature. Because He is holy, we must be too. Our lives must be different from the world around us. We express that difference in a complete dedication to God that allows us to be used for His purposes. We are set apart from sin and set apart for God. Our life is not to be divided into a Sunday display of holiness and then a display of worldliness the other days of the week. We are not to view our lives in parts—some secular and some sacred. All of a believer’s life is to be set apart for God’s purposes and for His glory. As children of God, we are the possessors of the divine nature of God—as such, God calls us to reflect that nature with a part of that nature of God being purity.

Thus, the life to which God calls His followers is a life of responsibility. Our responsibility is to live for God, showing the world what God, our Father, is like. Because the love of God flows through us to others, we are able to leave His imprint on the hurting world around us. James spoke of purity in this way: “Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (Jas. 1:27). In displaying the nature of our Father, our lives bear two distinct marks. One is a concern for the hurting and the other is moral purity.

In a world of temptation, living a life of moral purity is not easy—yet neither is it impossible. God’s Holy Spirit living in us makes it possible for us to live a holy life. He knows us well and is ready to support us in our areas of weaknesses if we will submit to Him. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that “no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful, and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape so that you are able to bear it.”

Why do we seek to live a holy life set apart for God's purposes? We do so because it is the life to which God has called us. But why, we might ask, has God placed such a demand on our lives? We can trust that our loving heavenly Father knows what is best for us. In His grace, He called us from our old way of living, and we have moved "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). As we walk in His light and live pure lives, we are rewarded by growing closer to God in our relationship with Him. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "The pure in heart are blessed, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). As we separate ourselves from the world and set ourselves apart for God, we are more aware of His presence with us and of His work around us. Our goal in this life is to be more like Jesus, and living a holy life allows us to advance in that pursuit.

## **B. Your purity is a testimony.**

<sup>11</sup> *Even a young man is known by his actions—if his behavior is pure and upright. (Prov. 20:11)*

This verse expresses a principle that is also found in Matthew 7:16. In warning His followers of false prophets, Jesus explained that they would be able to recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing by their fruit. Stated simply, the idea communicated in Proverbs 20:11, as well as in Matthew 7:16, is that actions do speak louder than words. Our life reveals our values. If we are following God's call to live a holy life, then our life will reflect a growing concern for others and an increasing aversion to sin. There is a balance to maintain in practicing holiness. Our love for people and our desire to see them follow God will not allow us to become isolated from the people we want to reach, yet our obedience to God's standard of holiness will not allow us to become identical to people who need to know Him.

In this way, our purity is a testimony to others; it is a statement of the difference that Christ has made in us. In *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges points out Paul's words in Ephesians to describe holiness as living as one who "took off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires" and who put on "the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth." Not only is God giving us freedom from our old way of life and victory in becoming more like Him, but He is also filling our hearts with love for others. We want them to have the growing relationship with God that we enjoy, and we reach out to them in the grace that we have been offered. Our holy life becomes a winsome expression of our faith as we display God's likeness and nature in our daily lives.

We understand that the opportunity to show that we are set apart for God's purposes extends to all areas of our lives. First Corinthians 10:31 captures this idea in these instructions: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory." As we move through our day, this principle of glorifying God in all things should guide us. We need to evaluate if we are showing that we are different from the world in the way we spend our money, in our response when we are frustrated, in the activities we participate in, or in the help we offer to the hurting. Purity should mark our lives at work and at play to such an extent that we are more focused on others, more gracious, and more loving than we could be in our own strength. Our pure lives should loudly testify that we belong to God and should not contradict the gospel message that we proclaim.

In the final lines of his poem, "I'd Rather See a Sermon," Edgar A. Guest underscores the importance of our lives matching our words.

And the lecture you deliver  
May be very wise and true,  
But I'd rather get my lessons  
By observing what you do;  
For I might misunderstand you  
And the high advice you give,  
But there's no misunderstanding  
How you act and how you live.

Jesus said it even more clearly when He instructed his followers: "Let your light shine before men, so that

they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Our good works, produced from a life of purity, can be the gateway through which people encounter God.

Students who desire to live holy lives will have to make difficult stands at times. They will choose not to participate in activities that do not glorify God or reflect His character. How can you help them focus on the positive aspect of making choices that may be difficult? It may encourage them to know that their choice to live pure can have an eternal impact on some of their friends who are observing them and who may see the love of Christ clearly through their words and actions. The moral purity and the character of God they model can be a statement of their faith that will lead to opportunities to explain the difference Christ has made in their lives.

### **C. Your purity is an example.**

<sup>12</sup> *Let no one despise your youth; instead, you should be an example to the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* (1 Tim. 4:12)

In this verse, Paul reminded Timothy of the example that his walk with Christ could be to others in every domain of life, including purity. Timothy was a young man who undoubtedly faced temptations in the city of Ephesus, which was known as a seat of sexual immorality. Paul wanted Timothy to realize that other believers were watching him. The choices he made impacted not only his life, but also the lives of those who were observing him. His pure life could be a roadmap for them to follow.

