



WEEKLY

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P O BOX 1207, CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE 37364-1207

“IT’S TIME FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD TO MAKE A STAND”

Lesson 1 ■ For week ending July 4, 2020

On June 15, 2020, Justice Neil M. Gorsuch and Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. joined the Supreme Court’s four liberal judges to rule that the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, which prohibits discrimination “because of sex,” now protects gay and transgender employees from discrimination as well. For the past 56 years, Title VII of the 1964 law has been interpreted by the high court to mean only that women could not be treated worse than men. This is the most significant legal decision on gay rights since the Supreme Court recognized a constitutional right for gay couples to marry 5 years ago this month. While The Church of God Jerusalem Acres does not promote the mistreatment or hatred of anyone, it must make a stand when the government of our country imposes laws that violate the laws of God found in the Bible.

KEY TEXT: *“Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled): neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality” (I Corinthians 6:9, AMPC).*

1. Let’s state for the record: The reason that the church teaches against sin—including the sin of homosexuality—is so that people are not deceived and thus end up eternally lost.

- » Jesus came so that we could have life and have it more abundantly. The goal of the Great Commission, is to introduce Jesus to everyone (Matthew 28:19,20).
- » The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
- » As believers, we know that sin in our lives separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2).

2. Satan is the author of confusion (John 8:44). When mankind chose sin over obedience to God, they opened the door to sin and darkness that has corrupted mankind ever since (Romans 6:16).

- » It is God who defines what is right and what is wrong.
- » God makes it clear in His Word that homosexuality is sin. In Leviticus 18:22, God calls it an abomination. Now, let’s be clear: All sin is an abomination to God. God does not accept sin, nor will He ever accept sin.
- » Because our government chooses to legalize sin, as it did with gay marriage and now with this latest ruling, that does not change the laws of God—nor the penalty that results from breaking His laws (Psalm 9:17).
- » God’s laws are for our protection. They define sin. When we disobey His laws, there are consequences.

3. Homosexuality is, however, different from other sins due to what is called an ARCHETYPE which is defined as a ruling way of thinking and acting, thus controlling individuals through the common, shared mind of mankind.

- » Scripture calls this archetype a “philosophy” (*def. a theory or attitude that guides one’s behavior*). And, unfortunately, statements like, “I was born this way,” has regrettably helped society embrace and even promote this ideology. We believe such an archetype and philosophy have been aided by the powers of darkness.
- » **Colossians 2:8, (AMPC),** *“See to it that no one carries you off as spoil or makes you yourselves captive by his so-called philosophy and intellectualism and vain deceit (idle fancies and plain nonsense), following human tradition (men’s ideas of the material rather than the spiritual world), just crude notions following the rudimentary and elemental teachings of the universe and disregarding [the teachings of] Christ (the Messiah).”*
- » The role of a Christian/believer for all people is to love the person, to hate that which destroys the life of Christ in them, and to assist as the Lord sets them free to become who they are meant to be in Christ.

4. The best Biblical example we have of society that disregarded the laws of God and openly embraced homosexuality, is found in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- » According to Genesis 18:20,21, why was God concerned about Sodom and Gomorrah?
- » Most of us know the story of how Abraham pleaded with God to rescue Lot and his family before He destroyed the city (Genesis 18:22-33).
- » Read Genesis 19:1-11. Notice the depravity that results from indulging the lusts of the flesh (Romans 1:26).
- » Homosexuality and gender confusion are not the plan of God for His creation: They are the plan of Satan to deceive people into spending an eternity with Him in a lake of fire (Romans 1:18-32)!
- » While Satan promises those struggling with homosexuality “freedom” and/or “happiness” if they “come out,” they actually experience enslavement as defined in II Peter 2:18,19. Only Jesus can set you free!

“CONFRONTING RACISM”

Lesson 2 □ For week ending July 11, 2020

What is racism? One definition says this: “Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races.” The Church of God Jerusalem Acres denounces racism in any form. The Word of God is clear: We are to love one another unconditionally and without partiality.

KEY TEXT: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10).

1. Let’s be clear: In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, God created ONE MAN.

- » Read Genesis 1:26,27. God created one man, Adam, and subsequently one woman, Eve, from which we all have descended.
- » Discuss the fact that not only are we all descended from one man, that man was made in the image of God: “So God created man in His own image: in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them.”
- » When we look at each other, we should see the image of God.
- » The truth of the matter is that we are all the same on the inside—one blood (Acts 17:26).

