

Discovering Membership

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PREFACE



“The church is the hope of the world” 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Most people are growing more and more aware that social engineers, government programs and increased funding for education are not going to eradicate the evils facing our society. Alcohol and drug abuse, pornographic exploitation, domestic violence, terrorism, and general crime rates continue to pose huge, seemingly insurmountable problems. Temptations facing young people are greater than ever; casual sex, alcohol and drug use are accepted behaviors in the high school life.

So what in the world can change the trajectory of the lives of people? Is the government going to start a program that will save them? Can Congress pass a law that will redirect them? Is some businessman going to sell a product that will alter the condition of their hearts? Will the media improve their value system? Is a college professor going to utter some brilliant words that will reshape their character?

Of course not! It's going to take a passionate follower of Jesus Christ from a local church who gets alongside them at some point in their lives and says, "Listen - it's pretty obvious that you didn't get much love in the home you grew up in. But I'm here to tell you that there's a love in heaven with your name on it. And if you'll open yourself up to the grace of Christ, over time He will revolutionize who you are. You can be pardoned through Christ for your wrongdoing, and you can join a biblically functioning community in which the teaching is transformational. You'll discover your spiritual gifts and find a new purpose for your life. And sooner or later you'll end up passing on the trajectory - changing message of Jesus Christ to someone who is just like you used to be."

Churches really do hold the hope of the world in their hands. They have more power than the Republicans or the Democrats, more influence than businessmen like Al Lerner or Dick Jacobs, more answers for the world's heartbreaks than any Case Western or Baldwin Wallace professor.

Professionals, politicians, and educators can rearrange stuff on the surface of life. They can spend money and enact legislation and draw attention to a cause. But they can't bring fundamental transformation into the life of one individual. They can't rewrite the eternal address of a single person. They can't order genuine reconciliation between two estranged human beings. They can't instill character into anybody. They can't turn a selfish heart into a servant heart, or a granite heart into a giving heart. And this is what our country desperately needs the most.

And this is the work of the Church. What greater mission - what more critical enterprise - can you possibly invest your life in? What is nobler, what is loftier, what is a higher purpose in life, than devoting yourself to establishing and developing a community of believers that strives to fulfill the Acts 2:42-47 description of what Christ treasures most - the Church? Following Jesus' vision for the church is the highest calling anyone could pursue. Its implications extend beyond earth into eternity.

As the Church anchors itself in truth and moves in love, it will become what it was meant to be: a counter-cultural, redemptive, transforming community that begs to be reckoned with. When the vision of the church is cast and caught it will offer a vital alternative to those living in a dying culture. When seekers are genuinely attracted to a community of believers, they can't help but be curious about the truth that motivates the community and the power that energizes it.

It is at the speed of one transformed heart at a time that the Church will begin to fulfill its call to make an impact on the world around it. We've got to tell people who are right in the midst of fouled-up lives that there's a gift of redemption that Christ has purchased with His death on the cross and which He is freely offering to anyone who'll receive it in repentance and faith.

The product of our efforts is destined to endure in heaven forever. Nothing on this planet is more important, more strategic, and more urgently needed than the local church. Stale churches that do business as usual won't change lives. But authentic biblical communities are the life jackets through which Jesus Christ can rescue a world that is drowning.

So let's commit ourselves to praying that God would energize His people and breathe renewing life into His Church. And let's go out - all of us - to surprise a lost and bewildered world with the most unexpected, outlandish, irrational, and ultimately life-changing message of all: You matter to God. If ever there was a time in history when the work of the true church was desperately needed, it is now.

The hope of the world is the gospel of Jesus Christ expressed through His body - a local church. He has said, "I will build My Church" (Matthew 16:18). He's counting on you to help Him to do just that! Thanks for considering joining us at CVC as we seek to bring hope to this world.

WHY MEMBERSHIP?



“So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” Romans 12:5

Why should I join the CVC team? Many people think this way: “As long as I’ve identified with Christ, what is the need for me to further identify with a local church? Isn’t it enough to simply call myself a Christian and attend services somewhere regularly? What’s the point of membership?”

What makes us a church is not that we have a building or that a group of people gather together once a week for a service. What makes us a church is the fact that we are followers of Christ who are in community together. People can belong to our fellowship and know they are connected.

Cuyahoga Valley Church is an exciting place. We always have people coming through our doors to be part of our services. ***But the church is much more than an event.*** Although the word “membership” is never used in the Bible, the word “member” is used. Membership is implicit through out the Scriptures.

The Bible gives several word pictures that help to make the point.

1. **The church is a family.**

Families are an important part of the fabric of our society. A family illustrates the essence of commitment - people linked together - inseparable and loyal. Certainly, family members today do disconnect themselves, but that is not the picture of “family” in Scripture. Family commitment assures a safe place for the proper nurturing of its members. It’s the focus of warmth and the catalyst for growth. But there are only two ways to get into a family - to be born into one OR to make a commitment to one. *James 2:15; 2 John 3:17; Ephesians 2:19*

2. **The church is a body.**

The Bible illustrates the connectedness of members of the church by referring to them as members of a body. Jesus is the head and the church is the body. It’s easy to see that the body only functions properly when each member takes its role seriously. When working together, it is beautiful, efficient and effective. *Romans 12:4; 2 Corinthians 6:15*

3. **The church is a bride.**

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the bridegroom and that the church is His bride. *Ephesians 5:25-27*. Collectively, we make up the bride of Christ.

4. **Therefore, we must connect and commit.**

God has called Pastors to “shepherd the flock”. Therefore, it is important for us to be able to identify who is in the “flock.” This allows us to know whom it is that we can count upon and whom it is that we need to shepherd. In a church that values people inviting and including others, that is important!

CVC, by its very design, attracts the uncommitted - seekers, observers, guests. We hope that this will always be the case. But at some point it is important to identify those who truly comprise the “flock” at CVC - the core that can be counted on to build and sustain the ministries of the church. These are also the “family members” who should receive priority in the allocation of finite church resources (See Galatians 6:10).

Every team must have a roster. Every school must have an enrollment. Every army has an enlistment. Membership identifies our family.

We believe that “commitment” isn’t a four-letter word. Although sociologists tell us that most people today are unwilling to make a commitment to most things, we believe that commitment is at the core of our faith. Therefore, membership at CVC is not a simple intellectual decision, it is a challenge to move forward with Christ. It is a challenge to grow! Members have moved out of the vague clouds of good intentions and into the clear light of committed participation.

Membership presents a challenge to “step out of the stands and onto the playing field.” Membership is a public affirmation of a commitment to Christ and to a specific local body.

STEPS TOWARD BECOMING A MEMBER



We who are in Christ are technically already full members of the body of Christ. We have an invisible, unbreakable bond that links us to Christ and to each other. But participating membership is about making the invisible, visible; the abstract concrete.

1. **Investigation**

During this step, a prospective member learns about becoming a member. By attending our Tell Me More class and Discovering CVC Membership class, you have an opportunity to find out more about CVC, to understand our philosophy, our direction, and our beliefs, and then prayerfully consider if God is leading you to join this local fellowship of believers.

2. **Affirmation**

A prospective member responds to the material studied during the investigation stage. He or she fills out the member confirmation forms, which includes his or her story about coming to faith in Christ, and makes the membership commitments. The prospective member returns these forms to the church office and will be contacted for an interview to review forms, and answer any questions or reservations before joining CVC.

3. **Confirmation**

This step is simply a personal interview, usually with a staff member or an elder. Prospective members simply return the forms in the membership packet in the enclosed envelope. Key membership issues are discussed and any concerns or unusual circumstances are covered. The interviewer then affirms the prospective member or refers remaining uncertainties to be resolved by the staff as a group or by the elders as a group. Keep in mind that we are not looking for “perfect Christians” (whatever that is!).

The purpose is:

- a) To confirm your commitment to Christ
- b) To CVC, and
- c) To a lifelong process of personal, spiritual growth.

4. Celebration

Now that the prospective member has been affirmed by a leader of the church, all that remains is to officially confirm the membership at a Sunday service. Throughout the year, we will have new member presentations where people will formally unite with CVC in an open but non-threatening way. The new member will be asked to join other new members at the front of the auditorium as an elder asks the new members to make public the membership commitments that have already been made privately. We want the rest of the congregation to celebrate with our newest members! We encourage you to invite your family and friends to this important occasion in your life.

RESPONSIBILITIES & PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP



1. Responsibilities

To put it simply, the main responsibility of every member of CVC is to participate in the life of the church by seeking to follow Christ. We are to do as He would do, live as He would live. What qualifies any of us to be members to fulfill the responsibilities are to:

- ❖ **Love God**
- ❖ **Love One Another**
- ❖ **Love the World**

If you will practice these spiritual disciplines in the context of a loving dependency on Christ - and if you do this regularly - over a period of time, you will grow! In short, the responsibility of every participating member of CVC is to seek to be a growing Christian. We aren't looking for perfection, just a commitment on the part of our members to seek to grow. No one, not even our elders, has it totally "together." As someone once said, "The church is not to be a haven for saints; it's to be a hospital for sinners." The church ought to be a safe place for people with messed-up lives to come together to experience God's forgiveness for our failures, His grace to put the pieces back together, and His love to take the message out to others who need His power in their lives, too.

2. Privileges

Being a member means that you now have the right to influence the key decisions of the church, most importantly the selection of elder candidates and their election. Members also receive priority for facility usage and staff members' time (such as weddings, funerals, benevolence needs, personal support in your area of ministry, etc.). From time to time, meetings or other functions are held which are for "members only." These events are usually called to either inform the core of the church of a major concern or to gather input from the church family. Therefore, they are limited only to those who are participating at all levels of the grow commitments. Finally, virtually all key levels of leadership positions in the church require membership as a prerequisite. The primary reason, however, to be a member is not to gain a personal advantage, but to identify ourselves with the characteristics or marks of biblical maturity and unity. Here at CVC we have developed a process to help people grow to become passionate followers of Christ. This process can be best understood through the baseball diagram found at the end of this book. Because each class builds on the previous one, one class becomes the prerequisite for the next.

LOVE GOD, LOVE ONE ANOTHER, LOVE THE WORLD



Seeking to be a passionate follower of Jesus Christ is life's greatest challenge. We are to observe all that Jesus commanded. (See Matthew 28:20.) It will take a lifetime for each of us to progress as His followers. Fortunately, he is patient with our growth.

Everything that happens in a believer's life is God's work to bring about good. Our destiny is "*to become conformed to the image of His Son*" Romans 8:28, 29. As we stay close to Christ and exercise faith in His Spirit's work within us, we will find ourselves living in increasingly God-honoring ways. Jesus said, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*" John 15:5.

Yes, God will work in us. But we have a responsibility to work with Him as He works in us. The Bible says, "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" Philippians 2:12, 13.

At CVC we have found that our main responsibilities can be summarized by focusing on three easy to remember statements.

- ❖ Love God
- ❖ Love One Another
- ❖ Love The World

If we pursue these God given directives we will continue to grow as passionate followers of Christ. These three statements sum up what CVC is all about. This is what we value. Loving God, loving one another, and loving the world is our purpose. Spiritual transformation is a process. The Great Commission according to Matt. 28:19 is to, “*make disciples.*” What does a mature disciple of Christ look like? Answer: someone who loves God, loves one another, and loves the world.

LOVE GOD



Loving God means that we will be passionate about both public worship and private worship.

Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! Psalm 99:5

Believers who grow are praying and reading the Word privately and participating in public worship opportunities.

Worship is much more than what happens in a Sunday service. Some of us view worship too narrowly. All of life is to be an act of worship.

Romans 12:1 says, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”* Brother Lawrence taught this principle well in his classic book, Practicing the Presence of God. We are to worship God when we sleep, when we eat, when we vacuum, when we work. Some of us are good at preparing our hearts for a service time, but we are lousy at living a worshipful life at home or in the marketplace. We are praying that CVCers will be a 24 hour-a-day worshipping body.

1. **Public** worship.

Donald Whitney defines worship well. “The word *worship* comes from the Saxon word *weorthscype*, which later became *worthship*. To worship God is to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise, or better, to approach and address God as He is worthy. As the Holy and Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, the Sovereign Judge to whom we must give an account, He is worthy of all the worth and honor we can give Him and then infinitely more... If you could see God at this moment, you would so utterly understand how worthy He is of worship that you would instinctively fall on your face and worship Him.”

The public services of a church provide prime opportunity for believers to join together in corporate worship. We ought to never neglect taking advantage of the opportunity to gather on Sundays to worship God. Make the decision now that Sunday morning belongs to the Lord. Luke 4:16 tells us that Jesus made it His regular practice to attend weekend services. *“As was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath.”* If Jesus, God the Son, felt it necessary to practice the discipline of being in His Father’s house on the Lord’s Day, how much more should we make CVC’s Sunday services our own “can’t miss” appointments?

Remember that worship is more than just the music time. Some people have a tendency to think of only the singing part of a service as the worship time.

Corporate worship involves a rejoicing in God and an honoring of God from our hearts as we:

- Pray publicly and privately during services,
- Attentively listen to the teaching of God's Word,
- Hear testimonies,
- Meditate during special songs,
- Celebrate with people who are using the arts (drama, media, and music) in God-honoring ways,
- Listen to scripture being read, as well as
- Sing praise to God.