In earlier verses (4:7-8), Paul exhorted Timothy to be as disciplined in his pursuit and practice of godliness as an athlete is to excelling in his sport. This pursuit of godly living is not easy. In fact, Paul wrote that “we labor and strive” in the training for godliness (4:10). Paul knew that Timothy’s life would be an example to other believers; thus, it was important for him to answer God’s call to purity.

As young Timothy was an example of pure living to others, so are young followers of Christ today. Are youth in your class aware that people are watching them? They have the opportunity to provide a pattern for others to follow as they live pure lives that avoid entanglement in sin and that reveal the character and the purposes of God. Who is watching them? For each person that answer will be different, but it would certainly include other young people, both at church and at school, family members, neighbors, teachers, coaches, and other adults in their lives. The world needs the example and influence of believers who are set apart from sin and set apart to God. Their sphere of influence may be more far-reaching than they realize. As they take stands on moral issues, they may find that at times they stand alone, but they may discover that their example emboldens others to choose purity too.

In striving to live pure lives, they will be different from the people who follow the world’s values. They have been set apart from sin, so their recreational activities will reflect that purity as they seek to honor God in all areas of their lives. There will be movies and television programs that they choose not to watch, and they will seek to maintain God’s standard of purity in all of their relationships. In reflecting the character of God, they will be focused on others and not on themselves. That focus will express itself in such ways as being sensitive to others’ needs, befriending the lonely, serving others, and expressing thankfulness. As they are set apart to God, the fruit of His spirit will grow in their lives, and they will demonstrate “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Why is it important for us to live holy lives? First of all, God calls us to be holy. He is holy, and He expects us to represent Him accurately in this world. As we answer His call to live holy lives, He uses our purity as a testimony of the difference that He can make in a person’s life and as an example to encourage others to be faithful to Him.

What will our statement be? “Do as I say, not as I do” or “Join in imitating me.” Encourage students to live holy lives so they can honestly choose the latter.

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## BASIC INSIGHTS

### **Purity Matters** *Session 2—Pure Loving*

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **Why should I keep my body sexually pure?** and to drive home this one truth: **Honor God with your body.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Sex outside of marriage is a sin. (1 Cor. 6:12-14)**

- > The Corinthians were living in a culture much like ours, where sexual mores were relaxed—or absent.
- > Choosing actions that dishonor God is costly and not at all helpful.
- > Followers of Christ are free, but we have not been made free to become enslaved.
- > Paul argued that although the stomach was made for food, the body of a follower of Christ is made for more than the gratification of sexual desires, particularly in an immoral sense.
- > Sex outside of marriage is a sin because it misses God's mark, His higher intention for our lives.
- > The Bible is clear in communicating the seriousness of sexual sin. David did not flee sexual temptation, but followed his immoral desires with Bathsheba down a destructive path yielding long-term consequences.
- > Experienced as God created it, sex strengthens relationships, but sex outside of marriage is a sin that weakens relationships.

#### **B. If you're involved, Jesus is involved. (1 Cor. 6:15-17)**

- > Paul underscored the fact that sexual immorality was no longer to be part of the lives of followers of Christ.
- > As followers of Christ, they were part of His body. His Spirit lived within them, and they were to represent Him accurately in the world.
- > To drive home the closeness of their identification with Christ, Paul asked a shocking question in verse 15: "So should I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute?"
- > Our goal should be to live so guided by His Spirit that we do not bring dishonor on Him by our actions.
- > Our witness, which reflects our submission to His work in our lives, is damaged when we do not honor God with our body.

#### **C. Sexual sin can mess you up. (1 Cor. 6:18)**

- > Paul's instructions for dealing with sexual temptation were succinct: "Run!"
- > Sex outside of marriage is sin, and it always causes pain and problems.
- > To treat casually this intimacy that was designed for a loving marital relationship is destructive to our relationship with people and with God.
- > Sexual temptation is not a point to debate, but an entrapment to flee.

#### **D. Your body is God's home. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)**

- > Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that God's Spirit lives within His followers.
- > Since God lives within each believer, every immoral act that a believer commits is, in essence, committed in God's sanctuary.
- > Believers have been purchased at great cost, not to fulfill their own desires, but to follow God's will. God's purpose for them is to glorify Him in their bodies.
- > Knowing that Christ has made His home with us should provide motivation to honor Him with our body as we strive to keep ourselves sexually pure.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Just as speed limits are posted on roads for our protection, God has set limits on human activity for our protection as well. One area for which God has set definite parameters is our use of the gift of sex. He created sex for marriage between a man and a woman and for marriage only. Any other use of this gift is a misuse and sin in God's eyes. God has not set these boundaries to deprive us or to torment us, but rather to help us derive from sex its greatest benefits and pleasures.