2. The only distinction that God ever made regarding mankind, is between the Jews and Gentiles. This distinction was only necessary because of the introduction of sin into the world (Romans 5:12).

- » And, that distinction was only for the dispensation of the Law in the Old Testament.
- » When Jesus arrived on the scene in Israel some 2,000 years ago, part of what He did at Calvary was to tear down the wall of separation between the Jews the Gentiles (John 13:34,35).
- » Read Ephesians 2:14-22. Discuss the separation that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles for thousands of years. According to verse 15, the two are now one new man.
- » Discuss our united status as you read Galatians 3:26-29.

3. Whenever sin entered the world—through the disobedience of Adam and Eve—the door of darkness, confusion, hatred, envy, bigotry, and every other fruit of the flesh—polluted mankind.

- » Again, let’s be clear: Satan is the author of racism. Why? Because racism involves hatred (I John 2:8-11). That’s why God’s people cannot be associated with any form of racism.
- » Romans 2:11 tells us that God does not show “partiality”. The word *partiality* means *favoritism, respecter of persons*.
- » James addressed these issues in James 2:1-9.

4. God does not care what color your skin is (as our society defines race). He loves you unconditionally, without prejudice, and without partiality.

- » He sent His only-begotten Son to rescue you—because His desire is that every one of His creation be saved and spend eternity with Him (John 3:16; II Peter 3:9).
- » God did not send Jesus to condemn you (John 3:17)—He sent Jesus to rescue you.
- » In the Bible, God refers to different groups of people as “nations.”
- » As Jesus prepared to ascend to Heaven, He gave special instructions to His disciples in Matthew 28:19,20. We call it the “Great Commission.”
- » Please note that Jesus states emphatically that this Gospel—that Jesus came to save the world—was to go to every “nation”—that means to people around the world. This is one of the reasons that The Church of God Jerusalem Acres has always had a robust World Missionary Department. Our job is to share Jesus with everyone—everywhere!
- » Read Isaiah 60:1-7. There is no racism or partiality mentioned. The Church of God Jerusalem Acres denounces racism or discrimination in any form (Galatians 3:28).

“CONFLICT-FREE LIVING – PART 1”

Lesson 3 ■ For week ending July 18, 2020

We were created to live in the love and excitement of harmonious relationships, free from dissension, confusion, and hurt. God wants our lives to be free from division; He wants us to live in peace with each other, yet such a life often eludes most of us. Instead, conflict wreaks havoc in our lives, leaving us wounded and alienated from one another. (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

1. Conflict—and the resulting strife—wreaks havoc in our lives.

- » The word *conflict* is defined as such: fight, battle, war, antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons), mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands.
- » It must be established up front that *conflict* and *strife* are works of the flesh. Read and discuss Galatians 5:19-21. Please note that the last phrase of verse 21, “...*those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*”
- » Discuss the result of conflict in our lives:
 - Ending our marriages
 - Alienating our friends and co-workers
 - Bankrupting our health
 - Embittering our children
 - Splitting our churches
 - Stealing our peace of mind and heart
- » We must always remember that we are not supposed to be fighting against one another (Ephesians 6:12). Satan is our enemy.

2. Jesus gave us peace for our protection.

- » We are to “*hold our peace*” and “*let peace be the umpire*” in every situation (Exodus 14:14; Colossians 3:15).
- » We should “*crave peace and pursue it*” and let it “*rule*” in our lives (Psalm 34:14; Colossians 3:15).
- » According to Matthew 5:9, what does Jesus promise to those that are peacemakers?

3. God’s Word contains some wonderful promises for peacemakers.

- » Read Psalm 37:37.
- » Think of it. If you are a person of peace—if you learn to resist conflict and strife—you will experience happiness.
- » God says that His children will inherit righteousness, peace, and joy (John 16:33).
- » The Kingdom of God consists of these three things, but few who claim Christ as their Savior actually experience these benefits in their everyday lives (Romans 12:18; 15:13).
- » Satan deceives, lies, and beguiles believers through a lack of knowledge or the unwillingness to apply the knowledge we have (Hosea 4:6).

4. God instructed us to put on the full armor of God so that we can defeat the devil in every one of his strategies and deceptions.