We must value *all* of what honors God in a service as true means of worship, not just the singing. Donald Whitney also reminds us that we must focus on God no matter which part of the service we are in at the time. "Since worship is focusing on God, regardless of what else we are doing we are not worshipping if we are not thinking about God. You may be listening to a sermon, but without thinking about how God's truth applies to your life and affects your relationship with Him, you aren't worshipping. You may be singing 'Holy, holy, holy,' but if you aren't thinking about God while you are singing it, you aren't worshipping. You may be listening to someone pray, but if you aren't thinking of God and praying with them, you aren't worshipping... Worship often includes words and actions, but it goes beyond them to the *focus* of the mind and heart. Worship is the God-centered focus and response of the inner man; it is being preoccupied with God."

With that in mind, let's spend some time thinking through two key elements of worship - teaching and singing.

a) **Public proclamation**

We desire to be known for sound, relevant, practical teaching of the Word that exalts God. Remember, God is "*well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached [emphasis ours] to save those who believe*" (1 Corinthians 1:21). When people leave our services, we want them to have a higher, more worshipful view of God because of our accurate Biblical exposition. We worship through faithful attention and application of His Word.

Some people seem to desire that worship give them an emotional high. While feelings certainly ought to be a part of every believer's life, we must be careful about pursuing ecstatic experiences. They can be counterfeit experiences that do damage to the soul. Since we are a sensual culture that values experience and feelings, we believe

that planning services that primarily appeal to emotions is very dangerous. (For more on this, read [The Counterfeit Revival](#).) We are told that we must worship God is Spirit *and* in truth.

For that reason, we must make the teaching of the Word of God a primary part of worship. A quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones may help here: “Man consists of mind, affections, and will... The will should always be approached primarily through the mind, the intellect, and then through the affections... My scriptural warrant for saying that is Paul’s Epistle to the Romans 6:17, “*But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.*” Observe the order in that statement. They have ‘become obedient’, yes; but how? ‘From the heart.’ What was it that made them do this, what was it that moved their hearts? It was this form of teaching that had been delivered to them. What had been delivered or preached to them was the Truth, and the Truth is addressed primarily through the mind. As the mind grasps it, and understands it, the affections are kindled and moved, and so in turn the will is persuaded and obedience is the outcome.” (From [Preaching and Preachers](#) p. 271.)

We will continue to lift up God’s word and challenge the minds of the people who attend CVC. Teaching is a vital part of CVC’s worship.

b) Public [celebration](#)

Having spent a good bit of time discussing the teaching element in a worship service, let us hasten to add that musical praise is a high priority at CVC. God loves it when we sing His praises! We’ve listed some verses from the Psalms that make that point loud and clear!

“I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” Psalm 9:2

“I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me.” Psalm 13:6

“Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.” Psalm 33:1

“Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.”
Psalm 66:2

“Sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!” Psalm 33:3

“I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.”

Psalm 89:1

“For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.” Psalm 92:4

“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!” Psalm 95:1

“Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.” Psalm 98:1

“I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.” Psalm 104:33

“Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.” Psalm 147:1

“Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!” Psalm 149:3

These passages make the point very clearly. God desires us to sing praise to Him! In the future, we can see that because of our commitment to musical excellence, our praise services will be considered “can’t miss” for hundreds, even thousands, of people who are committed to growing spiritually. Even those who have not yet come to faith will be attracted to our warm-hearted worship. So, whether you consider yourself a great vocalist or not, please put your heart and soul into giving our excellent God the worship that is due Him! Sing out!

2. **Private** worship.

Three essential practices are indispensable for personal, private worship; listening to God, talking to God, and giving to God.

a) **Listening** to God

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” 1 Timothy 3:16-17

i) **The Purpose of a Daily Quiet Time**

1. To **give** glory to God.

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.” Psalm 29:2

“And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.” 2 Chronicles 31:21

2. To **get** guidance from God.

“Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.” Psalm 25:4

3. To **gain** delight in God.

“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16:11

FACT: The better I get to know Christ, the more I love Him.

The object of your Quiet Time is not to study about Christ, but to actually spend time with him!

4. To **grow** daily like God.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. {4} Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” 2 Peter 3:3-4

ii) How to begin a Daily Quiet Time

1. Select a specific time.

* The example of Bible characters. (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Job, Hezekiah, David, Daniel, Jesus, etc.)

* It seems logical to begin the day with it. “The best time to tune your instrument is before you play the concert, not after!”

* It demonstrates that meeting with God is your first priority. You give Him the first part of your day. You are likely to be more rested, your mind is less cluttered, and it’s often the quietest time!

“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.” Isaiah 50:4

“LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.” Psalm 5:3

2. Be consistent.

3. Choose a specific place.

The Important Factor: Get alone with God.

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Mark 1:35

4. Gather resources.

- A Bible - with readable print.
- A Notebook - to write down what the Lord speaks to you about, and to keep your prayer list.

5. Begin with the right heart.

- Reverence

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:10

- Expectancy

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Psalm 119:18

- Obedience

"If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." John 7:17

THE “LOVE GOD” Journal

The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37). We can't fulfill this command without spending quality and quantity time with God. Spending time with Him has been called the morning watch, the quiet time, an appointment with God, personal devotions. Whatever you call it, it's important to know that the goal is to build a love relationship with God by spending regular, consistent, and unhurried time with Him.

Jesus set the example for us concerning the quiet time. He took time to connect with the Father regularly. *"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."* Mark 1:35.

Make your devotions a very important part of your day. As we read God's words, we begin to see God's heart for us and for the world. Doing daily devotions renews our minds. When we face the challenges and opportunities of the day, we will more and more begin to respond the way God desires.

Journaling is an excellent way to both record and process what God says to us. It's also a useful tool to use at a later time to reflect on and review some of the loving wisdom that you have received from God. Without writing what God says down, you may forget some very important lessons. And while journaling is a very personal time with the Lord, from time to time you may want to share some of your daily journaling with your community group or your friends. Through discussion, you may be able to look deeper into what God is speaking to you, gain new insight, and bring encouragement to others.

What follows is a simple guide using the word “LOVE” to help you write in your journal as you build your love relationship with God day after day.

* * *

L for **Learn**

Open your Bible to the reading found under today's date of your One Year Bible reading plan. Take your time reading the scriptures. Allow God to speak to you. When you finish reading, be selective. Look for a verse or verses that particularly spoke to you and seek to *learn* the verse of verses by writing the words in your journal. *L is for learn.*

O for **Observe**

What do you think God is saying to you in the verse or verses? Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and reveal God's love to you. Write what you *observe* in your journal. You could use the following questions to help you get started: What is a title that you would give this passage? What does this teach you about God, about others, about yourself? What are some cross references for the passage? *O is for observe.*

V for **Value**

Based on what you have learned, how will you show God that you *value* Him and His word? We show God that we value Him and His word by obeying what He's teaching you. So, personalize what you have read by asking yourself how it applies to your life right now. Perhaps God is lovingly teaching you, reproofing you, correcting you, or training you in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). You can use the following questions to help you find an application: Is there a sin to avoid? A promise to claim? An example to follow? A command to obey? A service to perform? Write down how you intend to apply the scripture to your life today. *V is for value.*

E for **Express**

Now, you can *express* yourself to God in prayer by writing out at least a portion of your prayer. Adore God by telling Him that you love Him and why you love Him. Confess your sins of thought, sins of attitude, sins of relationships, sins of omission, sins of commission, sins of self-rule, or sins of self-reliance. Thank God for the many blessings that He has given you to show you that He loves you. And ask God for the things that are on your heart. Especially ask God to help you use the scripture for the day in your life or ask Him for greater insight on what He may be revealing to you. *E is for express.*

During our time with God, we may also sing praise songs, read a daily devotional book, or simply be still and listen. But keep it simple. The important thing is to show up for your daily appointment to build your love relationship with God because God is always waiting for you. He loves you. Now, love Him in return (1 John 4:19). Remember, the goal is to build a love relationship with God by spending regular, consistent, and unhurried time with Him.

b) **Talking to God**

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8

“Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:9-11

i) **How to Revitalize your Prayer Life**

1. Approach prayer with the right heart.

2. Be real.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” Matthew 6:5

3. Don’t try to impress others.

4. Don’t try to impress God.

5. Be focused.

“But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Matthew 6:6

6. Be simple.

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:7-8

ii) **A.C.T.S. - A way to pray**

Sometimes our prayer life tends to get out of balance. It is easy to get in the “help me Lord, meet this need...” syndrome. Sometimes it’s difficult to think of something to pray about, or it’s difficult to get focused, and other times difficult to concentrate.

A.C.T.S. is a good way to have a passionate prayer life. Try to remember this acrostic and spend time in each of these areas when you pray. You may want to write down these prayers on your “Love God” Journal.

1. **A doration** - *praising God for who He is.*
During this time, focus on God’s character qualities (ex. love, holiness, all powerful, all knowing, all seeing, sovereign, just, unchanging, etc.) In fact, a great way to do this is to make your own list of God’s characteristics to look over when you pray. Also, make a list of all the name of God as your read your Bible.

2. **C onfession** – *agreeing with God about our sin and asking for cleansing..*
“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

Confession restores our fellowship with God. Remember: Don’t generalize, be specific. Call it what God will call it.

3. **T hanksgiving** – *praising God for what He has done.*
Think of a particular spiritual, relational, or material blessing and the answers to those prayers. Start your own thanksgiving and praise list. If you take time to write these down, you will be amazed at all you have to be thankful for! Looking over this list is especially helpful during times of discouragement.

4. **Supplication** – Seeking God for personal needs and for the needs of others.
“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” *Philippians 4:6*

Key Points about Prayer to Remember:

- Pray to God about everything. (Philippians 4:6-7).
- Pray consistently. (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Pray in the name of Jesus - that is, by the authority of Jesus and according to the will of Jesus. (John 16:24)
- Pray with bold confidence. (Hebrews 4:16).

iii) Prerequisites for Effective Prayer

Though it is clear from Scripture that God answers our prayers in some manner (as we mentioned above) there are also some guidelines for effective praying. There are certain practices or attitudes that can hinder your prayers and, in such cases, God will not respond to them. The passages below help us understand that we must be in right relationship with God and with others in order for our prayers to be effectively heard by God.

- Psalm 6:18 Harboring un-confessed sin will put a barrier between you and God.
- 1 John 3:22-23 God hears the prayers of those who obey His commands.
- James 4:3 God will not hear prayers that have wrong or selfish motives.
- 1 John 5:14-15 We are instructed to pray according to His will, not according to ours.
- Mark 11:22-24 When we pray, we are to ask in faith. Unbelief is a barrier to answered prayer.
- John 15:7 An ongoing abiding life in Christ (having regular fellowship with Him) will allow your prayers to be heard. When fellowship is broken, so is communication with God.

- Luke 11:9 Sometimes we don't have answered prayers because we do not ask. We are to pursue appropriate requests regularly and bring them to God.
- Ephesians 6:18 Prayer in the Spirit (that is, under the control of the Holy Spirit) is also a prerequisite. This verse instructs us that we must also persevere in our praying. Prayers offered in the flesh will not be heard by God.
- Matthew 6:9-14 If you are unable to forgive someone for something they have done to you, then God says you have not yet understood or received His forgiveness. Restored and right relationships are essential for open communication with God.
- Philippians 4:6 We are to pray with thankful hearts. Those of us who come before God without a spirit of thankfulness will find our prayers are not heard.
- Proverbs 28:9 If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law (that's God's Word), even his prayers are detestable.

A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

“Father, I realize that I was created to have fellowship with you. Thank you for making this privilege possible through Jesus’ death and resurrection. I know that daily fellowship with You is to be the most important thing in my life. I now want to commit myself to spending at least some time every day with you in a quiet time of Bible reading and prayer. I’m trusting in your strength to help me be consistent. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

c) **Giving to God**

God is the giver of all good gifts, the ultimate source of all that we have. He has given us the responsibility to manage our resources. We need to be good stewards. And we do this not just by releasing a few dollars here and there to a church. We start by surveying all we have and consider in a fresh way how everything that we have - EVERYTHING, kept or released - should be used in the light of eternity.

God is not asking us just to share our resources. He is asking us to give our resources to Him - all of them - and then, in His Name, keep what we need and give the rest away. And so that there's no mistake about it, He gives us the ultimate example in Jesus Christ, who gave up all He had to purchase our salvation.

God's Word makes it clear that we are to give our treasure to support His work in this world.

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

The law of the harvest is taught in these verses: You reap what you sow. You reap more than you sow. You reap later than you sow. This law works on the farm. It also works in our relationships. (Sow some love today, and you'll reap more love tomorrow.) This same law also works in our finances. Proverbs 11:25 reiterate this: *"The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered."* If we sow just a little - give just a little - then we can only hope for a meager harvest - skimpy reaping. But if we sow a lot - give bountifully - then over time, we can expect God to reward our consistent generosity.

At CVC, we aren't into a "name-it-and-claim-it" theology or a "give-to-get" motivation. We're not saying, "If you put ten dollars in the offering basket today, then you'll have one hundred bucks materializing in your mailbox by the time you get home." But what God's word is telling us is that we are putting ourselves at a financial disadvantage when we do not take advantage of the law of the harvest. Over time, God rewards consistent generosity. If you want to have an abundance, then you're going to have to sow bountifully. Wishful thinking won't work.