Our culture largely ignores God's standards and often reaps the consequences. Earlier this year, a prominent public figure announced to the world that he had had an extramarital affair years earlier that had resulted in the birth of a child. He had recently revealed his secret to his family and followed the private announcement with a public apology for his conduct. In spite of the sincere confession, the pain that his actions caused remains. There is an illegitimate child who is growing up without the benefit of a father in the home. Additionally, the man's wife has decided to leave him, and their children are struggling with his deception. The misuse of God's gift has brought calamity to this man, his family, and to those who respected him.

God wants so much more for His followers. His desire that we keep our bodies sexually pure stems from His love for us and from His desire for us to honor Him in all things, including our body.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### A. Sex outside of marriage is a sin.

<sup>12</sup> *"Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is helpful. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be brought under the control of anything.* <sup>13</sup> *"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food," but God will do away with both of them. The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.* <sup>14</sup> *God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. (1 Cor. 6:12-14)*

The Corinthians lived in a culture much like ours, where sexual mores were relaxed—and even absent. In this passage, Paul reminded his readers of God's higher standards. "Everything is permissible to me" was probably a well-known Corinthian expression. Paul used the phrase with his own twist to make an important point. It is true that there is great liberty for those who are not bound by the constraints of the law; however, choosing certain actions is costly and not at all helpful. In verse 12, Paul gave two tests that Corinthian Christians could use to evaluate whether they should engage in a certain behavior: "Will it be helpful?" and "Will it enslave me?" Paul wanted to correct their inaccurate idea of Christian liberty. Followers of Christ are free, but we have not been made free to become enslaved. These two questions are a great starting place in evaluating our own actions.

Verse 13 expresses a popular misconception held by the Corinthians: "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food." In this line of thinking, they argued that the body was made for having sex, just as the stomach was made for eating. They viewed both processes as purely biological. Paul countered, however, that although the stomach was made for food, the body of a follower of Christ is made for more than the gratification of sexual desires, particularly in an immoral sense. Sex outside of marriage is a sin because it misses God's mark, His higher intention for our lives. Paul wanted believers to understand that they were created to serve the Lord in this life and in the life to come—a life for which their bodies would one day be resurrected and be made new.

The Bible is clear in communicating the seriousness of sexual sin. Proverbs 5:3 illustrates the powerful allure of seduction in describing the forbidden woman as one whose lips "drip honey" and whose "words are smoother than oil." Although compelling, seduction is full of false promises. In the end, those promises are "as bitter as wormwood and as sharp as a double-edged sword" (v. 4). Joseph understood

the dangers of sexual sin and repeatedly refused the advances of Potiphar's wife. When the temptation reached its peak, he simply fled (Gen. 39:12). David, on the other hand, did not flee sexual temptation, but followed his immoral desires with Bathsheba down a destructive path. In an attempt to cover up his sexual sin, David had Bathsheba's husband killed. He was then able to marry Bathsheba before she bore him a son. God, however, was not impressed with his maneuverings. Second Samuel 11:27 reports that "the LORD considered what David had done to be evil." There were consequences of David's sin that he experienced for the rest of his life in the strife that ruled his family relationships. This story bears out the truth of Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage must be respected by all, and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge immoral people and adulterers."

In commenting on the consequences of sexual sin, Warren Wiersbe explains that sex outside of marriage can be compared to a bank robbery. It is true that the bank robber gets something when he takes the money, but it does not belong to him, and he will pay for it at a later time. Nevertheless, sex as God intended between a husband and wife is like depositing money in a stable bank that will yield benefits that are both short-term and long-term. Experienced as God created it, sex strengthens relationships, but sex outside of marriage is a sin that weakens relationships. God wants His followers to experience the very best in their marital relationships. When we fulfill His expectation of honoring Him with our body by reserving sex for marriage, His best is possible.

What problems result from our choosing to disobey God and to engage in sex outside of marriage? What are the benefits of observing God's principles concerning sexual purity?

### **B. If you're involved, Jesus is involved.**

<sup>15</sup> *Don't you know that your bodies are a part of Christ's body? So should I take a part of Christ's body and made it part of a prostitute? Absolutely not!* <sup>16</sup> *Don't you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For Scripture says, "The two will become one flesh."* <sup>17</sup> *But anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (1 Cor. 6:15-17)*

As background information, it is important to know that Corinth was home to the temple of Aphrodite, the love goddess. One thousand prostitutes were in service there as priestesses, and sex was integrated into their worship. This is the context from which some of the Corinthian believers had come. Paul underscored the fact that sexual immorality was no longer to be part of their lives. Their lives were to be different from the people around them who were influenced by the sexually permissive culture. As followers of Christ, they were part of His body. His Spirit lived within them, and they were to represent Him accurately in the world. His concerns were to be their concerns. They were to live for Christ and not for themselves. To drive home the closeness of their identification with Christ, Paul asked a shocking question in verse 15: "So should I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute?" The idea was reprehensible, but Paul wanted them to see the seriousness of sexual sin. If they were involved in it, so was Jesus.

Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 in reminding the Corinthians of the physical unity that sex brings. From the beginning, it was God's intention that this unity be enjoyed only within the bounds of marriage. That unity is God's design for marriage, but it is also a beautiful picture of the unity we share with Christ. As Paul wrote, we are "one spirit with Him." Our goal should be to live our lives so guided by His Spirit that we do not bring dishonor on Him by our actions. Christ is not personally marred by the sexual sin that believers commit, but His reputation is negatively affected by such sin. Christ is not honored when we who are one with Him engage in sexual immorality. Our witness, which reflects our submission to His work in our lives, is damaged when we do not honor God with our body.

How should being one Spirit with Christ impact the choices we make in our personal lives?

### **C. Sexual sin can mess you up.**

<sup>18</sup> *Run from sexual immorality! "Every sin a person can commit is outside the body." On the contrary, the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. (1 Cor. 6:18)*

Paul's instructions for dealing with sexual temptation were succinct: "Run!" Paul knew the damage caused by sexual immorality, and he was warning the Corinthian believers to head in the opposite direction from the opportunity to engage in this sin. God created sex to be a loving expression between a husband and a wife. Sex outside of marriage is sin, and it always causes pain and problems. This principle is illustrated in Galatians 6:8, which promises that "the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh."

Why is sexual sin so disastrous? It has to do with the very nature of sex. When a man and a woman engage in sex, they become one flesh in the most intimate way possible. Strong emotions and passions are evoked, and the damage of disobeying God's instructions in this area is felt deeply. To treat casually this intimacy that was designed for a loving marital relationship is destructive to our relationship with people and with God.

God can forgive sexual sin, but the consequences, both emotional and physical, endure. Paul, recognizing the superiority of God's standard, wanted the Corinthians to avoid sexual immorality and the encumbering baggage that accompanies it. God knows that honoring Him with our bodies by staying sexually pure eliminates unnecessary pain from our lives.

Paul knew that sexual temptation is not a point to debate, but an entrapment to flee. Why is it important for young people to set standards and to have firm convictions before they enter a situation where they encounter this temptation? What should they do if they are tempted to commit sexual sin?

#### **D. Your body is God's home.**

<sup>19</sup> *Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,* <sup>20</sup> *for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)*

In these final two verses, Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that God's Spirit lives within His followers. As the Temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God, so the believer's body is the dwelling place for the Spirit of God. To counter the Corinthian thought that the body was worthless and its actions thus inconsequential, Paul stressed here that God had affirmed the importance of the body by placing His Spirit within it. For most believers, the idea of committing sexual immorality in their place of worship would be unthinkable. However, every immoral act that a believer commits is, in essence, committed in God's sanctuary.

Some of the Corinthians felt great liberty to conduct themselves as they chose, including the participation in sexual immorality. Paul provided a reality check for his readers in this section. He wanted them to grasp that they had been purchased at great cost, not to fulfill their own desires, but to follow God's will. Christ had not died for them so that they could live selfish lives. God's purpose for them was to glorify Him in their bodies. He had redeemed them for higher goals than entrapment in sexual immorality.

In the little book *My Heart—Christ's Home*, author Robert Boyd Munger illustrates the importance of allowing Christ to have control of our entire heart including the books we read, the priorities we follow, the service we offer to others, the relationships we build, and even the secrets and strongholds with which we contend. If written today, the book would no doubt include references to easily accessible online pornography. As John 14:23 explains, He wants to make His home with us. In coming to dwell within us, He produces His fruit in us and seeks to redeem every area of our lives. Knowing that Christ has made His home with us should provide motivation to honor Him with our body as we strive to keep ourselves sexually pure.

How do you feel when you reflect on God's great love that prompted Him to redeem you? What is your response to His redemptive work in your life? Is He welcome in all areas of your heart?

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## BASIC INSIGHTS

### **Purity Matters** ***Session 3—Pure Speaking***

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **Why is it important to keep my speech pure?** and to drive home this one truth: **Your words have influence.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Your speech is powerful. (Prov. 18:21)**

- > Our words have the potential to build others up or to tear them down
- > Throughout the Book of Proverbs, one of the guiding principles concerning the use of the tongue is restraint.
- > Although powerful, the tongue, when handled correctly, can bring life.
- > When we are listening to God and are speaking the words He wants us to share, we refresh and edify others.
- > James described the destructive nature of the tongue in this way: “The tongue ... pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell” (Jas. 3:6).
- > People who choose their words carefully and seek to bring life through them will reap a harvest that blesses them as well as their hearers.

#### **B. Your words reflect your heart. (Matt. 12:33-35)**

- > Our words reflect our heart. If you could hear a recording of the words you have spoken today, what would your assessment of your heart be?
- > What we put into our heart will flow out of our mouth.
- > The psalmist’s life and words were pure because the outflow of his heart reflected the preeminent place of God’s word in his heart.
- > When our hearts are centered on God, then the overflow of our hearts will encourage others.
- > If we will fill our heart with God’s word, our speech will have the eternal influence God desires.