- » Read Ephesians 6:10-18.
- » If we want to experience God’s blessings and power, we must resist the devil’s attempts to stir up strife.
- » We must be on guard, because “*the devils roams around like a lion roaring [fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour*” (I Peter 5:8).
- » Read Proverbs 10:12. Love covers a multitude of sins! Read I Peter 4:8.

“CONFLICT-FREE LIVING – PART 2”

Lesson 4 ■ For week ending July 25, 2020

The dictionary defines *strife* as “fighting; heated, often violent conflict; bitter dissension; a struggle between rivals; or contention.” Other descriptive words that describe strife are *quarrel*, *rivalry*, *wrangling*, *debate*, *provocation*, and *factions*. If we fail to recognize and resist strife, it poisons our attitudes and begins to negatively affect all of our relationships—our relationships at school, work, home, and church. What’s worse is that we often have no idea when the problems even started or what to do about them. (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts” (Proverbs 17:14).

1. The Bible has much to say about strife and contention (which are actually the same thing) and points to strife as the source of many other kinds of problems.

- » The Apostle James wrote, “For wherever there is jealousy(*envy*) and contention (*rivalry and selfish ambition*), there will also be confusion (*unrest, disharmony, rebellion*) and all sorts of evil and vile practices” (James 3:16).
- » And we read in Hebrews 12:14-15, “Strive to live in peace with everybody and pursue that consecration and holiness without which no one will [ever] see the Lord. Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look [after one another], to see that no one falls back from and fails to secure God’s grace (His unmerited favor and spiritual blessing), in order that no root of resentment (*rancor, bitterness, or hatred*) shoots forth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it.”

2. Strife leads to resentment, rancor, bitterness, or hatred. Left unconforted, it destroys and devastates.

- » It brings torment to church members and to church leadership, hindering God’s work and contaminating many (James 4:1).
- » If a deadly plague should strike a household, the Department of Health would place the household in quarantine. We need to be as vigilant when it comes to eliminating strife.
- » That’s why it’s so important to learn how to identify the symptoms (fruit) of strife, including:
 - Pride (or defensiveness) • Bitterness • Hatred
 - Judgment and criticism • Deception and lies • Anger
 - Rebellion • Unrest • Fear and negativity
- » Anytime we give into any of these feelings, we open the door to strife and usher in destruction. Strife kills! It kills the anointing, the blessings, the prosperity, the peace, and the joy. Read Galatians 5:15.

3. Strife is not just a problem between people; it’s often a problem within a person.

- » What’s going on inside of you? Is the atmosphere inside peace or tense? Read Psalm 51:6-12.
- » Strife can, and often does, affect our attitude first (Proverbs 20:3).
- » Strife often gains entrance through a minor issue, something that really doesn’t make a difference. For example, a friend makes a passing comment about how she liked our old hairstyle better, and we take offense—we feel we have been trespassed.
- » Instead of talking about it with the friend and making peace, or extending grace, we choose to replay the words over and over in our minds, feeding our anger, and thereby ushering strife into our life. We continue giving in to strife, and before we know it, we seem constantly outraged.
- » The best way to avoid strife is to forgive those that trespass against you quickly. This was the instruction of Jesus found in Matthew 6:9-15 as He taught us how to pray on a daily basis.

“CONFLICT-FREE LIVING – PART 3”

Lesson 5 ■ For week ending August 1, 2020

Have you ever been absolutely sure you were correct about something? Your mind appeared to have a store of facts and details to prove you were right—but you ended up being wrong. What did you do? Did you admit your error, or did you keep pushing and trying to find a way to defend your position? (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention” (Proverbs 15:18).

1. Confronting strife, embracing peace.

- » Joyce Meyer speaking: For years I felt bad about who I was, and in order to feel any confidence at all, I had to be right all the time. So I would argue and go to great extremes to prove it. Someone was always challenging me, and I lived in frustration as I tried to convince everyone that I knew what I was talking about (Philippians 2:3,4).
- » It wasn't until my identity became rooted and grounded in Christ that I began to experience freedom in this area. Now I know my worth and value do not come from appearing right to others. They are found in the fact that Jesus loved me enough to die for me and bring me into personal relationship with Him (II Corinthians 5:17-21).