Many sound Christian financial planners/counselors teach a money management plan that is rooted firmly in the scriptures.

The 10 – 10 - 80 Plan

Every paycheck you get, you can decide to pay the two persons most responsible for the money you earned. You can pay them handsomely and consistently.

i) Sharing 10% - One tenth goes to God first.

"A tithe of everything you produce belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord." Leviticus 27:30

God is responsible for giving us the opportunity, the energy, and the creativity to earn. When we honor Him first, we are saying that God is number one in our lives. Plus, we set in motion God's blessing and interaction in our financial lives. We open ourselves up to God's supernatural activity to provide for us in ever-increasing ways. Proverbs 3:9, 10 says, *"Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine."*

At CVC we encourage that practice tithing for the support of Christ's Body, the church, as God commands. We recognize that giving 10% of our income is a good guide as we consider the Biblical standard of giving. Giving to God first can be quite a challenge for us. But those who step out in faith to do so find giving to be richly rewarding. Below is a testimony from one of our CVC couples:

"Many years ago when my wife and I were first married, a man in our church challenged all of us to consider giving 10% of our income. Since the bills seemed so much larger than our meager income at that time, we were reluctant to think that this was God's will. Maybe instead it was a ploy by the church to 'raise money.' Our friend said that they calculated their giving versus their income and discovered that it represented only two percent. So, he made a commitment to give 5% and see if that would cause a struggle in the budget. To his surprise, God blessed his family so much that the following year he doubled his giving to 10% and they have been there ever since.

We decided to do the same thing. We too found that you cannot outgive God. We have been giving in excess of 10% to God's work for many years now and both of us

delight in giving back what is God's gift to us to help His people. My wife says it best, 'We are grateful for what God has blessed us with and we want to share our blessings with those charities or organizations (especially the church) that are close to our hearts. Our greatest joy is in giving and in seeing the fruits of those gifts.'

In Old Testament times, God's people were required to contribute at least a tenth of their income to God's work (the tithe). Although the New Testament is not explicit about the continued validity of the standard, it may be assumed that it endorses the practice of tithing as a minimum guideline or a starting point for Christian giving. Obviously, the New Testament lays demands upon believers that exceed the giving of the tithe.

According to the New Testament, the totality of one's possessions belongs to God - not just the tithe (Matthew 6:19-34, 19:16-30, 25:14-30; Luke 9:23-25, 12:13-34, 16:1-13, 18:18-30, 21:1-4; Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37).

The New Testament allows Christians to keep the portion of their income which is necessary to provide for them and their dependents so that they do not become a burden on society (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 5:8; 6:6-10). But the balance of their income is to be used for God's work and for deeds of charity (2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:16-18).

Thus, whereas the Old Testament required the contribution of only a tenth of one's income to God's work, the New Testament requires the total disposition of one's possessions for God's work, except for that portion which is to be kept to provide for oneself and one's relatives with reasonable safeguards for the future. On this basis, if a tenth of one's income is sufficient to provide for one's own and family needs, the remaining ninety percent belongs to God's work.

We're not asking you to turn over your wallets, purses or savings to the church. But God does ask for you to live with an attitude that everything you have is His. The principle of "tithing" is one we still teach at CVC even though it is an Old Testament command. The New Testament goes one step further and reflects an attitude of selfless surrender of all possessions and wealth to meet any need - trusting that God will supply when you

are in need as well. We believe therefore, that the tithe reflects a level of giving that is doable, yet one that will require faith. No matter where you are in your giving, we encourage you - in your heart - to surrender all you own to God - and then to express that by growing in how much you give to God through the church and others - using the 10% mark as a guideline goal.

The expansion of the old covenant standard of tithing into the principle of total giving provides an explanation for the relative silence on this issue of tithing in the New Testament. The implications of the New Testament principle of total disposition reduces tithing to a beginner's exercise, a minimum reference that is to be increased in proportion to one's income and one's growth in Christ.

When Christians learn to regard the totality of "their" possessions as belonging not to themselves, but to God, they develop a joyful sense of freedom from the instinct of possessiveness. They view their possessions as divine entrustments placed in their care for the purpose of ministry. As a result, their giving is not based on legalistic calculations of grudgingly accepted impositions. It becomes the spontaneous heart response of grateful spirits answering cheerfully and generously to God's love. The biblical measure for giving is to be found in a grateful heart, not in the devices of an electronic calculator (Acts 20:35).

We know that your spouse may not be where you are in his/her commitment to Christ. Or, you may not have been used to giving a significant portion of your income to the church. Or, you may be in debt and trying to get out. We trust that God will enable you to move toward the tithe - even though a full tithe might not seem realistic to you at this time. (Our "Good Sense" ministry can help.)

For Christians whose limited income is only sufficient for subsistence, the tithe provides a goal to attain. For more affluent Christians whose income exceeds their needs, the tithe becomes restrictive. It is to be surpassed in the same measure that God prospers them.

Remember: There is one Person that we must never *not* pay. That's God!!

ii) Saving 10% - One tenth goes to your savings.

You worked hard for your paycheck. Pay yourself by putting some earnings into savings! This is not to be vacation fund money. It's not a "mad-money fund." This is to be put it somewhere so you will earn some interest. Too many people work until retirement and spend everything that they ever earned. They enter into their last years with nothing. They spent it all. How tragic. Don't let that happen to you. Pay yourself! The Bible teaches us to save: "*Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.*" *Proverbs 21:20*

iii) Spending 80 % - The rest goes for your living expenses.

You already honored God and paid yourself. Now, spend!

Let's see how the 10 -10 - 80 plan works over time.

Let's say your income is a minimum wage - \$15,000 annually. Assuming a ten percent interest rate, if you start the 10 - 10 - 80 plan at age 25 and keep it up for 20 years, then, at the end of that time, you will have given \$30,000 to God's work and saved \$85,913!

Perhaps your income is a more realistic (for our community) \$30,000 annually. Assuming a ten percent interest rate, if you start the 10 - 10 - 80 plan at age 35 and keep it up for 20 years, then, at the end of that time, you will have given \$60,000 to God's work and saved \$171,000!

Or maybe your income is a generous \$60,000 annually. Assuming a ten percent interest rate, if you start the 10 - 10 - 80 plan at age 45 and keep it up for 20 years, then, at the end of that time, you will have given \$120,000 to God's work and saved \$343,000!

This 10 -10 - 80 plan will require courage, tenacity, and discipline. But if you stick with it, the results will be worth the effort.

Here's one more testimony from a CVC member that we hope will be a source of encouragement for you to trust God in giving your treasure.

Our family was in financial turmoil (big debts, not big income). To top it off, our pastor gave this big-time convicting sermon on giving (real bad timing).

*Something about giving in faith and you will receive.
Oh well, things can't get a whole lot worse, we
thought...*

*After a lot of painful discussion (OK, actually fighting!)
we gave, only 3%, and hated it. We continued to give,
for a year, out of guilt and frustration. We found
ourselves not much worse off. Opportunities to save
money found us, and better job opportunities found us.
The next year, we increased our giving to 5%. This time
a large unexpected tax return found us. We met with a
Christian friend and saw how he budgeted his money.
He showed us ways to save, track our expenses, and
budget our income. He also told us that it was
impossible for us to love God and love money at the
same time. He backed it up with a verse from the Bible.
(Ouch that hurt. We could have done without that one!)*

*The next year, as we were praying on our commitment, a
Christmas bonus arrived. Year after year, this process
continued. After about four years of continuous
commitment to applying God's principles to our
finances, we were debt free and giving 10% of our first
fruits to our local church. Today our situation
continues to improve as we give more each year. These
four years dedicated to stewardship were far the
toughest, but also the most rewarding.*

LOVE ONE ANOTHER



Loving one another means that we are living in community and serving in ministry.

1. **Living in Community**

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:24, 25

Believers who grow are involved in a loving small group where they can serve and be served.

God has given us so much to help us grow. He’s given us His Son to forgive us, His Spirit to live in us, and His word to instruct us. These are precious gifts. But they aren’t all He’s given us. He also gave us each other.

In the body of Christ, we serve each other in various ways. This is just how God designed it. For example, we can learn when we listen to gifted teachers. When we worship together in church gatherings, we can enter a dimension of God’s beauty experienced through no other means. And, when we sit with members of a small group, someone can powerfully remind us of what we can’t see - that God is working in us, that we’re going to make it, that the affection of God is not just for “the world” - it’s for me.

When we’re together as Christ-followers, someone can literally say our name and put a voice on “You, _____ (insert your name), matter so much to God that He personalized His plan of salvation so there would be room for you.” Or we can hear, “I know you are going through a tough time, but you’re not alone; God is with you and we’re all with you.”

These are the moments of beauty that give us the hope that we can break free to honor God and enjoy life. They are the moments that show us there’s another side to the ugliness we’re so accustomed to.

It is common for people to attend Sunday worship services regularly for many years and never experience real growth in their walk with Christ. The reasons? Anonymity is easy to maintain in a large group. It’s possible to present yourself as “mature” and “together” when you only have to maintain a Christian facade for one hour a week. People often stay at a “surface level” with others and never go “deep” if they only relate on Sunday mornings. In the process, people feel very alone and isolated.

At CVC, we are convinced that true Christian growth happens best in a small group environment where people are encouraging each other and accountable to each other on an ongoing basis.

a) Living out the One Anothers

The New Testament teaches that we must minister to each other. Every believer is to participate. We are not only to have someone minister to us, but we also need to minister to and with others. We minister through the full range of the “one another” ministries of the New Testament. Love encompasses all of these ministries. These expressions, and they are numerous, are not practiced only by full-time staff, but also by every believer. We are told to:

Comfort one another	1 Thessalonians 4:18
Encourage one another	1 Thessalonians 5:11
Build up one another	1 Thessalonians 5:11
Live in peace with one another	1 Thessalonians 5:13
Seek what is good for one another	1 Thessalonians 5:13
Stimulate one another	Hebrews 10:24
Confess sins to one another	James 5:16
Pray for one another	James 5:16
Not complain against one another	James 5:9
Not judge one another	Romans 14:13
Not consume or devour one another	Galatians 5:15
Offer hospitality to one another	1 Peter 4:9
Prefer one another	Romans 12:10
Edify one another	Romans 14:19
Receive one another	Romans 15:7
Admonish one another	Romans 15:14
Care for one another	1 Corinthians 12:25
Greet one another	1 Corinthians 16:20
Serve one another	Galatians 5:13
Submit to one another	Ephesians 5:21

The best place for these kinds of relationships to be built is in the context of a small group. In fact, it’s almost impossible to practice the “one anothers” of the New Testament in a large gathering. One Christian leader, in emphasizing the value of small groups in relation to large meetings, said, “We impress people from a distance. But we impact them up close.”

In small groups, we experience what is commonly called Christian fellowship. It’s enjoying others who follow Jesus! At CVC, a small group is any group of people (6-12) who regularly come together. They may be groups that primarily focus up on spiritual growth, a ministry task, support or committee work. No matter the focus - each attempts to incorporate some aspect of LOVE, LEARN, DECIDE and DO. In addition, many

members of CVC have found it to be spiritually beneficial to meet regularly with an accountability partner. You may want to ask God to help you find one.

b) Finding Groups to Build Relationships:

- i) **Community Groups** are small groups of (mixed groups 10 to 12 people, Men's or Women's group 7-8 people) that meet regularly with each other. You'll experience a comfortable environment, authentic relationships and spiritual growth.
- ii) **Group Connect** is a two-hour event where we can help you meet and connect with others to form a Community Group. Childcare is available by request (age 12 and under).

For more information, please contact Jackie Puliafico at 440.746.0404, ext. 822.

- iii) **Building relationships in prayer or fellowship groups:** Wednesday Night of Prayer - 7:00 – 9:00pm

Relationships are key to Christian growth. Often we talk so much about a personal relationship with Jesus that we forget that we need each other to grow strong. That's one of the reasons why God established the church – to help us “be together” in Christ. God desires for each of us to experience true biblical community.

c) Resolving conflicts

When we are in relationships, we can count on conflict. Disagreements are inevitable. And not all of them are bad. When people are working hard toward certain goals, they will have disagreements on strategy, timing of things, who should lead, or who should follow. Some disagreements can be constructive and accomplish a good objective. But whenever a disagreement occurs, something has to be done with it. If we don't follow God's guidelines very closely, disagreements that started out on the constructive side can turn destructive very quickly. When that happens, the whole atmosphere in a family, in an organization, in a church, and in a small group changes.

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us a process to help us handle conflicts wisely. Jesus' teaching carries the potential to heal broken relationships, to restore weakened friendships, and to foster reconciliation between colleagues. And yet it's a process

that's too often ignored in relationships in our homes, in our communities, in our companies, and in our churches.

If you want to be successful in your relationships, you need to know and follow these principles. Jesus is outlining God's plan in confronting conflict. Following His teaching can make all the difference in the world. A failure to follow His plan will allow conflict to go underground where it can slowly poison relationships and communities. But fully following His plan will result in God-honoring relationships.