#### **C. God will hold you accountable. (Matt. 12:36-37)**

- > Every person has spoken careless words or “words that accomplish nothing.”
- > This fact clearly underscores our need for a Savior.
- > The words of a person who has been saved by grace will be different because his heart is new.
- > It is sobering to realize that our well-chosen words can encourage others in the process of finding God and that our careless words can serve as a deterrent to helping others find Him.
- > As we move throughout our daily lives, we need to be cognizant of the effect our words have on the ministry of reconciliation to which God has called us.
- > The purity of our lives should be evident in our words, and the words we speak should reflect the change Christ has made in our hearts.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

I remember when I learned the rhyme “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” It was in the middle of a neighborhood disagreement, and we children were faced off against each other in opposing yards. Even as I joined with the older children in chanting the rhyme, I knew that what we were saying was not true. Callous and unkind words can hurt. Jokes at the expense of someone else are painful. Rumors can ruin reputations.

Words today can have an even greater impact. With the power of social media, the audience is exponentially increased. While at one time a young person might have been made fun of in front of a few people gathered by a locker, it is now possible that the teasing will occur in an online arena to which most of the school has access.

We can lead young people who follow Christ to model purity in all their communication and to be an example to their friends. This is a time for them to realize the power of their words. They need to evaluate their speech to determine if it reflects their relationship to Christ and realize that He holds them accountable to His standard.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### A. Your speech is powerful.

<sup>21</sup> *Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Prov. 18:21)*

Our words are powerful. They have the potential to build others up or to tear them down. They have the power to bless or to discourage. Sensible people have a healthy respect for powerful substances. In the hands of the inexperienced, dynamite causes destruction and sometimes death. When controlled properly, however, dynamite can be quite useful as it blasts through rock for roadways or wells. The results depend on the user. So it is with the tongue. Our words have much influence, and the user will decide whether that influence will be positive or negative.

Almost every chapter in Proverbs addresses the use of the tongue. Throughout these instructions, one of the guiding principles is restraint. Arrows cannot be recalled after they have been shot from the bow, and words cannot be called back once they have been sent forth by the speaker. Thus, Proverbs 10:19 cautions, “When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise.” Abraham Lincoln is credited with having said, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.” When we speak, we need to choose our words carefully and make certain they are words that will not cause harm to others or to God’s kingdom. In what situations is the principle of restraint difficult for you to follow?

Our focal verse reminds us that, although powerful, the tongue, when handled correctly, can bring life. As we pray for one another, encourage one another, teach God’s word, and share the gospel, our words can bring life to others. Proverbs 10:11 states, “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.” When we are listening to God and are speaking the words He wants us to share, we refresh and edify others. Paul stressed the importance of using words of grace to everyone, but particularly to those who are not yet believers. As he explained in Colossians 4:6, “Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.” Our words have the potential to influence seekers for Christ as we explain the hope we have in Him.

At times, though, our words are less like a life-giving fountain and more like a sewer. It is at these times that our tongue brings death. James described the destructive nature of the tongue in this way: “The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell” (Jas. 3:6). When we speak untrue words that

malign another's character, we risk destroying a relationship that has perhaps taken a long time to build. In criticizing harshly, we imperil the fragile self-esteem of someone we should be encouraging. In a tense moment, our angry words can incite anger in others and can reap consequences beyond our expectations. When we repeat coarse jokes and use profane words, we destroy our witness and become a stumbling block to others who are observing us.

In the final phrase of this verse, the expression "those who love it" is translated "they who get the mastery over it" in the Septuagint. In other words, those who master their tongue will eat its fruit. People who choose their words carefully and seek to bring life through them will reap a harvest that blesses them as well as their hearers. What are examples of words that bring a harvest of blessing?

God wants us to reflect His purity in all areas of our lives. By our kind and gracious words, we can show others what He is like. As we choose life-giving words, our speech will have the influence God intends.

### **B. Your words reflect your heart.**

<sup>33</sup> *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. <sup>35</sup> A good man produces good things from his storeroom of good, and an evil man produces evil things from his storeroom of evil. (Matt. 12:33-35)*

In this passage, Jesus is pointedly addressing the Pharisees. They have just committed the sin of blasphemy by attributing the works of Christ to Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Jesus is explaining to them that their faithless words reveal the putrid condition of their hearts. Perhaps others respected them as religious leaders, but Jesus knew them to be a "brood of vipers." Their words confirmed his assessment.

This passage also has application for those of us who profess faith in Christ, for our words reflect our heart. If our heart is full of goodness, words that do good will pour out of our mouths. If, on the other hand, our heart is full of evil, words that harm others will issue forth from our mouths. If you could hear a recording of the words you have spoken today, what would your assessment of your heart be? Is it full of goodness or evil? Have your words helped others or harmed them today?

In computer lingo, GIGO means "garbage in, garbage out." In data entry, the quality of the input influences the quality of the output. This rule holds true for us as we move through our life. What we put into our heart will flow out of our mouth. If we are absorbing God's truth, then we will speak His truth. If, however, the bulk of our input is rooted in the world's values, then those values will be reflected in our words.