2. Why did I have to be right? Because my pride was at stake.

- » Pride wants desperately to look good, to look intelligent, to be admired—even to ourselves (Galatians 6:3).
- » So much so that, as Obadiah 3 tells us, “*The pride of your heart has deceived you.*”
- » Pride can deceive us and make us think we are right when we are actually wrong (Proverbs 13:9,10).
- » Pride wants desperately to please the flesh—at any cost (Proverbs 17:19,20).
- » The flesh, if not under the control of the Holy Spirit, does all in its power to have its own way: “Give me what I want, when I want it, the way I want it, and do it now!”
- » This is the cry of all of us, apart from the Spirit of God (Jeremiah 17:9).
- » The Bible says that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh (Matthew 12:34).

3. Pride cannot lead us into victory.

- » God's Word is clear about what happens when we allow pride to rule our lives (Proverbs 16:5).
- » There is no hope of peace without a willingness to humble ourselves.
- » The Word of God teaches that pride leads us to destruction. Read Proverbs 16:18.
- » Pride seeks to tear the other down in order to build itself up. When we have pride in our hearts, our word often become judgmental and divisive, causing all sorts of dissatisfaction and problems in our relationships.
- » Is it any wonder that God resists those who are proud?
- » Read James 4:6, AMP, “*But He gives us more and more grace (power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this evil tendency and all others fully). That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but gives grace [continually] to the lowly (those who are humble enough to receive it).*”

“ARROGANT HEARTS–DIVISIVE WORDS”

Lesson 6 ■ For week ending August 8, 2020

Words are containers for power. But they can carry either creative or destructive power. They carry the power of God or the power of Satan. What is coming out of our mouths? Are we speaking life to ourselves and those around us, or are we speaking death instead? (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger...a gentle tongue [with its healing power] is a tree of life” (Proverbs 15:1,4, AMP).

1. A soft answer brings peace into the midst of turmoil. A gentle tongue has healing power.

- » James warns us about the power of the tongue to cause hurt and division: “*And the tongue is a fire [The tongue is a] world of wickedness set among our members, contaminating and depraving the whole body and setting on fire the wheel of birth (the cycle of man’s nature), being itself ignited by hell*” (James 3:6, AMP).
- » Wrong words or words spoken at the wrong time can certainly start a fire, particularly when they are words of judgment, criticism, gossip, and talebearing.
- » Judgment says, “You are defective, but I am not.”
- » An example of destruction caused by arrogance and judgment can be found in Luke 18:10-14.
- » Notice that pride will even follow us into the prayer closet. We tell ourselves that we are praying for someone else’s faults, but we may actually be operating out of a critical and judgmental spirit, which Jesus condemns.

2. Judgmental arguments that arise about Scripture are the result of spiritual pride. This is the most disgusting kind of pride to the Lord.

- » Satan loves it when Christians are divisive. Paul wrote to the Christians at Ephesus, “*We are not wrestling with flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the despots, against the powers, against [the master spirits who are] the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenly [supernatural] sphere*” (Ephesians 6:12).
- » If we want to defeat Satan and enjoy trouble-free relationships, we will exchange pride for humility, keep our mouths shut, and follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit (Proverbs 17:27,28).

3. If we are not willing to humble ourselves, we have no hope of peaceful relationships.

- » As long as we think we KNOW EVERYTHING, we do not KNOW ANYTHING.
- » When we believe we still have a lot to learn and stop passing out our opinions, we have finally come to the place where knowledge can begin.
- » Read I Corinthians 2:2.
- » Not only was Paul a Pharisee, but he also called himself the “son of Pharisees” (Acts 23:6). He was one of the chief Pharisees and was extremely well educated. Yet he says he would rather forget all he ever though he knew in order to “*know...Jesus Christ (the Messiah) and Him crucified.*”
- » In order to stay out of pride, we have to be nailed to the cross with Jesus regularly. We have to know Christ and Him crucified (Romans 8:5,6).

4. We can enjoy the glory of a peaceful life, if we are willing to go through the suffering of learning to crucify our pride.

- » Read Romans 8:17. We have to learn to stop arguing!
- » C.S. Lewis once said: “For pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense.”
- » Pride will destroy you. Satan is the father of fleshly pride.
- » Read Ezekiel 28:17 to find out what pride did for Satan.