This information may very well provide a defining moment for you. It's our hope that you will experience renewed determination and will learn some new skills in dealing with relational stress in a way that honors God and respects people. Who knows how many friendships and how many ministries might be saved as a result? God gives us three guidelines for resolving conflict in these verses.

i) **Deal with conflict one - on - one.**

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." Matthew 18:15

What do we naturally want to do when we are hurt? We want to talk to someone else!! We want to go to anyone but the person who has created the offense. But that is directly contrary to the clear instruction on Matthew 18. Jesus gave us this no-nonsense command because He knows that our natural tendency will always be to avoid going to the person who has hurt us.

We must do what's supernatural, what's counterintuitive. It's the last thing we want to do. The first step we usually take is to go to someone else first. We want to tell our five best friends. We want a shoulder to cry on. We want a whole bunch of people to say, "Oh, you poor thing. Yes, you have been unduly mistreated." We want sympathy and understanding from uninvolved parties.

But Jesus is clear. The minute the offense occurs and it takes root in your spirit, stop. Don't do another thing. Anything you do other than go to the person is the wrong thing and will make things worse! It will hurt someone and involve parties who shouldn't be involved. Stop. Contact the person. Immediately start moving that way.

What you are looking for is that the one confronted will take your correction kindly, will acknowledge the offence, will declare a sorrow for it, and will desire to make changes so a reconciliation is made. When that happens, you will have gained your brother or sister. That means that the one who has been confronted will recover from the error of his/her ways and the relationship will be restored. Afterwards, no mention of the conflict ought to be made either to him/her, to any other person, or to the church.

By the way, when someone brings an offense to you and you realize very quickly that he needs to go to the person who offended him, you may just need to cut that person off in mid-sentence. When someone starts describing a problem with someone else, there is a side to us that wants to know about it. If there is a problem, we may want to hear the juicy gossip or even may want to help solve it - put it to rest. But resist that urge!

How the process happens is extremely vital. It's not just the "fix" we're after. It's making sure that the process that leads to the "fix" is a God-honoring process. You may need to say, "Hold it. This feels to me that we are not honoring the Matthew 18 process. Have you described this to the person who offended you?" If they say, "I mean to, I'm going to, I intend to." We must say, "Stop. This can go no further. Don't give me any further information. Right now, I challenge you to go to the person with whom you have this difficulty and get it out on the table as Jesus has commanded us."

ii) **Take one or two with you.**

"But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses." Matthew 18:16

The Bible is clear that there are times that others in the community of faith are to be involved. The real possibility exists that the one confronted will either deny the sin, excuse it, or defend it. Some people may show no signs of repentance. Instead, they may become angry and defensive. They may fight back with hard words to you. If that's the case, then take with you one or two more believers in Christ. They ought to be people with "above reproach" reputations and character. They may know something of the

matter, and so can confirm, by their own testimony, what has happened. The reason you take others with you is not to punish. It's to bring the person to conviction and acknowledgment. Or perhaps the one or two you take with you may, by hearing what is said on both sides, determine where the truth lies. It may be that you aren't seeing things clearly. Again, the goal is reconciliation and unity in the home, in the office, or in the church.

Should this matter be taken to the next step, these one or two witnesses would be able to understand the issue, be able to speak about it, and be able to report the steps that have been taken.

iii) **Involve leadership.**

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Matthew 18:17

Practically, speaking, when things aren't resolved after steps one and two, that's the time to involve the leadership. First, we encourage you to go to a ministry leader. As a last resort, we ask you to go to the elders. In the church, the elders act as representative leaders for the entire body.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Hebrews 13:1

Again, when the offender is lovingly confronted, we are hoping and praying for repentance and restoration. But if there is still no change in the offender, ultimately, the whole church body is to be acquainted with the situation.

After a person has been privately admonished and publicly rebuked, without success, his company is to be shunned, and intimate friendship with them to be avoided. You just don't hang out with them any more. Does that mean they can't come to church? Of course not. We want even irreligious people to come to church! But the person who won't work through relational conflict is not qualified for positions of leadership in the church and ought to be discouraged from taking the Lord's Supper.

Why take these three steps? The goal is restored relationships.

iv) The Peacemaker's Pledge

Our elders at CVC have adopted "The Peacemaker's Pledge" - a document that describes the way we want conflict resolution to work at CVC. We must remember that there will more than likely be times when we will fail each other. But we must remember that we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. He will never fail any of us!

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to response to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict.¹ We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ.² Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to response to conflict according to the following principles.

(1) Glorify God.

Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will seek to please and honor God – by depending on His wisdom, power, and love; by faithfully obeying His commands; and by seeking to maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude.³

(2) Get the log out of your own eye.

Instead of attacking others or dwelling on their wrongs, we will take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts – confessing our sins, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.⁴

(3) Go and show your brother his fault.

Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will choose to overlook minor offenses, or we will talk directly and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook. When a conflict with another Christian cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.⁵

(4) Go and be reconciled.

Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation – forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.⁶ By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an assignment, not an accident. We will remember that success, in God's eyes, is not a matter of specific results but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers rings praise to our Lord and leads others to know His infinite love.⁷

¹Luke 6:27-36; Gal. 5:19-26; Matt. 5:9. ²2 Cor. 10:31-11:1; Rom. 8:28-29; James 1:2-4. ³1 Cor. 10:31; James 4:1-3; Psalm 37:1-6; Phil. 4:2-9; Col. 3:1-4; 1 Peter 2:12; John 14:15; James 3:17-18; Rom. 12:17-21; Mark 11:25. ⁴Matt. 7:3-5; 1 John 1:8-9; Prov. 28:13; Col. 3:5-14; Luke 19:8. ⁵Matt. 18:15-20; James 5:9; Prov. 19:11; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim 2:24-26; 1 Cor. 6:1-8. ⁶Matt. 5:23-24; Matt. 6:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Matt. 7:12; Phil. 2:3-4. ⁷Matt. 25:14-21; 1 Peter 2:19, 4:19; Rom. 12-18; John 13:34-35.

2. **Serving in Ministry**

Believers who grow are being good stewards of the gifts God has given them - their time, their talents, and their treasure.

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Ephesians 5:15-17

Have you ever heard the old saying, “Time is money?” This is true in the sense that time is an expendable resource, just like money. Time that is squandered is wasted forever! Time that is skillfully invested produces dividends throughout eternity.

Moses, the great leader of the Jewish people, asked God to help him remember the importance of managing his time wisely. He prayed, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Psalm 90:12. Life is short. Death is certain. We must start investing our time in the service of Christ today! Remember the words of Jesus in Mark 8:35, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”

We're not asking you to stop doing everything else in your life - or even to show up every time we have a service or activity. But serving Christ and growing in Him will take time. It takes time to build relationships, reach out, serve others, and be loved by others. Too many people keep adding to an already full plate. Some choices need to be made. We must eliminate some things from our schedules so we can grow in serving Christ. If we don't, then we will miss out on all God desires to give us and do through us.

- a) Time commitments necessary for growth.
 - i) I will make the time daily for prayer, Bible reading, and quiet contemplation.
 - ii) I will make time weekly for regular worship services.
 - iii) I will make time to serve regularly in a ministry of the church.
 - iv) I will make time to be involved in a small group of Christian friends.
 - v) I will make time to reach out to those who do not know Christ.

One of the most important gifts we must give to our Lord is our time. It is a tangible way that we show others, ourselves, and our Lord, that we are seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

God's word is clear that we are to use our talents in the life of a local church.

b) What we are to do.

- i)** Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).
- ii)** With our spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10).
- iii)** In the right spirit (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).
- iv)** As an expression of obedience and worship (Romans 12:1).

At CVC, we have a strategy to help you discover, develop, and use your talents to serve Christ and His church.

The first step for those seeking to serve involves identifying your S.H.A.P.E.. This section is designed to communicate the philosophy of gift-based ministry and to help you explore who God has made you to be; your unique S.H.A.P.E.!

Upon completion of a gifts inventory and as a part of your new member interview, you will be helped by a CVC leader who will help you determine where you should serve. This will provide an opportunity to discuss areas of ministry that may be of interest to you.

Ministry leaders will make contact with those interested in their area of service. Job descriptions and time commitments will be discussed in greater detail.

The reason we make such a "fuss" about serving Christ with our talents is because we were created for ministry (Ephesians 2:10), we are called to minister (Galatians 5:13), and we have been gifted for ministry (Ephesians 4:12, 1 Peter 4:10).

The reason you should be interested and involved in using your talents for ministry is because the Body of Christ needs your ministry (I Corinthians 12:12-26). If any part is missing, the Body is deformed. (We want

our Body to be whole).

If any part is not functioning, the Body is disabled. (We want our Body to be hearty).

If any part is malfunctioning, the Body is dysfunctional. (We want our Body to be healthy).

By now, we hope you are thinking,

“What body part am I? How has God ‘shaped’ me?”

Our "S.H.A.P.E." is determined by:

- S - Spiritual Gifts
- H - Heart
- A - Abilities
- P - Personality
- E - Experiences

Your ministry will be most effective, fulfilling (and fun!) when you are using your **S**piritual gift in the area of your **H**eart's desire and using your **A**bilities in a way that best expresses your **P**ersonality and **E**xperiences.

(insert “Spiritual Gifts Discovery”)

(insert current “Getting Involved” sheet)

LOVE THE WORLD



Loving the world means that we follow a simple strategy – invest and invite.

*"And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."
Matthew 4:19*

Believers who grow are investing in relationships with those who don't know Christ in order to show Christ's love with them, and inviting them to groups, events, and services in order to win them to Christ.

People without Christ matter to God. And they must matter to us at CVC! There is a real heaven (John 14:1-3) and a real hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) and real people go to either one or the other (Hebrews 9:27). Our immediate family members, our extended family members, our friends, our neighbors, and our co-workers need Christ Jesus!

Historically, at CVC, we've said that our hope is to "go to heaven and take as many people with us as we can!" We want that to be your hope, too!!

1. **Invest**

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Luke 5:27-31

God's desire is for us to value unbelieving friends the way Matthew did. Be innovative. Think creatively. Come up with a strategy that is true to who you are and to who your friends are. Pray hard and be willing to go out on a limb. Learn from mistakes and adjust the approach accordingly. Remember to focus on people rather than programs. You've got to seize opportunities to rub shoulders with irreligious people if you're going to reach anybody. Contagious Christianity is friend-to-friend, person-to-person, neighbor-to-neighbor.

a) **Reach out to people you already know.**

It's the people we already know who have already developed a measure of trust in us and our motives, and are therefore most in range of influence. Attributes like authenticity, compassion, and sacrifice are powerful magnets to those who observe them in your life. The key element missing in so many of these relationships is relaxed time together outside of the routines of work, household chores, or the everyday busyness of life. We simply need more "down time" in order to allow conversations to deepen into the real, personal issues of life.

Like Matthew, you may simply throw a party! They're usually designed to fulfill a modest purpose: to provide a neutral setting where contagious Christians can make low-key contact with irreligious people. These are ideal environments for strengthening existing relationships as well as cultivating new ones. And they're great places to plant some spiritual seeds and strike up conversations about matters of faith. Ideas for parties are: Holiday Parties, events for kids on the block, dessert parties, or baptism receptions.

If you've been wringing your hands wondering what you could do to raise your proximity level with people who need Christ, why not brainstorm some new ideas with a few like-minded friends? Dream a little. Pray together about it. Then take a risk and see what God does.

Another great idea is to involve others in your everyday activities. Another misconception many of us have is that in order to build relationships with irreligious people, we'll have to add a lot of new activities to our already overburdened schedules. Well, you'll be glad to know that it's not true. An effective way to maximize those friendships is to invite the person to join you in the things you're already planning to do.

Things like sharing a meal, watching a game, participating in sports activities, sharing exercise time, going to children's activities, and sharing strategic workdays can be great ways to build relationships through everyday life experiences. You can add to this list of examples from your own situations and interests. What's important is that you plan get-togethers that are natural for both you and your friends.

Who are some people without Christ you already know?

b) Reach out to people you used to know.

Think of the people from your past with whom you've lost contact. Few people make an effort to stay in contact with their acquaintances once they leave school, a job, or a neighborhood. When you actually do write or call a former coworker or classmate, he or she will be pleasantly surprised and open to the idea of getting together to catch up.

Who could you call? What address do you need to look up so you can drop a note of encouragement and reestablish a waiting-to-be-recovered friendship? Even if you've lost track of where the person lives, a little creative thinking and a couple of calls can usually get you the information you'll need. Call them out of curiosity. Call them for fun. But in the process, prayerfully watch for opportunities to inject into the conversation some of the changes God has affected in your life. They'll probably be more interested than you'd expect.

Who are some people without Christ that you used to know?

c) Reach out to people you would like to know.

Relax. We're not talking about spiritually accosting unsuspecting passersby! The idea is to find ways to build rapport with people you come into contact with through natural means, with the hopes of eventually being able to discuss spiritual topics. A fancy title for it: strategic consumerism.

All of us go to gas stations, restaurants, dry cleaners, grocery stores, clothing shops, and other places for the necessities of every day life. Well, with a little forethought, those mundane errands can be turned into evangelistic adventures. Approach the people working in these places not as objects to serve us but as people who matter to God and who are worthy of our love and concern.