How can we, as believers, make certain that garbage is not going into our hearts? Psalm 119:11 gives us instruction on this point as the psalmist explains, "I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You." He knew that God's Word offered the guidance he needed to live a life that honored God. His life and his words were pure because the outflow of his heart reflected the preeminent place of God's word in his heart. It is important to note that he "treasured" God's Word. He had not begrudgingly sown God's Word in his heart, but in recognition of its great value, he had intentionally placed it there. Are we as deliberate in planting God's Word in our hearts? Are we willing to limit the time we spend in other activities so that we can consecrate more time to studying God's Word?

When our hearts are overflowing with God's word, then our words will be words that honor Him. Paul expected this level of conversation from the Colossians when he instructed them to "Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). When our hearts are centered on God, then the overflow will encourage others.

I recently participated in a mission trip to a place of restricted religious freedom. Before going, I realized

that I would be in situations where I would not have free access to my Bible, so God began impressing on me the importance of placing His Word in my heart more intentionally. As I walked the streets of that place with new believers or seekers by my side, God was faithful to remind me of the verses that were hidden in my heart. I experienced a freedom of recall that I have rarely known as I was able to share verse after verse proclaiming God's love and the difference that He makes. Since returning home to a dizzying pace of life, God has convicted me of my continued need to spend intentional time filling my heart with His words. I must take the time to plant God's words in my heart if I want the overflow to bless others.

Our words have influence. If we will fill our heart with God's Word, our speech will be pure, and it will have the eternal influence God desires.

### **C. God will hold you accountable.**

<sup>36</sup> *I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak.*

<sup>37</sup> *For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matt. 12:36-37)*

Every person has spoken careless words or words that accomplish nothing. That is why these verses are particularly convicting. Our guilt is certain. We have all spoken carelessly and have missed God's mark in this area. Our words have not always honored Him. This fact clearly underscores our need for a Savior. On this point, as on every point, we are dependent on God's grace and forgiveness.

We saw in verse 34 that our words reveal the condition of our heart. The words of a person who has been saved by grace will be different because his heart is new. In Philippians 2:14-15, Paul reminds believers that their words should set them apart from the world. He writes, "Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world." Grumbling and arguing are examples of words that do not accomplish God's purpose of revealing Himself through us to a lost world. God wants our words to reflect the hope we have in Him, so that others will want that hope for themselves. It is sobering to realize that our well-chosen words can encourage others in the process of finding God and that our careless words can serve as a deterrent to helping others find Him. There is no place in the believer's life for careless words that might mislead others. What are examples of "words that accomplish nothing"?

Romans 10:9-10 reveal the words that everyone who seeks acquittal must speak: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation." Those of us who have in faith confessed Jesus as Lord are God's ambassadors in this world. He has tasked us with the "message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). As we move throughout our daily lives, we need to remember our mission and be cognizant of the effect our words have on that mission. The purity of our lives should be evident in our words, and the words we speak should reflect the change Christ has made in our hearts. When we speak carefully instead of carelessly, our words can accomplish God's highest intention as we partner with Him in His work of reconciling people to Himself. God expects no less of us.

In remembering that God is holding us accountable for our words, we need to pray, "Lord, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). In what situations are you most in need of a guard for your mouth? With God's help, our words can influence others for Him.

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## BASIC INSIGHTS

### Purity Matters Session 4—Pure Thinking

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **How do I keep my thoughts pure?** and to drive home this one truth: **Guard your mind.**

**Note: An expanded version of Insights begins on the next page.**

#### **A. Set your mind on things above. (Col. 3:1-4)**

- > We have been raised with Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God. Our position in Him should influence our attitudes and our actions.
- > Since we are seated with the Messiah, we should seek what is above and be concerned about those matters that are most important to Him.
- > With our new position of having been raised with Christ (v. 1) and having been hidden with Him (v. 3), we cannot live as though this world's affairs are of utmost importance.
- > As we journey through life, we can keep our minds on the things above as we pray, read, and trust God's Word, worship Him, and serve Him.
- > By maintaining an eternal perspective, believers can keep their thoughts pure as they guard their minds from focusing on earthly goals and desires.

#### **B. Choose to think about right things. (Phil. 4:8)**

- > As in all matters of instruction, God knows what is best for us. When we follow His plan in the area of right thinking, we receive His peace.
- > The verb *logizomai*, translated "dwell on," is in the imperative. Right thinking is not an option for the believer.
- > Believers should think on things that are true. Our source for truth is God's Word.
- > In addition to pondering truth, we are to dwell on honorable and just thoughts.
- > Believers should remember that our thoughts are open before God and should be pure.
- > A filter for our thoughts should be this question: "Is this a thought that pleases God?"
- > Choose to think on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, morally excellent, and praiseworthy.