“LEARN TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT”

Lesson 7 ■ For week ending August 15, 2020

Wrong words are like fuel on a fire. The more fuel we pour on the fire, the bigger the fire grows. The only way to stop inflammation is to remove the fuel. The only way to stop or prevent a disagreement or argument is to stop speaking. When someone insults us or hurts our feelings, we are often tempted to give a response out of our wounded pride. But it would be wiser to forgive the insult and let God deal with the person. We must give up wanting to prove that we are right and everyone else is wrong. (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: *“He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive” (Proverbs 17:27,28).*

1. It’s ironic that many of our arguments are over insignificant concerns.

- » The Apostle Paul warns us about such conversations in II Timothy 2:23-24.
- » Notice the word *trifling* in verse 23. It indicates things that are unimportant and make no difference when considered with things that are really important.
- » The verse is saying, “Stay out of conversations where no one knows what they are talking about and everybody is arguing over nothing.” Read Ephesians 4:29.
- » A proud heart refuses to be quiet because pride demands that I have my say—I must have the last word!
- » When someone insults us or hurts our feelings, pride tempts us to give a response out of our wounded emotions (Philippians 2:3).
- » But I would rather forgive and live in peace than get my own way all the time. Wouldn’t you?

2. Let’s talk about the necessity of following the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

- » There are times when we should speak up and confront people, but it’s vital that we are sensitive to the Spirit of God in each situation (John 16:13).
- » Sometimes we are all fired up and want to tell someone that he or she will not mistreat us or take advantage of us any longer. But no matter how much we may want to confront that individual, the Holy Spirit persistently tells us to leave it alone (Galatians 5:25).
- » Other times we do not want to speak with a person about an issue, but God lets us know that we must. When this is the case, we should choose our words carefully so that we speak out of wisdom rather than emotion.
- » The Book of Proverbs tells us, *“There are those who speak rashly, like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing”* (Proverbs 12:18). Also, *“A fool’s wrath is quickly and openly known, but a prudent man ignores an insult”* (Proverbs 12:16).

3. If we want to enjoy trouble-free, harmonious relationships, we will follow Jesus’ example.

- » He was accused of wrongdoing regularly, yet never once did He attempt to defend Himself. He let people think He was wrong, and it did not disturb Him at all (I Peter 3:8,9).
- » He could do so because He knew who He was. He did not have a problem with His self-image.
- » He was not trying to prove anything. He trusted His heavenly Father to vindicate Him, and we can do the same (Romans 12:19).
- » Give your need to be right over to the God, and watch your relationships improve. You’ll discover that great spiritual power is released in unity and harmony.

“GOD—I DON’T SEE YOUR POWER AND BLESSING IN MY LIFE”

Lesson 8 ■ For week ending August 22, 2020

Do you ever wonder why you are not prospering, even though you are giving to God and serving Him? Are you pouring your life and time into your church or ministry, yet failing to see it grow in numbers and spiritual power? If you answered yes to either of these questions, it may be because of the presence of conflict and strife in your life, whether it be in your home, workplace, or ministry. (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).

1. Joyce Meyer speaking: In the beginning years of our ministry, my husband and I did a lot of religious or spiritual things, but we lacked peace in our home.

- » Everything would be fine one minute, and the next thing I knew, everyone would be mad—screaming and yelling. Or we would experience the other extreme, everyone would be deathly quiet—so cold and quiet that it was obvious feelings were hurt and wrong thoughts were running rampant (Mark 3:25).
 - » I can remember our family arguing all the way to church on Sunday mornings, but living in the pretense that all was well as soon as we saw anyone we knew. I would “fake” my way through the service, putting on my “church face” and clapping in all the right places, saying “Amen!” at the appropriate times, and pretending to pay attention to the pastor while he preached (Isaiah 29:13; I Cor. 11:17, 18).
 - » All the while, I was planning how I would ignore my husband or the kids until they apologized to me. I certainly did not intend to go home and fix them a nice dinner. I really didn’t even plan to talk to them (Proverbs 25:24).
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2. God revealed to us that He is not pleased or satisfied with religious sacrifices in a house full of strife.

- » Read Proverbs 17:1. He is not looking for phony Christians. He wants the real thing—not just people who “talk the talk,” but those who “walk the walk.” Read James 1:22.
 - » God responds to the prayer of agreement when it is prayed by people who agree (Matthew 18:19).
 - » God told us, “Keep the strife out of your life, out of your home, and out of your ministry. Walk in integrity, and do what you do with excellence.”
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3. Strife blocks God’s power.