The relationship will grow as we show genuine interest in their life, their family, their work, and their hobbies. Over time, we'll begin to earn their trust and pique their curiosity about what it is that makes us different from so many other customers who don't seem to care.

Who are some people without Christ you'd like to know?

How might you be able to turn ordinary activities into Spirit-directed adventures? It can all start with the practice of strategic consumerism. Or it can begin with whatever variation on the theme you'd like to give it: strategic recreation, strategic community involvements, strategic political activity and so on. Whatever the arena, Colossians 4:5 again remind each of us to *“be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”*

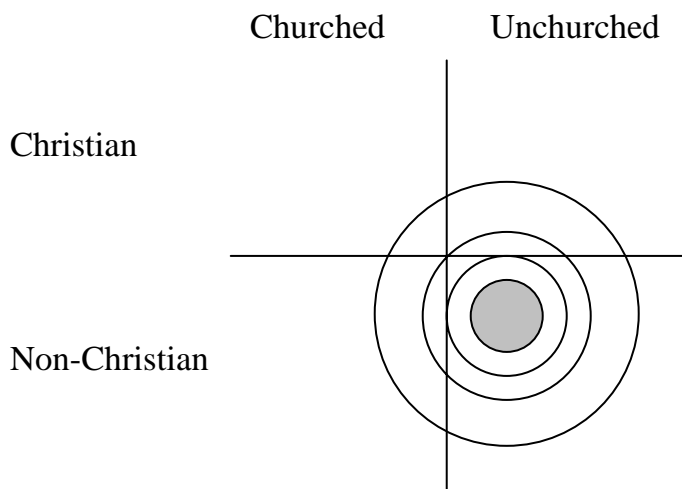
Events as simple as having lunch or playing golf with someone who needs to know Christ could start a process that ends up--well, that *never* ends at all!! What a privilege it is to be used by God to make contact with people for the purpose of spiritually impacting their lives in ways that last not just for this lifetime, but *forever*.

2. **Invite**

One researcher did a survey and found that 89% of church attenders believe that the church exists “for me and my family.” While one of our core values is to strengthen individual believers and the families of the faithful, it’s unbiblical to forget about a lost and dying world of people without Christ.

Jesus said, *“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you”* John 20:21. Now, why did the Father send Jesus? The Father sent Jesus *“to seek and to save, that which was lost”* Luke 19:10. Therefore, Jesus is sending us to seek and to save those who are lost - those who are without Christ. Clearly, we have a responsibility to reach unchurched people. At CVC, we take that responsibility seriously. And want you to take that responsibility seriously, too.

An unchurched person is someone who rarely attends services anywhere. They may have an affiliation with a church from their childhood. But they may only go just a few times each year. The unchurched have given up on the traditional church for a variety of reasons. The following diagram will help you understand who our evangelistic target audience is.



Some churches seemingly plan and program to reach the people in the churched/Christian quadrant. These churches might grow. But they experience what is called “transfer growth” - shuffling the already convinced from one ministry to another. We feel that God has given us the task of targeting those in the unchurched/non-Christian quadrant. In the process, we have seen God bring to CVC those in the other three quadrants.

With that in mind, we have sought to get inside the mind of the unchurched people in our community. The Far Hills Church in Dayton, Ohio asked Wright State University to survey unchurched people in their community. They gave these reasons why they don't attend church:

- ❖ Too much pressure to join
- ❖ Too much pressure to give
- ❖ The services are too stiff and formal
- ❖ Long sermons
- ❖ Long services

When asked what would cause them to want to attend a church, they gave these reasons:

- ❖ Enthusiastic leadership
- ❖ Positive and uplifting sermons
- ❖ Being made to feel at home and comfortable
- ❖ Fresh, creative, innovative services
- ❖ Practical relevant sermons

As CVC was starting, our founding pastor conducted a door-to-door survey in Northeast Ohio. The reasons unchurched people in Cleveland gave for not attending were almost identical to the ones in Dayton. Two more insights came through loud and clear. Unchurched people said, “We don't go to church because childcare is inadequate and because the pastor talks ‘at’ me, not ‘with’ me.” We

have determined to always keep in mind why the unchurched don't come and why they might come. These factors affect our programs and planning for our services.

At CVC, we expect all participating members to move beyond simply being attenders. We want you to be "bringers." Invite, and then include, your unchurched friends!

As you begin spiritual conversations with anyone, we have found it to be helpful to say, "You know, the last thing I want to do is to stress our relationship or to turn you off. So, if at any time you want me to 'back off,' just say the word and I will." This relaxes the other person greatly since they know they are "in charge" of how far the conversation will go. It also shows great respect for the other person.

One of the common reasons many Christians rarely engage non-Christians in serious spiritual conversations about Christ is because they are afraid. Are you afraid of saying the wrong things? Are you afraid of offending people? Are you afraid of getting into an argument? Then, join the crowd! Even the most effective evangelist has fear. Yet, God is calling us to bring our fears to Him, to step out in faith, and to reach out to lead people to Christ.

We have learned a simple, yet effective, method of sharing the good news about Jesus that calms many of these fears. With this method, you simply ask questions. The other person gives the answers! That takes care of the fear of saying the wrong thing, the fear of offending anyone, and the fear of getting into an argument!

Here's how it works:

a) Ask your friend questions about themselves.

Use questions to determine where God may be working. Listen. Your only responses should be something like, "Umm" or "Uh huh."

- ❖ I sometimes pray for people I meet. How can I pray for you?
- ❖ When you die, if God says to you "why should I let you into Heaven?" what would you say?
- ❖ What has been your most meaningful spiritual experience?
- ❖ Do you find that your spiritual background helps you answer your questions about life?
- ❖ How did you arrive at the spiritual belief that you have?
- ❖ How is God involved in your life?
- ❖ To you, who is Jesus?

b) **Ask your friend questions about the Bible.**

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the word of God. I Peter 1:23 tells us that the new birth comes from having the word of God planted in the heart like a seed. So, we must expose our friends to the power of the gospel as it is expressed right out of the Bible. God's word is our authority, not our own opinions.

Underline, highlight, or place a box around the following verses. Write the "address" of the next verse you will turn to on the page containing the verse you are asking your friend to read. Simply let the Bible speak. Turn your Bible to face your friend, point to the verse, and ask them to read it *out loud*. Say to your friend, "Read the verse aloud." Then ask your friend, "What does this say to you?"

Here are seven verses to use that communicate the gospel clearly.

- ❖ John 3:16
- ❖ Romans 3:23
- ❖ Romans 6:23
- ❖ Romans 5:8
- ❖ Ephesians 2:8,9
- ❖ Acts 3:19,20
- ❖ John 1:12

c) **Ask your friend questions to encourage a commitment.**

Close with key questions:

- ❖ Do you believe that you are a sinner who needs God's forgiveness?
- ❖ Do you want God's forgiveness for your sins?
- ❖ Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for you and rose again?
- ❖ Are you willing to surrender your life to Christ?
- ❖ Are you ready to invite Jesus to be the Savior (Forgiver) and Lord (Leader) of your life?

You may want to lead your friend in a prayer to receive Christ. (It is a good idea to write this prayer in the front or back of your Bible so you can turn to it when it is needed.) Suggest to your friend, "I will pray a prayer one phrase at a time. Please repeat each phrase after me." Here's a suggested prayer:

Dear Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I turn away from my sins. I believe that you died on the cross paying the penalty for my sins. I believe You rose again from the grave. I receive You into my life. I invite You to be My Savior. I make you Lord. Please change me from the inside out. I want to honor and enjoy You forever. Amen.

If someone prays with you to receive Christ, please call the church office to let us know. We can provide you with follow-up material that can help you help your new brother or sister in Christ grow!

Remember, successful witnessing is sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.

A few years ago, one of our members, Carol Garrett, wrote an article that accurately reflects our passion to reach out effectively to those who are new attenders at CVC.

V.I.P.'s In Our Midst

Only God knows who they are...

Each week they take a seat among us in CVC Sunday services.

Most wish to remain inconspicuous. Some even anonymous. On the outside, they look just like everybody else. They smile. They sing. They laugh. At appropriate times they stand or sit or listen.

But on the inside, where only God can see, they are searching.

Many don't know what it is they're looking for, or even if they've come to the right place to find it. For a variety of reasons, all kinds of people with all kinds of questions have made their way into our midst each Sunday.

Some come looking for God, trying to satisfy a spiritual longing. Perhaps they have never been inside a church. Or maybe they've been in one too many. Disillusioned with religion, they never planned to be in another church. But here they are. Searching.

Some just need a little peace. Life is tough, and they need direction. Or answers. Possibly, even a reason to go on. Something is wrong and they can't make it right. So here they are. Maybe it's a last resort.

A few people come to be polite...a friend kept asking. Why not be nice? Experience something new. No expectations, no strings attached. No awareness of their need for God.

We don't know who these people are. But some things we do know. Each week they are here because in some way God has drawn them. It is no accident. For many, a lifelong search will end as spiritual truths heard here open their eyes to Jesus Christ.

Every believer at CVC will know these things, because at some point in each of our lives, we were that person sitting on that chair, on our own personal journey toward Christ.

We have all been the seeker.

And that is why we spend countless hours planning, practicing, praying and preparing for these few moments each Sunday. We provide a comfortable place where others can come, listen, and learn the truth we know. No amount of effort is too great, no time spent is wasted in giving that opportunity.

Whether we plan the service, implement the plans, or invite the visitors, all of us come together with a single high purpose. For the person sitting in that chair—we do our job, then God can do His. And that's the exciting part. That's when seekers become believers.

By: Carol Garrett

SPIRITUAL GROWTH



Several years ago, leadership expert John Maxwell wrote, “One of the things I enjoy most is doing conferences around the country. One of the most important things I talk about at those conferences is personal growth. I often invite anyone in the audience who has already created a personal plan for growth to come up during the break to tell me about it. Do you know that in all the years I have been doing that, not once has anyone come up to me. Why? Because not one had created a personal growth plan for himself.”

Paul told Timothy, “Pay close attention to yourself” (I Timothy 4:16a). Growth is not automatic; it does not necessarily come with experience, nor simply as a result of gathering information. What we want to see is transformation. The word “transformed” in Romans 12:1-2 is *metamorphoo* in the Greek. We learned the word in grade school. Metamorphosis. A caterpillar “morphs” into a butterfly.

That’s what God intends for us. We are to change, to morph, to grow! Staying the same isn’t an option. Don’t you want your life to be different at the end of this year than it is today? An angry mom becomes more patient. A lazy student becomes more disciplined. A sour dad becomes more joyful. An impatient single person becomes more at peace.

Personal growth must be...

- *deliberate,*
- *planned, and*
- *consistent.*

Think of yourself as a well and think of the people around as having a bucket. They will drain you dry. Unless the well is replenished, you will be emptied soon. Your growth requires a plan.

1. Ask God to help you grow.

Yes, God has promised to work in us. That's why we can be confident that He will answer us when we ask Him to help us grow. A man was overheard thanking God for answering his prayer for something good that happened in his life. His friend said, “It was a coincidence.” The praying man replied, “If it is a coincidence, I sure have a lot more coincidences when I pray than when I don’t!”

What should you ask God? Ask Him to give you the grace to implement the classic spiritual disciplines in our life. Ask Him to motivate and guide you to the activities, experiences, and relationships that have been used by God down through the centuries to change believers to actually become more like Jesus. Ask Him to

show you where you need to grow. Often, a spouse, a child, or an associate will be more than happy to let you know what your growth areas are!

How do you begin? Begin with prayer - asking God for specific things that you want to see changed in your life! Be specific. How would you like to see God change you this coming year? Write the things down that come to your mind and then add them to a prayer list that you will keep handy over the next few months.

2. Develop a plan for growth.

Get alone with God and ask Him to help you develop a plan. Listen to Him! You may want to answer the following questions. Don't forget to write down what He says.

i) 12 questions to help you develop a plan:

- (1) In what area of your life do you need to grow to be more like Jesus?
- (2) Which fruit of the Spirit need most development in your life?
- (3) What will you read in scripture this year?
- (4) What sections of scripture will you memorize?
- (5) How will you grow in your prayer life this year?
- (6) What music will you listen to?
- (7) What books will you read and/or reread?
- (8) With whom do you need to build a relationship/friendship with this year?
- (9) What CD's do you need to listen to?
- (10) What seminar/conferences do you need to go to?
- (11) What new disciplines do you need to develop? (For example; praying with your spouse or having devotions with your kids).
- (12) Who will hold you accountable?

3. File quickly what you learn.

Every good piece of information a person finds needs to be processed and filed. Each time you reduce a book, a tape, or an article down to its one most relevant sentence or paragraph, you have processed through all the information, digested it, summarized it, and learned it. You'll never get that real life application without reflecting on what you are learning and creating a system to retrieve what you've learned to put it into practice and use in the future.

4. Apply quickly what you learn.

Simply knowing a thing will not make it a part of you. To do that, you must apply it. Each time you learn something new, it's good to ask yourself, "Where, when, and how can I use this?" You can do more than simply make a mental connection with the things you learn, so you may want to use the following system developed by John Maxwell.

i) Select one thing each week that you've learned.

ii) Put it on a 3 x 5 card. (Keep it in front of you for a week).

iii) Share it with your spouse or close friend.

iv) Share it with someone else within twenty four hours.

v) Teach it to someone else. (Put it in a lesson).