#### **C. Give Jesus control. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)**

- > It is important to recognize that the battle in which we are engaged is a spiritual one.
- > When thoughts that attack or distract us enter our minds, we need to call on Christ for help.
- > As we seek victory in keeping our thoughts pure, we need to strategize using God's battle plan and the weapons He has supplied.
- > We need to know God's Word so intimately that we are able to recognize the twisted lies with which Satan tries to confuse us and the sin with which he tries to entrap us.
- > We must give Jesus control of our schedule, so that spending time in His word is a priority for us.
- > We guard our mind by giving Jesus control. He helps us recognize Satan's lies, and He helps us redirect our course.

## EXPANDED INSIGHTS

### INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Focus is necessary in most areas of life. I love to cook, but I have had many mishaps in the kitchen. Most of them have been caused by a lack of focus. The phone rings while I am adding ingredients, and when I return to the mixing bowl I can't remember if I've added two cups of flour or three. Distractions in the kitchen can lead to surprising results, but distractions on the road can lead to disaster. In fact, lack of focus is listed as one of the top ten reasons people have car wrecks. Leaning over to retrieve a dropped item or searching through a bag while behind the wheel can cause regrettable accidents.

As people of God who seek to keep our thoughts pure, we learn that guarding our mind also requires focus. An image flashed across the screen, a song playing on the radio, or an angry outburst from a family member can quickly distract us from pure thinking. Staying on course takes intentional effort. In our quest to honor God with our thoughts, we must set our mind on things above, choose to think about right things, and give Jesus control.

### POINTS TO FOCUS ON

#### **A. Set your mind on things above.**

<sup>1</sup> So if you have been raised with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God. <sup>4</sup> When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4)

Verse 1 reminds us that we have been raised with Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God. Our physical bodies are on the earth, but our thoughts should be in heaven. In other words, we should see life on earth through heaven's perspective as we lean on Christ's guidance in our daily affairs. Our position in Him influences our attitudes and our actions. Commentator Warren Wiersbe recalled hearing the late Senator Hubert Humphrey comment, "You must remember that in politics, how you stand depends on where you sit." He was talking about the seats assigned to political parties in the Senate, but the statement is applicable to believers. How we stand or live our lives is determined by where we sit. Since we are seated with the Messiah, we need to seek what is above and be concerned about those matters most important to Him. What are the things that matter most to Christ? Are these the things that matter most to you?

Two men from the Old Testament help us to understand the process of setting our minds on what is above. When the Israelites stubbornly refused to claim God's promises and enter the Promised Land, God sent them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Caleb and Joshua, the spies who trusted God, were the only two from that generation who survived the wandering period. Certainly, those forty years must have been difficult for them. Through that time, however, they were able to continue trusting God. Although their bodies were in the wilderness, their minds were in Canaan. They knew God had a great inheritance in store for them, and they lived in that hope. As we journey through our lives, we can keep our minds on the things above as we pray, read, and trust God's Word, worship Him, and serve Him.

Verse 3 contains an interesting word picture. Paul described believers as "hidden with the Messiah in God." When a man died and was buried, the Greeks referred to him as being "hidden in the earth." Early Christians used this analogy to communicate their place in Christ. Baptism was a picture of their death to sin and their resurrection to live a new life. In dying to sin, a person was not "hidden in the earth," but was instead hidden in Christ or enveloped in Him. With their new position of having been raised with Christ (v. 1) and having been hidden with Him (v. 3), believers cannot live as though this world's affairs are of utmost importance. They now live according to God's standards of purity and of love for others. Those whose minds are set on things above value giving over consuming, serving over being served, and

forgiving over carrying a grudge.

Paul used a beautiful expression in verse 4 to communicate the believer's priority when he referred to Christ as "the Messiah, who is your life." We sometimes say of a young athlete that sports are his life. There is a line of T-shirts that proclaim "Football is Life. The rest is details." Every other sport or activity has a similar shirt. In making that statement, we are asserting that that young man finds meaning and purpose in playing sports. For believers, we can say that Christ is life. Life has meaning and purpose because of their relationship with Him. In grasping the value of this relationship, as well as the hope of glory, followers of Christ evaluate earthly things in light of His love and sacrifice and are able to see the world's affairs and amusements in their true temporal light. By maintaining this eternal perspective, believers can keep their thoughts pure as they guard their minds from focusing on earthly goals and desires.

What are your greatest hindrances to setting your mind on things above? How can remembering your position in Christ and relationship to Him help you to refocus your thoughts?

### **B. Choose to think about right things.**

<sup>8</sup> *Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things.* (Phil. 4:8)

Our thoughts are powerful, and choosing to think about right things brings benefits to our lives. Isaiah realized this when he wrote, "You will keep the mind that is dependent on You in perfect peace, for it is trusting in You" (Isa. 26:3). Peace is a byproduct of focusing our thoughts on God and on His Word. As in all matters of instruction, God knows what is best for us. When we follow His plan in the area of right thinking, we receive His peace.