- » The Bible teaches us that the seed of God’s Word must be sown in a heart of peace by someone who works for and makes peace. Read what James wrote in James 3:18.
 - » As ministers and believers, this means we must stay in peace ourselves and be peacemakers if we desire a strong anointing flowing forth from us to help people.
 - » Read Mark 4:14-15. Satan is intent on stealing the Word before it takes root in us. He knows that if it takes root in our hearts, it will begin to produce good fruit. We must operate in the wisdom of God from within and show ourselves wiser than the enemy.
 - » We cannot sit by passively and allow the devil to get us so upset before we get to church that we cannot hear or retain what is being said! Read I Corinthians 1:10.
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4. In order to grow spiritually, we need to be able to think about the Word that has been preached and taught to us.

- » Jesus said, “*Be careful what you are hearing. The measure [of thought and study] you give [to truth you hear] will be the measure [of virtue and knowledge] that comes back to you—and more [besides] will be given to you who hear*” (Mark 4:24, AMP).
- » Life is enjoyable when people live in unity and keep strife out of their lives. On the other hand, there is nothing worse than a home or relationship filled with an angry undercurrent of strife.
- » Read Psalm 133:1-3. Unity was one of the last things Jesus talked about with His disciples before He was arrested and crucified. He prayed, “*That they all may be one...*” (John 17:21).

“MAKE FORGIVENESS A LIFESTYLE”

Lesson 9 ■ For week ending August 29, 2020

Joyce Meyer speaking: “I lived far too long behind walls that I had built to protect myself from emotional pain because I was determined not to give anyone a chance to hurt me again. If someone offended me, I cataloged it in my memory banks and put up a wall that kept that person at a distance or completely out of my life. I was no longer abused, but I held abuse in my heart. It continued to cause pain in my life because I refused to trust God to vindicate me. It took many years for me to realize that I could not love anyone as long as I kept myself a prisoner behind walls of unforgiveness.” (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

1. Joyce Meyer speaking: I also had to learn that I really could not love and be loved until I was willing to take a chance on being hurt. Love hurts sometimes, but it also heals.

- » It is the only force that will override hatred, anger, and unforgiveness. It is the only force that can heal broken or troubled relationships (John 3:16).
- » The world is filled with hurt and hurting people, and hurting people hurt others (John 3:17).
- » Satan works overtime among God’s people to bring offense, strife, and disharmony, but we can override his attempts to sow hatred, bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness.
- » How? WE CAN BE QUICK TO FORGIVE (Matthew 6:12).

2. Forgiveness closes the door to Satan’s attack so that he cannot gain a foothold that might eventually become a stronghold (Ephesians 4:27).

- » It can prevent or end strife in our relationships with others (1 Peter 4:8).
- » No wonder Scripture tells us over and over that we are to forgive those who hurt or offend us. Read Colossians 3:13. Jesus made forgiveness a lifestyle, and He taught His disciples to do the same.

3. Let’s look at what Jesus has to say about forgiveness in Matthew 18.

- » Read Matthew 18:23-30 – The Parable of the Ungrateful Servant.
- » The servant in this story owed so much to the king that he could never pay his debt. When he asked the king to forgive the debt, the merciful king did so. However, the same servant who was unable to pay his debt and who had asked for and received mercy was unwilling to give mercy to another servant in a similar situation.
- » The servant in this story represents us, and the king represents God. When we ask God to forgive us, through the sacrifice of Jesus, all of our debts are canceled (Romans 3:23). The Lord forgives our sins because He knows we could never pay Him what we owe.
- » We often refuse to release others from their offences toward us, even though our heavenly Father has forgiven us.

4. When you and I refuse to forgive other people, we open a door for Satan to torment us. We lose our freedom—the glorious freedom that God intend us to have as we follow His ways.

- » Read Matthew 18:31-35. Discuss what happened to the servant who refused to forgive his brother.
- » God is love. His is also merciful, king, forgiving, and slow to anger. We often desire His power and blessings without wanting the lifestyle that goes with those things.
- » Forgiveness must become a lifestyle. As soon as someone offends us, we must respond with forgiveness.
- » In fact, Jesus makes sure that we understand that we are not to put any limits on our forgiveness. Right before He tells the parable of the ungrateful servant, Peter asked Him an interesting questions about how many times we should offer forgiveness. Read Matthew 18:21-22.

“490 TIMES”

Lesson 10 ■ For week ending September 5, 2020

Last week we talked about making forgiveness part of our lifestyle. What does that mean? We should plan on forgiving people—before they ever offend or trespass against us. The question then arises: How many times do I have to forgive them? The answer is simple: As many times as it takes! (NOTE: This series is taken from the book, “Conflict Free Living,” by Joyce Meyer.)