5. Grow with someone.

I often say, "People don't do what's expected, they do what's inspected." So, find someone to inspect you! When you share what you are learning with others, it increases your insights, builds your relationships, gives you a common vision, and holds you accountable. At CVC, we highly value accountability. Get connected with another growing person or group!

Remember: There is no perfect growth plan. Your plan should be dynamic. It should change as the year develops and God shows you new things to learn and new areas of growth. Many of the most highly gifted leaders jump from new ideas to new plans. Sometimes they're just bored. And sometimes they just can't help themselves. But persevere. A good plan from a persistent person will produce better results than a great plan from an inconsistent person.

Beware the barrenness of busy-ness. We are witnessing the acceleration of just about everything in life. But faster internet connections do not make us grow to be like Jesus faster. The growth of our souls takes time. If you want to make sure that do not

experience a barrenness in your life, then take pains with the growth of your own soul. Start making your plan today! Personal growth is like investing. It's not your timing. It's your time in. So, get growing now! Develop a plan and stick to it.

Your spiritual growth...

Are you and the members of your group growing spiritually? At CVC, we talk a lot about helping people grow to be passionate followers of Christ. What does that look like? 3 things: loving God, loving one another, loving the world. So, this tool is organized around those 3 essentials.

Why not use the following tool to evaluate your own spiritual health? Simply grade yourself in light of the following statements on a scale of 1-10 (10 being highest). Maybe God will give you some insights into areas of growth to help you develop your own spiritual growth plan.

Loving God

- I attend church services regularly and expectantly, seeking to experience intimacy with God during both the music and the message
- I spend time following an organized Bible reading plan
- I spend time in regular, ongoing, unhurried prayer
- I am giving a tithe to my local church
- I am giving over and above a tithe to support Kingdom causes

Loving one another

- I have become an active and accountable member of a local church
- I am actively involved in a Community Group
- I am building a spiritual friendship with an accountability partner
- I am volunteering in a ministry of the church
- I am bearing the fruit of the Spirit in my personal relationships

Loving the world

- I am building relationships with people who do not yet know Christ
- I serve in local and/or international mission projects
- I regularly invite unchurched friends to church services and events
- I am volunteering in a community organization outside my local church
- I invite people to put their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior

Now tally your score. And use the lowest marks to help you develop some strategies to grow.

- 130-150 - Move over Billy Graham.
- 100-129 - Wow! You're an example to many, but what's your next move?
- 70-99 - It's really time for you to get to the next level. You can do it!
- 40-69 - Christ is coming back and it looks like you're really not ready.
- 0-39 - Are you sure you are saved? Remember: no fruit; no root.

APPENDIX



Doctrine of Salvation

1. God's Initiative in our Salvation.

a. Election

God's choosing individuals before the foundation of the world to be recipients of His saving grace solely because it seemed good in His sight. (John 6:37-40, 44, 65; 15:16,19; Ephesians 1:4-6, 11; Romans 8:28-30).

b. Redemption

God's work to deliver men from sin's dominion and curse through the Savior, Jesus Christ, who perfectly satisfied the demands of the law, establishing His right to release men from sin's captivity, and brought about the release by His substitutionary death on the cross. (Ephesians 1:7-8; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

c. Calling

God's effectually inviting men to repent and receive, by faith, the salvation provided by Christ. (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

d. Regeneration

God's changing the heart of men enabling them to respond to His grace in repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Regeneration is necessary because in the natural state, man is dead in his trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) and because of the nature of the unregenerated heart (Jeremiah 17:9).
2. Regeneration is necessary for salvation (John 3:3).
3. The agent of regeneration is the Word (1 Peter 1:23).
4. The means of regeneration is the Word (1 Peter 1:23).
5. The proof of regeneration is a new life (1 John 2:29; 1 Corinthians 5:17).

2. Our Response to God's Initiative.

a. Repentance

A saving grace by which a sinner, out of a true grief and hatred of his sin and an understanding of the mercy of God in Christ, turns from the sin and turns to God with a purpose to live a life of obedience. (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:37-38; Acts 3:19).

b. Faith in Christ

A saving grace by which one receives and rests on Jesus Christ alone for salvation. (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9).

c. Commitment to Christ as Lord

A saving grace which accompanies repentance and faith enabling one to crown Jesus as Master, Ruler, King and Authority over his life. (Acts 16:31, Acts 20:20,21; Acts 2:36; Romans 10:9).

3. Our Benefits Resulting from God's Grace.

a. Justification – Our Salvation from the Penalty of Sin

An act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, because of the righteousness of Christ given to us. This being received only by faith. (Romans 3:24-25; 4:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Galatians 2:16).

b. Sanctification – Our Salvation from the Power of Sin

A work of God's grace by which we are renewed in our inner being according to the image of God so that we are enabled to more and more die unto sin and live unto righteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 4:23-24; Romans 6:4,6).

c. Glorification – Our Salvation from the Presence of Sin

A work of God's grace by which believers at the end of their earthly lives are brought into the very presence of the Lord and are perfectly conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 John 3:2; Philippians 1:21).

CVC's Position Concerning Baptism

Before stating the position of our church concerning baptism, we would like to state that the ultimate goal of our ministry is to express love to God and love to all His people. That is why we have chosen "Love God, Love One Another, Love the World" as our theme. We are mindful of Jesus' words in John 13:34, 35,

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We also remember Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 where He asks the Father to grant unity among His followers so that the world might believe. It seems clear to us that the aim of all Christians should be to promote love and unity between all who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We seek to express our position concerning baptism, therefore, with the hope that our love for others will be seen and with the desire to promote understanding among believers rather than to create division.

We feel that our unity as believers should be based on absolute truth as revealed in the Bible, not on fallible reason, convenience, or tradition. God has spoken through His Word. It is final and absolute because He is final and absolute. The following paragraphs express in outline form what we believe the Bible teaches concerning baptism.

The meaning of the word:

Before one can adequately understand the Biblical teaching of baptism, he must understand the meaning of the word. It is unfortunate that the word was transliterated from the Greek into the English rather than translated. Without question the Greek word, baptizo, means to immerse, dip, or plunge. This can be seen in every major Greek lexicon. It is also significant that many who have practiced sprinkling admit that baptizo signifies to immerse. The early church, which certainly knew the meaning of the word, practiced immersion. We believe, therefore, that the definition of the word demands that water baptism by immersion be recognized as the proper mode.

The Symbolism:

That immersion is the proper mode of baptism can also be seen because of the symbolism involved. Water is used by all who baptize because it pictures cleansing from sin and moral purification (Acts 2:38, 22:16). Only immersion, however, symbolizes the basis for our cleansing and purification. When one goes under the water and is raised up, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are clearly pictured along with the fact that the believer has died to sin and been raised to a new life (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-5). Water baptism by immersion is a beautiful worship experience reminding the believer that his sins have been cleansed because of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Savior and encouraging him to daily die to self and live the new life.

The New Testament circumstances:

The circumstances surrounding baptism in the New Testament also indicate that immersion is the proper mode. John 3:23 tells us that John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon because there was "much water there." Now it should be clear that the "much water" would not be necessary if sprinkling was the common practice. Mark 1:10 indicates that after John baptized Jesus, our Lord "came up out of the water." It seems reasonable to think that the practice of immersion, not sprinkling, necessitated our Lord's going down into the water. This can also be seen in Acts 8:38-39 where Philip and the eunuch "both went down into the water." After the eunuch was baptized, they "came up out of the water." There certainly seems to be little reason for Philip and the eunuch to enter the water if sprinkling was an acceptable practice in the early church. Baptism by immersion is clearly implied when one considers New Testament data.

Believer's baptism:

Water baptism by immersion is only one aspect of our belief system concerning this important issue. We also believe that the New Testament teaches that only believers are to be baptized. This, of course, precludes infant baptism (sometimes called "christening"). The New Testament teaches the following facts. One must be a disciple prior to baptism (Matthew 28:18-20). Faith comes before baptism (Mark 16:15-16). One must believe prior to his baptism (Acts 16:31ff.; 8:12; 18:8). One must confess Christ before baptism (Acts 8:38-39). Repentance precedes baptism (Acts 2:38). Receiving the Word is before baptism (Acts 2:41). One must receive the Holy Spirit before he is baptized (Acts 10:47). Clearly, no infant can experience these works of grace (like repentance and faith) which should precede baptism. Therefore, the New Testament does not teach infant baptism. Only believers who have experienced regeneration should be baptized.

Not necessary for salvation:

While we consider baptism as important, we do not feel that it is necessary for salvation. In 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, the apostle Paul made this statement: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." He also wrote that while in Corinth he only baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanus. It seems clear that Paul himself would have baptized more people had it been necessary for their salvation. Many passages in the New Testament clearly state that our salvation is not dependent on any deed that we perform (like baptism) but comes only by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Galatians 2:16-21). Baptism is the believer's step of obedience and is an outward sign of an inward reality that has taken place in his life. Baptism does not help to save; it shows that one has already been saved.

Reasons to be baptized:

Why, then, should a person be baptized by immersion as a believer if it does not save? One, it is an act of obedience because Christ has commanded us to declare our faith in Him by being baptized (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:12, 10:48). Two, it shows the disciple that he belongs to Christ and reminds him of what the Savior has done for him when He died and rose from the grave. Three, it

demonstrates to believers that God has cleansed them from their sins through Jesus Christ (Acts 22:16; Colossians 2:11-14). Four, it teaches the believer that he has died to sin and has been raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Five, it demonstrates that a believer who dies will one day be raised from his grave at the coming of the Lord. Six, it is an act after which the believer should join himself to a particular church of Jesus Christ enabling him to faithfully walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord (Acts 2:41-42; 5:13-14; 9:26; I Peter 2:5; Luke 1:6). As we are spiritually baptized into the body of Christ (the Church), so we are outwardly declaring through water baptism that we are joined to that Body (the Church) and are uniting ourselves with the visible expression of it (the local Church). See 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Baptism is an obedience issue:

By now, it should be evident that we think that New Testament baptism is the immersion of believers only in water. Nothing else ought to be substituted. Why do we feel so strongly about this issue? We desire to be as strictly obedient to the Word of God as possible. Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments (John 14:15) " If we were to accept other baptismal practices while believing that the Bible teaches believer's baptism by immersion, we would violate our own consciences and would not be expressing love to our Lord through our obedience.

We realize that many sincere Christians who love God and experience His blessing do not view this issue as we do. We want to cooperate with these brothers and sisters in Christ and trust that they will feel genuine love from us. This has been written to encourage some to embrace our view concerning baptism and to promote understanding among those who reject our view. We certainly do not want to be perceived as a ministry seeking to produce division in the Kingdom of God. We simply want to be known as a ministry striving to be as obedient to the Word of God as possible while, at the same time, seeking to love others who may differ.

What about being Baptized twice?

Our church recommends that you be baptized again if you have not been baptized by immersion since you became a believer. It does not devalue a prior experience but simply reflects your desire to be baptized in the same way Jesus was baptized. If you were baptized by immersion in another church since you received Christ, it is not necessary for you to be baptized again.

Can my Family be Baptized together?

Yes! If each family member fully understands the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her trust in Christ for salvation, we encourage families to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment.

Will I have to say anything?

We ask each person being baptized to share briefly how Christ has changed their life. In short, tell your own story in such a way that anyone in the congregation will be drawn to have a life-changing experience with Christ.

That 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. Romans 10:9

When are we to be Baptized?

As soon as you have believed! You shouldn’t delay.

“Those who accepted his message were baptized...that day!” Acts 2:41

Who do I contact to sign up for Baptism?

Indicate your desire to be baptized on the Care Card attached to the weekend worship guide or give us a call at the church office (440-746-0404). We will contact you prior to the next baptismal service.

CVC'S Position Concerning the Lord's Supper

"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19

1. What is it?

The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ on the night before His crucifixion as a symbolic representation of the believer's participation in the benefits of His death, (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-23). Jesus observed the Passover, and was crucified at the time of the Passover, (Matthew 26:2, John 18:28). He is called "Our Passover", 1 Corinthians 5:7). After His crucifixion, The Lord's Supper clearly took place on the Passover, The Lord's Supper was instituted BY Jesus, FOR His church, UNTIL He comes, IN ORDER THAT we might be properly reminded of His death and return. (1 Corinthians 11:26).

2. Who Partakes of the Supper?

One, it is for born-again believers only, (John 3:3, Acts 2:41-42). We invite all to participate with us in the observance of the Lord's Supper who have experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ. We do not believe that saving grace comes to an individual through the Supper, but that participation in the Supper is a sign that one has already received saving grace. Saving grace is experienced when a person recognizes that his sin has made a separation between him and God and that he is deserving of God's wrath and judgment, (Romans 6:23; Exodus 34:7). We also must recognize that God expressed His love for sinners by sending Christ to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, (John 3:16; 1 Peter 2:24). Our responsibility is then to repent of sin and trust Christ alone for salvation and crown Him as Lord of our lives, (Luke 13:3, Acts 16:31). We can then begin to see changes in our lives in the areas of attitudes and actions (1 Corinthians 5:17). We invite all who have repented of sin, trusted Christ as Lord as Savior and experienced a changed life to observe the Supper. Two, it is for Christians who examine themselves, confessing all known sin so as not to partake of the supper in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27,28).