The verb *logizomai*, translated "dwell on," is in the imperative. Right thinking is not an option for the believer. It is what God expects of us, and in this verse He gives us clear boundaries to follow in pursuing the goal of having thoughts that honor Him. Paul listed eight spiritual qualities that he believed followers of Christ should spend time considering. First of all, believers should think on things that are true. Our source for truth is God's word. The psalmist declared that God's precepts are "reliable and altogether righteous" (Ps. 19:9). In interceding for His disciples, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth: Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Although we likely give verbal assent to the statement that God's Word is our source for truth, how does the amount of time that we spend in God's Word each day support our claim?

In addition to pondering truth, we are to dwell on honorable thoughts—ideas that are worthy of respect. Paul uses this word for honorable (*semnos*) in other writings to describe the life worthy of respect that leaders were to live. Honorable thoughts are uplifting. As the lives of leaders were to be different than the lives of other men, honorable thoughts are above the commonplace and lead people to reverence or worship. Believers' thoughts are also to center on what is just. *Dikaios*, the word for just, refers to being in accord with God's law. Those who follow Christ are to dwell on things that are in line with God's standards of righteousness.

As we choose to think about right things, we are to meditate on what is pure. Commentator William Barclay explains that *hagnos*, the Greek word for pure, is used to describe items that have been ceremoniously cleansed and are suitable to be brought before God and employed in His service. Believers should remember that their thoughts are open before God, and their musings should be morally undefiled. Along with thinking on what is pure, we should dwell on what is lovely. *Prospiles*, the Greek word for lovely, is found only in this verse. It refers to things that are pleasing before God. We should also think on matters that are commendable or well regarded. Like the word for lovely, *euphemos*, the Greek word for commendable, is found only in this verse. According to Barclay, commendable describes "the things which are fit for God to hear." That definition serves as an apt filter for all of our thoughts as we ask

ourselves, “Is this a thought that pleases God?” In summary, Paul adds the tags of moral excellence and praise as a final reminder of the quality that our thoughts should attain.

Reviewing the eight spiritual qualities Paul references in this verse provides an opportunity for us to evaluate the focus of our thoughts. Are we choosing to think on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, morally excellent, and praiseworthy? In light of this verse, how do we rate the websites, music, television programs, movies, books, and magazines that compete for our attention and captivate our minds? We can guard our minds by choosing to focus on right things and turning away from media that does not meet God’s standard.

### **C. Give Jesus control.**

*<sup>3</sup> For though we live in the body, we do not wage war in an unspiritual way, <sup>4</sup> since the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments <sup>5</sup> and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)*

As God desires what is best for us, Satan is bent on our destruction—we are in a spiritual war. It has been that way from the beginning and continues to this day. Since this is a spiritual war, we cannot use typical methods of warfare. We must understand the spiritual nature of the battle for our minds. Paul knew that reliance upon God and the weapons He provides is the only way to win the battle for our minds.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul reminded believers of Satan’s trickery by warning, “But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be seduced from a complete and pure devotion to Christ.” It is important to recognize that the battle in which we are engaged is a spiritual one. Paul reminds us that “our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (Eph. 6:12). Satan is deceitful, but we must never lose sight of the fact that Christ who resides in us is “greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

When thoughts that attack or distract us enter our minds, we need to call on Christ for help. We can be encouraged to know that God has provided the weapons we are to use. For our battle, God has given us the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. In reading over this list, the emphasis on God’s Word is evident (Eph. 6:14-17). The truth we practice, as represented by the belt of truth, has its foundation in God’s Word. The good news we are to share readily while wearing the shoes of the gospel is revealed in God’s Word. In our hand is the sword of the Spirit, which is identified as God’s Word. Our minds are protected by the helmet of salvation. While Satan would seek to deceive us or confuse us, God covers our mind with the truth of the salvation He has provided. Where do we learn about this salvation? Its message is revealed in God’s Word. Thus, as we seek victory in keeping our thoughts pure, we need to strategize using God’s battle plan and the weapons He has supplied. We must turn from the lies Satan feeds us, and we must ask Christ to fill us with His truth as He controls our thoughts.

How will we be able to discern Satan’s lies from God’s truth? The answer is found in our training. A bank official friend recently confirmed for me the training process used to teach tellers the difference between counterfeit and real money. Before the tellers are exposed to counterfeit bills, they spend time closely examining authentic bills. The bank wants them to be so familiar with the qualities of real money that they are instantly able to recognize fake currency. Our training process for discerning truth should be just as scrupulous. We need to know God’s Word so intimately that we are able to recognize the twisted lies with which Satan tries to confuse us and the sin with which he tries to entrap us. This process involves our giving Jesus control of our schedule, so that spending time in His Word is a priority for us.

Throughout the day, we are tempted by thoughts that do not honor God. For example, we focus on another person’s differences and think about criticizing him; we face difficulties and begin to question God’s wisdom; we finish a task and are tempted to boast about our own cleverness; we observe God’s

gifts to a neighbor and risk coveting. How do we keep our minds pure from such thoughts? We guard our mind by giving Jesus control. He helps us recognize Satan's lies, and He brings our rogue thoughts under His submission.

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