KEY TEXT: “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Colossians 3:13).

1. What happens when someone continually offends you?

- » In Matthew 18:21,22, Peter asked Jesus a question that many of us have probably thought—if not asked outright—“How many times do I have to forgive that person?”
- » I believe Peter asked this question because he was dealing with someone in his life who regularly offended him. Peter thought he should forgive a person up to seven times, but Jesus told him to forgive up to 70 x 7 (490 times).
- » Jesus was essentially telling Peter to forgive whatever number of times it takes to remain in peace.
- » 490 is the numerical value of the biblical Hebrew word “tamim” which means to “complete,” “perfect,” or “finished.” A person who can’t forgive will always live an imperfect, and incomplete life that’s lacks a true understanding of the “finished” gracious work of the cross. 490 is also the value of the Hebrew phrase “Let your heart be perfect” (I Kings 8:61). Forgiving helps to make us complete and is key to perfecting our heart (Matthew 5:48).

2. We are to forgive people who ask our forgiveness, even when we are not aware that they have wronged us, because our forgiveness frees them to be at peace.

- » We are also to forgive people who do not ask our forgiveness, whether because they did not intend to offend us and do not know they did or because they are not repentant (Luke 6:37).
- » Either way, forgiveness frees us from harboring bitterness and anger in our hearts. It releases us.
- » Read II Corinthians 2:3-11. Discuss Paul’s urging of forgiveness and extending mercy.

3. If you think you have offended someone, go the extra mile and simply say, “If I have offended you, I am sorry.”

- » Remember, God calls us to be the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).
- » Then, if you discover that they indeed were offended, simply ask them to forgive you.
- » The power of the words “Please forgive me” is amazing! Read Hebrews 12:14.
- » Should the individual refuse to forgive you, at least you have done your part and can dwell in peace.
- » Forgiveness is not an elective it’s a requirement. We must forgive because we have been forgiven by the Lord. Biblically, extending forgiveness should not be dependent on receiving an apology, “*even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do*” (Colossians 3:13).
- » Unforgiveness keeps you imprisoned and chained to your past but forgiveness sets you free.

4. Choose forgiveness – Choose Life!

- » God’s Word says, “*I have set before you life and death...choose life*” (Deuteronomy 30:19).
- » When we encounter an offense or a circumstance that ushers death into our lives—physically, spiritually, or emotionally—the only sane solution is to choose life. If we don’t choose life, death continues to spread until it steals our peace, joy, hope, health, and personal relationship.
- » Every time we are hurt, offended, disappointed, or even devastated—and there are many such times in our lives—we must choose how we will respond.
- » Will we hold on to anger and resentment and choose death? Or will we resist anger and offer forgiveness thus choosing life? Read Acts 3:19 and Jon 10:10.

“OPPORTUNITIES”

Lesson 11 ■ For week ending September 12, 2020

The Heavenly Father is always at work to bring about His will and purposes. Even in our trials and tribulations, God is at work! When we are faced with difficult situations, as children of God, we should be looking to see what God is doing. That trial or difficulty you are facing could very well be an opportunity to bring glory to God!

KEY TEXT: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).*

1. Sometimes opportunities present themselves to us in ways that we might not expect.

- » No one likes to go through a hard time or to face temptation, however, it is in these times that we have the opportunity to grow in our faith!
- » This is the message of James 1:2-4,12.
- » Discuss James' exhortation to *“count it all joy”*. This same phrase in the NLT says, **“consider it an opportunity for great joy”**.
- » James is challenging us to get a right perspective. Rather than complaining we should be seeking to know what God is doing through this trial to bring us closer to Him.

2. No matter what our circumstance in life, we were created to bring glory to God.

- » Let us consider how God used a man in the Scriptures who was blind from his birth.
- » Read John 9:1-11,15,25.
- » Notice how many people came face-to-face with the reality of Jesus because of this man's testimony.
- » Not only did this man receive his sight, he also became a follower of Christ (vs 35-38).
- » **JOHN 9:35-38**, *“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” 36 He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” 37 And Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.” 38 Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him.”*

3. The trial that you are facing could be a door of opportunity for you to bless others with the Gospel.

- » When Paul and Barnabas were beaten and thrown into prison for preaching the Gospel, they gave praise to God.
- » Their experience became an opportunity to minister to someone in a way they otherwise would not have been able to.
- » Discuss this as you read Acts 16:23-34.