3. What does it mean today?

The ordinance is primarily summed up in command of Christ, "this do in remembrance of Me." (Luke 22:19). It is an act of symbolic obedience whereby members of the Church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and anticipate His Second Coming. Jesus not only died, He was raised from the dead to come again, and the Lord's Supper points to both of these glorious events. The Supper is to be received with great reverence, gratitude, devotion, and worship.

CVC & Spiritual Gifts

Perhaps it is prudent at this point to make a statement about the public expression of the gifts of miracles, tongues, interpretation, and healing. While we do not believe, as some Christians do, that these gifts have ceased for today's church, we are not a church where the expression of these gifts is emphasized. Some people at CVC have experienced this gift of tongues and use the gift in their personal devotions. And that's OK.

But we know that God has raised up this church to reach new people for Christ through culturally relevant and creative communication of Bible truth. We have been and are being effective in sharing Jesus with irreligious people. So, we have to stay sensitive to the fact that the public expression of gifts like tongues and interpretation often turn off the unchurched who show up.

1 Corinthians 14:23 makes the point: *"If the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?"*

At CVC, God has called us to create an environment in worship that insures that unsaved people will not focus on our methods of worship, be turned off, and subsequently lose sight of the Savior Himself.

Regarding tongues, Billy Graham gives sound Biblical advice in his book on the Holy Spirit. "Seek not; forbid not." This comes from two main passages.

"Forbid not." 1 Corinthians 14:39 says, *"Do not forbid to speak in tongues."* The churches who teach that the gifts of miracles, tongues, interpretation, and healing are either psychological hoaxes or Satanic counterfeits may actually be violating this command. "Forbid not". But that's just half of the equation.

"Seek not." Churches that teach that this baptism of the Holy Spirit always results in speaking in tongues are just wrong. 1 Corinthians 12:29-31 asks a series of questions:

All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have the gift of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

It is wrong for someone who has not been given the gift of tongues to feel that he is somehow a "second rate" Christian or to earnestly covet this gift if God has not seen fit to give it to him. It's also wrong for someone who has this gift to try to compel others to have it or to teach that everyone must experience it. It's not the high point of Christian maturity. Millions of spiritually mature Christians have never spoken in tongues and many who have spoken in tongues are not spiritually mature.

May we at CVC never permit controversy concerning the gifts of the Spirit to bring division to this body of Christ!

What the Bible teaches about Divorce & Remarriage

The subject of divorce and remarriage is one that often causes people to react emotionally. Some are confused while others are ready to stand up and fight to defend their positions and views. It can indeed become an emotional subject. Actually, it is a confusing subject because there are a variety of conclusions people have come to and a variety of situations people find themselves in while trying to apply the Word of God to these different situations.

At the same time, there can be disagreement and different opinions over this issue. We cannot wish it away or pretend that it doesn't sometimes occur. We are faced with a need to take a stand and, in some way to regulate it. In fact, we believe God was faced with the same dilemma when he instructed Moses to allow the Israelites to divorce under certain circumstances (Matthew 19:3-9 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4). God was faced with the reality of man's sin in relation to marriage.

God's original plan was one man and one woman for life. Two individuals were to become one flesh. They were to love, cherish, submit, and be committed to each other until one of them died. However, because of man's sinful nature, God recognized the reality of divorce (Leviticus 21:7, 14 and Jeremiah 3:8) and regulated when it could and could not occur. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) because it is contrary to His original plan and is a result of man's sinfulness. We too, therefore, should hate divorce. Divorce is not something we should aspire to or desire. God never requires it; He allows it only under certain circumstances. When are divorce and remarriage allowed by God and when are they wrong and not allowed? This is the important question each of us must wrestle with and come to biblical conclusions and convictions. Many respected Bible believing people have come to different and opposite conclusions while studying the same verse! Who is right, and who is wrong?

We at Cuyahoga Valley Church believe God allows divorce and remarriage to occur in two specific situations. If a particular situation does not fall into either of these categories, then God does not allow it and the elders and the church cannot support or permit it either.

Situation # 1 – Adultery

The first situation is found in Matthew 19:3-12. Verse 9 is commonly called the exception clause.

“And I say to you. Whoever divorces his wife, except it be for immorality, and marries another woman, commits adultery and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” Matthew 19:9

There are three basic conclusions others have come to concerning the meaning of this verse.

1. The first view is that since the book of Matthew was written primarily to the Jews, the exception clause only applies to them.

2. The second view is that the word immorality should be understood from a Jewish perspective and that the word immorality applied to the betrothal or engagement period as in the case when Joseph was planning to divorce Mary his espoused wife (Matthew 1:18-20).
3. The third view is that the Greek word immorality (*porneia*) refers to sexual immorality in general including but not limited to incest, sodomy, harlotry, perversion, and sexual intercourse.

We believe the third view is correct. As we have studied the word immorality (*porneia*) there is only one conclusion that we can come to: this word refers to unlawful sexual behavior in general. God allows divorce and remarriage in this situation.

Before we go any further we say this: Just because unfaithfulness does occur in a marriage does not mean that the faithful spouse must seek divorce. Hopefully they would be willing to forgive the unfaithful one and seek to restore the marriage. The unfaithful spouse must repent of his/her sin and recommit themselves to God and their marriage. The faithful spouse should also examine their own life to see what changes need to be made in their life as well. Divorce should never be desired or preferred. It should be a last resort after the unfaithful spouse has had time to demonstrate fruit of repentance. If the unfaithful spouse continues in his/her sinful lifestyle and refuses by their actions to be faithful to that spouse, then and only then should the faithful spouse consider seeking divorce.

Situation # 2 – Abandonment

The other situation in which we believe God allows divorce is found in I Corinthians 7:12-16. The situation here is concerning mixed marriages in which a Christian is married to an unbeliever. More than likely, this is a situation in which both were unsaved at the time of the marriage and then one became a Christian or in which the couple is unequally yoked (one a Christian and one not a Christian).

Paul handles this situation differently than he does the one in verses 10 and 11 in which both are Christians. If both spouses are Christians he says they should not leave their spouse. However, if they do leave then he says they have only two choices or alternatives: remain unmarried for the rest of their lives or else be reconciled to their spouse.

Now, back to the situation in which one is a Christian and one is not. What should the Christian do if the unsaved spouse decides to leave and end the marriage? While they should have a desire to reconcile and to restore their marriage, they should not beg their unbelieving spouse to stay, contest the divorce, or compromise their convictions to win them back. The Scripture does not teach or imply this.

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.” 1 Corinthians 7:15

They should permit them leave. God says He has called them to peace. The frustrations of being unequally yoked have ended in this case. God has called them to peace and they are no longer under bondage.

The word “bondage” comes from the root Greek word *deo* that means to bind or be in bonds. *Doulos*, the noun form of this word, is translated slave or servant. The form used here is *doulao*, which means to be held subject to or to enslave. In Romans 7:2 this same word is used pertaining to the death of a spouse.

“For the woman who has an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.” Romans 7:2

Under normal circumstances, a wife is bound (the same word is used in 1 Corinthians 7:15) to her husband until he dies. Then she is loosed (no longer bound) to him and she is free to marry another. In other words, in 1 Corinthians 7:15 the word “bondage” means that the Christian who is married to an unsaved spouse who leaves and desires to end the marriage is no longer bound to the unsaved spouse who leaves. They have been loosed and they are free to marry another, but only in the Lord. The bond of marriage has been broken.

Again, this should not be desired or encouraged. The unsaved may be under conviction because of their exposure to the Gospel through the godly behavior and the loving witness of their Christian spouse. No matter how difficult things may become, the Christian spouse should never openly or secretly hope nor encourage their unsaved spouse to leave.

Our conviction is if divorce occurs for either or both the reasons just mentioned (and it can be substantiated and verified), then God allows remarriage. We believe God’s Word is clear. When divorce is allowed, remarriage is allowed. When divorce is not allowed, remarriage is not allowed.

Cuyahoga Valley Church will be faithful to the Scriptures. When God’s Word does not permit divorce, then we will not permit it. When God’s Word does permit it then we will lovingly permit those involved to put their lives back together and go on living lives as passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

How to Grow Spiritually

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1, 2

The last thing we want to do as a church is to load people up with a bunch of religious activity that will do nothing but add to the frustration and guilt in our lives. What we want to do is to encourage people to be involved in the classic disciplines - the activities, experiences, and relationships - that have been used by God down through the centuries to change believers to actually become more like Jesus. What we want to see is transformation. Look at the word “transformed” in the preceding verses. In the original it’s *metamorphoo*. We learned the word in grade school. Metamorphosis. A caterpillar “morphs” into a butterfly.

That’s what God intends for us. We are to change, to morph, to **grow!** Staying the same isn’t an option. Don’t you want your life to be different at the end of this year than it is today? An angry mom becomes more patient. A lazy student becomes more disciplined. A sour dad becomes more joyful. An impatient single person becomes more at peace.

a) How our union with Christ helps us grow

Consider Romans 6:4-7: *“We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”*

We must understand who we are because of our union with Christ and then live in faith in light of our union with Him. We fail to grow and fall into sin when we forget what has happened to us in our union with Christ. Our problem is that we don't understand the reality of what happened to us when we trusted Christ. The rule, the reign, the control of sin was broken at the cross. Whether we know it or feel it, it's still true. We must not forget it.

We value far too lightly what has really happened to us. We were in the domain of darkness and now we are in the light. It is an utter transformation. We must have this knowledge of the facts, meditate on these truths, and then step out in faith to live out what we really are in Christ.

Think about the men and women who pay \$2,000 to role play at a fantasy baseball camp. Watch them for a while and you will notice that they are imposters. They run slow, throw weakly, and struggle to hit the ball out of the infield. They are pretending to be major league players. But a couple of weeks later, the real pro players come to camp. Watch them for a while and you will see that they are the “real deal.” They run fast, throw hard, and hit the ball 400 feet. The difference? They are “doing what they are.”

Well, God, in His grace through our union with Christ, has made us “major leaguers.” Whether we realize it or not, we are the “real deal.” We need to remember who we are and start to “do what we are.”

Think about what God says is true about our identity in Christ:

i) 10 truths about us after becoming “new” in Christ.

Hebrews 10:15-17 - Your sins were forgiven, never to be held against you.

Romans 8:11 - The Holy Spirit lives in you.

John 3:1-8 - You have been born again.

1 John 5:11, 12 - You were given eternal life.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - You were made into a new creation.

2 Corinthians 5:18 - You were reconciled to God.

Romans 5:1 - You are no longer at war with God.

Colossians 1:13, 14 - You are redeemed from the enemy’s authority.

Colossians 1: 13, 14 - You were brought into the kingdom of God.

*What GOD says about the new you is what you must choose to believe about yourself. It's also what we must choose to live. **This is called “living by faith.”***

- **THE NEW YOU!**

“New life brings new identity. Being a Christian is not just a matter of getting something; it's a matter of being someone... Being born again transformed you into someone who didn't exist before. What you receive as a Christian isn't the point; it's who you are.” (Neil Anderson, Victory Over The Darkness, p. 43)

- **Why “trying hard” to grow won’t work.**

While most of us have good intentions to actually be the kind of person who lives out the grow disciplines, we find ourselves unable to turn our intentions into actions. Many Christians try really hard to practice the disciplines of the Christian life. But trying hard will cause us to end up in two God-dishonoring places.

- 1) Those who are “successful” in living disciplined lives through self-effort will often become like the Pharisees in the Bible - looking “holy” on the outside, but having hearts that are filled with spiritual pride. The disciplines can become duty and drudgery.
- 2) Those who are “unsuccessful” in doing the growth disciplines will often become discouraged and want to either give up the faith or just go through the motions, settling for a sub-par spirituality.
- 3) Either way, we don’t end up becoming more like Jesus. So, we must approach the growth disciplines in a way that treats them not as more “laws” to obey, but as a means to grace.

- **How to view the grow disciplines.**

Growth for the Christian is like boarding a boat to go from point A (where we’re not very much like Christ) to point B (where we’re conformed to the image of Jesus). We can take one of three approaches.

Growth could be like being on a rowboat. You leave the dock with high hopes and lots of energy. You make some good progress for a while. But before too long, you run out of energy. And you start to drift - a long way from point B.

Or growth could be like being on a speedboat. (That’s for the type A’s among us!) You fill the gas tank and leave the dock with the pedal to the metal. You’re moving pretty fast. But it’s a lot further from point A to point B than you thought. You get further than the guy in the rowboat, but you end up in the same predicament - out of gas, drifting.

God’s kind of growth is like being on a sailboat. Oh, you are responsible to hoist the sails. But you’re not depending on your own energy to make progress. Instead, you catch the wind. God moves you. Sometimes, the wind doesn’t blow as hard as you’d like. But when you keep the sails up and the rudder right, eventually, you’ll come to point B.

Practicing the grow disciplines is hoisting the sails. That's our part. Philippians 2:12, 13 reminds us of our responsibility while demonstrating that it is God who really produces our growth: "*Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*"

Nobody on earth can direct the wind. It acts with complete independence. No one can make God blow His winds of growth across our lives. It's His sovereign decision. That's why we must cry out to God for His mercy and grace, "Please, God, blow Your winds of growth across my life. In faith, I am hoisting the sails. Now, please, in Your time and in Your way, move me." This is a great lesson for people who have been brought up to believe that they can change themselves by self-effort, by keeping the rules of religion.

- **Grow is a "faith" issue.**

Every true Christian has realized that we must trust Jesus, not our own efforts, for our salvation. We are trusting Christ alone to save us *from the penalty of sin when we die*. But too many believers fail to trust Christ alone to save us *from the power of sin while we live*. We try to live the Christian life in our own effort. We try hard to be more loving, more joyful, more at peace, and more obedient. But we fail. The reason is because God never designed us to change ourselves from the "outside in." He longs for us to live in a dependency on Him so *He* can change us from the "inside out."

We are not only justified by faith, we are also sanctified by faith. Colossians 2:6 says, "*As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.*" We received Christ by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Now, we must continue to grow in our Christian life by grace through faith. It's not self-effort. It's not trying really hard. It's not "turning over a new leaf."

A key verse for us to remember is John 15:5. Jesus said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*" We grow not by "trying" but by abiding, remaining in contact with the One who causes our growth. We must trust Him to fulfill Philippians 1:6 for us, "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

While "formula" prayers can never be a substitute for prayers from the heart, sometimes a written prayer is helpful to teach us truths. The following is an example of the kind of prayer that people who want to grow could offer to the Lord:

*Dear Lord Jesus,
I am tired of my lack of growth. I do not have it in me, that is, in my flesh, to grow. I am helpless. Without You, I wouldn't even want to*

grow. I wouldn't even desire to use my gifts, be in relationships, reach out to others, or worship You.

I desire something better. I believe that You will set me free from the things that keep me from real growth. Right now, I surrender myself to You. I'm Yours today. I'm trusting You to live through me so I will go where You want me to go, do what You want me to do, be what You want me to be, say what You want me to say, serve where You want me to serve, give what You want me to give, and act how You want me to act.

Jesus, You have given to me a new heart - a heart that wants to grow. I have a new identity because of my union with Jesus. I am trusting You to not only save me when I die but also to save me while I live. You are my life. I am complete in Christ. I have everything I need for life and godliness. You will give me victory and growth by Your Spirit's power. I'm counting on You, not me for my victory. I believe that you will fulfill all your promises and will work in me.

So here I go, Lord, to live this day moment by moment in Jesus' name, Amen.

- **When growth becomes “dutiful drudgery.”**

Remember how Romans 12:1 begins? *“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.”*

God is merciful. It's incredible. So, we “hoist the sails” (we practice the growth disciplines) out of gratitude for His past mercies and in anticipation of His future mercies. This is what keeps our “hoisting the sails” a delight rather than a duty. It's why we can live the Christian life with joy.

Suppose you give to your spouse some flowers. “Why do you do this?” he/she asks. “It's my duty,” you say. Does that honor him/her? Is that the best motivation? No. Let's try again.

You give him/her the flowers. “Why do you do this?” he/she asks. “It's my delight,” you say. “You've been so good to me over the years and I just know you will be good to me in the future. You are such a loving person.” Now he/she's honored. You've been motivated out of gratitude for the many things he/she has done for you over the years. The bouquet we give to God is a life filled with the growth disciplines. And we do it because of a delight in His mercies. This keeps our service from being “dutiful drudgery” and turns it into something that is our pleasure, our delight. God is honored with that kind of service. As John Piper says, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

God's mercies precede our changing. His winds power our growth. Growth - our transformation, our morphing, our becoming like Christ,

our sanctification - begins and continues in God. We get the joy of experiencing personal growth and He gets the glory. Maybe that's why one of the greatest portions of God's Word that deals with growth (Romans 12:1, 2) is preceded by these words in Romans 11:36: "*For from Him and to Him and through Him are all things. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.*"

In Closing

So, what does God want me to do with all this? I know I need to grow. How does the vision of the church help me grow? Maybe this little quote will help:

“You will never grow to be all you can be until you help others grow to be all they can be.”

Do you want to be a growing person? Help others grow. The bottom line? We believe that God may just want you to help. Help us help people grow to be passionate followers of Christ. Join the many others at CVC who are on the front lines as we do battle for the Lord.

We don't have a prayer of reaching our goals and objectives without you. This isn't about reaching big numbers and making a name for ourselves. We have a tremendous sense of humility and inadequacy as we seek to reach our goals. The only way we are going to make it is if people say, “OK. That's it. Count me in. I'm in the race. I will do the mundane stuff with the rest of my life, but count me in. I want to be part of something bigger than myself. I want to do something that will last for all eternity.”

It's no accident that you are reading this material today. In the Old Testament book of Esther, a woman of God was challenged this way, “Who knows but that you were born for just a time as this?” The whole course of your life has led to this point. God knew that you would be interested enough in the things of God that you'd be reading this CVC members' manual - excited, we hope, about where this church is going. God has appointed you for such a time as this. We need you. God needs you to accomplish His work of redemption through the ministry of this church.

We don't want to end this section with a big band or with balloons coming down from the ceiling. No. We just want to ask you to help. Not just today, or tomorrow, but for the days, weeks, months, even years ahead - as long as God leaves you at CVC.

- **Help with your heart.**

Get your heart connected to God so that when we worship and praise Him together it's a worship and praise that makes the evil one run. Get your heart connected with some other loving hearts in a little community of faith - in a small group. We don't want to lose the sense of doing things together. We are going to be more focused and intentional and more organized, but not at the expense of doing things with our hearts knit together. Help with your heart.

- **Help with your head.**

Think with me now. Who is going to turn this mess of a world around? Government? Education? Science? Technology? Business? No. The hope of the world is Jesus and the power of

His gospel expressed through a church. Think! “I can be a part of the solution for the problems in this world. I will not waste this opportunity. I want to be a significant part of world redemption.” Take some time and consider what really matters. Help with your head.

- **Help with your hands.**

Hands that are folded in prayer. Hands that are reaching out to lost people in your neighborhood, at the office, at school, with your friends. Hands that are serving effectively because you have found your spiritual gift and are using it. Help with your hands.

- **Help with your feet.**

Say to yourself, “Unless providentially hindered, I will try my best not to miss a Sunday worship time. I will try not to be absent from my place of service. I will try to meet with my small group - with my accountability partner - every time.” Sometimes victory and growth comes when we just get in the car and go. Help with your feet.

- **Help with your checkbook.**

Make the commitment not to rob God or this church. Rearrange your finances so you are moving toward giving the full tithe. If you are already there, ask God to help you give more. Some of you might be able to earn a little extra and throw it into the pot. Help with your checkbook.

- **Help with your daily planner.**

This is simple. It’s just seeking first the kingdom of God. Don’t get to the end of your life saying, “I did what was OK. I just didn’t do the best part. I didn’t manage my time well. I missed the opportunity to play the part God had for me.” Help with your schedule.

If you help this way - with your heart, your head, your hands, your feet, your checkbook, your planner - with that kind of help we will meet our goals and objectives and you will be glad and God will be honored.

Every now and then people will hear stories about our start-up days at the Lawrence Road School on Wallings Road. Sometimes people who have plugged in more recently here can feel like they are on the outside looking in because they weren’t part of those early exciting days at CVC.

Here’s our take on that. You’re on the ground floor right now! Sure, some of us have memories of the victories and set backs during the last two decades. Those memories are very precious to us.

But all of us - even if it's only one of your first times to be at CVC - can share in laying yet another row of bricks on the foundation of this church. You can be founders as the gun goes off for the years ahead. This opportunity at CVC is the opportunity of a lifetime for each one of us. This next period of history in the life of this church is going to be thrilling, energizing, and awesome. We are going to see God do some things that will blow our minds. He's promised to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask of think. He has said, "I will build My church." You don't want to miss it!

If you commit to help us help people grow to be passionate followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that one day, when you're taking a stroll around heaven with our Lord Jesus, you'll be able to think back to this time in your life and say, "Lord, that time at CVC, right at the dawning of a new millennium, that was a great run, wasn't it?"

That's why without hesitation, we're glad to ask you to help.

25 Books for Spiritual Growth

Recommended by Rick Duncan, Pastor, Cuyahoga Valley Church

Theology

1. Knowing God by J.I. Packer
2. The Holiness of God by R.C. Sproul
3. The Pleasures of God by John Piper
4. Desiring God by John Piper
5. Know Why You Believe by Paul Little
6. Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem

Devotional

1. Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan
2. The Pursuit of God by A.W. Tozer
3. The Calvary Road by Roy Hession
4. Spiritual Depression by Martyn Lloyd-Jones
5. Morning and Evening by Charles Spurgeon

Discipleship

1. Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald Whitney
2. The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert E. Coleman
3. The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions by Arthur Bennett
4. Returning to Holiness by Greg Frizzell

Leadership

1. The Making of a Leader by Robert Clinton
2. Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders
3. The Christian Ministry by Charles Bridges
4. Halftime by Bob Buford

Biography

1. George Muller of Bristol by Arthur T. Pierson
2. Shadow of the Almighty by Elizabeth Elliot
3. Jonathan Edwards by Ian Murray

Skills for ministry

1. Bold Love by Dan Allender
2. 30 Days to Confident Leadership by Bob Biehl
3. 7 Practices of Effective Ministry by Andy Stanley

MEMBER CONFIRMATION FORM

Please print all information below.

Last name _____ First name _____ MI _____

Salutation _____ Nickname _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: Home: _____ Work: _____ Cell: _____

Fax: _____ Email: _____

Sex: ___ F ___ M Birthday (Please include month/day/year): _____

Marital Status: ___ Single ___ Married ___ Divorced ___ Widowed

Marriage date: _____ Spouse name, if married _____ Is spouse a member? ___ Yes ___ No

List children's names and year of birth:

Occupation: _____ Hobbies/Interests: _____

Did you grow up in this area? ___ Yes ___ No If not, originally from? _____

I attend: ___ CVC Services ___ 707 Services Month/year I started attending: ____/____/____

I have attended (or listened to the DVD) of both Tell Me More classes and both Membership classes?

___ yes ___ no

I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior before coming to CVC/707: ___ Yes ___ No ___ Not Sure

I have been baptized by immersion since becoming a Christian ___ Yes ___ No Date: _____

If you said no, who would you like to have baptize you?

John Chapek ___ Rick Duncan ___ Ryan Edlind ___ Rick Eimers ___ Dan Fries ___ Brian Howell ___ Gregg Jacobsen ___

Gary Nave ___ Tom Petek ___ Dale Piscura ___ Andy Sikora ___ Dean Siley ___ No pref. ___ Other

w/Pastor _____

Note: Baptism by immersion after receiving Christ is required to become a member. We will contact you and remind you prior to the next baptismal service.

Before CVC, I was active in another church: ___ Yes ___ No Denomination _____

Are you involved in a Community Group? Yes _____ give name of group _____ No _____

I now serve in the following ministry area(s): 1. _____ 2. _____

I have interest in serving in the following ministry: _____

What did you discover were your top three gifts from the Spiritual Gift Survey you filled out in the Membership class?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Would you like to receive contribution envelopes? ___ Yes ___ No

Confirmer to complete at time of interview:

Service to be presented at: Saturday: ___ 5:30pm Sunday: ___ 8:15am ___ 9:30am ___ 11:30pm ___ 7:07pm

Date of Service: ____/____/____

MY STORY

Use this page to briefly convey the story of how Jesus Christ became your Forgiver/Savior and Leader/Lord.

You should include 3 basic elements.

1. A bit about your life before knowing Jesus. For example, you might want to describe how you tried to meet some deep inner need in your life in a God-dishonoring kind of way.
2. How Jesus came into your life. Write down what led up to your trusting Christ and how it all happened. We love to hear how God works in a person's life!
3. How your life has been different since knowing Jesus personally. You might want to show how Jesus is now meeting that deep inner need in your life.

COPY

THE CVC MEMBER'S COMMITMENT

We feel that it is important to ask our members to make a commitment that supports our overall vision. And to show that commitment, we ask our members to sign a statement that we will keep in the office on file.

The CVC Vision: Helping people grow to be passionate followers of Christ.

My Commitment...

I commit myself to...

❖ Love God.

I will seek to love God through passionate involvement in public worship through passionate involvement in, as well as private worship through a daily quiet time and giving.

❖ Love One Another.

I will seek to live in Community and to serve in ministry.

❖ Love the World.

I will seek to invest in others and invite others to Christ through my involvement in local, regional, national, and global outreach.

As members of CVC we acknowledge the responsibility of each member to lovingly place themselves under the authority of sacred Scripture. The leadership of CVC is committed to serve members by caring for them, teaching and counseling them from the Scriptures, and remembering them in prayer. In addition, members also agree to lovingly submit themselves to the authority of the Elders at CVC in matters of faith and morals under the authority of sacred Scripture (Hebrews 13:17).

I now desire to be confirmed as a member.

Signature

Date

I, _____, after interviewing the above applicant do hereby confirm him/her as a member of CVC and confer all the rights and responsibilities that come with membership in a local church.

Signature of confirmer

Title

For office use only:

Confirmed: ___ Yes ___ No **Information entered:** ___ Yes ___ No **Confirmer's initials** _____