4. Just because things do not happen in the way we think they should or in our time does not mean that we should give up on what God is doing.

- » Don't give up! You're on the brink of a miracle!
- » Is it possible that we have missed opportunities to see God move because we were not willing to wait patiently for His will to be done?
- » Through prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can seize every opportunity that God sets before us (Romans 8:24-27).

“RESTORING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE”

Lesson 12 ■ For week ending September 19, 2020

The same unconditional love that God demonstrated when He sent His only-begotten Son to save a dying world should be the same unconditional love that is the motivating factor in the work of the Church. Jesus did not come to condemn the world—for they were already condemned. He came to love them into His Kingdom. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can love even as He loved.

♥ **GOD’S AGAPE LOVE** – *is a sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return.*

KEY TEXT: *“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (I John 4:9).*

1. The world is full of people who are hurting and who need to experience God’s love.

- » Jesus came as the express image of the Father to visibly show to the world God’s love.
- » Study John 3:16-18.
- » Jesus did not come to condemn humanity. He came to save us.
- » **Condemn** - *to pronounce to be guilty; to sentence to punishment; to utter sentence against judicially; to doom; opposed to acquit or absolve.*
- » Discuss the way Jesus interacted with the lost (Luke 19:1-10; Matthew 9:10-13).

2. There needs to be a restoration of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE to God’s Church.

- » Before Jesus returns there will be a *“restitution of all things”* (Acts 3:21,22).
- » This includes the restoring of unconditional love.
- » Both Moses and Jesus revealed *love* to be a requirement in God’s people (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37-40).
- » Read and discuss I John 4:7,8.

3. It is the unconditional love of God that will draw people into the Kingdom of God.

- » It was love that nailed Jesus to the Cross of Calvary.
- » Jesus declared that through His selfless sacrifice, He would draw the world to Himself.
- » Read John 12:22,23.
- » The “love chapter” describes the kind of unconditional love this world is in need of.
- » Read **I Corinthians 13:4-7(NLT)**, *“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”*

4. The ability to love unconditionally is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- » Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).
- » In order for us to love others the same way Jesus loves us, we must allow the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with God’s love (Romans 5:5-8).

“QUESTIONS IN TRYING TIMES”

Lesson 13 ♦ For week ending September 26, 2020

The year 2020 has proven to be a year filled with many challenges. Covid-19 has taken thousands of lives and caused worldwide shut downs which in turn has taken the livelihood of many. And more recently there has been racial tensions, protesting and rioting in the streets all across the United States stemming for the death of George Floyd at the hands of corrupt police. One might call these “*trying times*.” The Prophet Habakkuk faced some trying times in his generation which led him to question God concerning what He was doing. God’s answer to Habakkuk is still true for us today.

KEY TEXT: *“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” (Habakkuk 2:1).*

1. Habakkuk was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah just before the exile, when their unrepentant sinfulness was at its height, around 625-604 B.C.

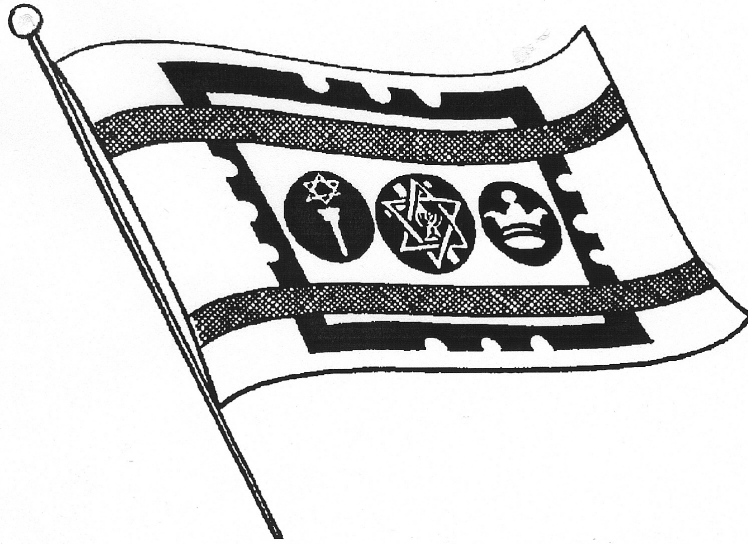
- » As the prophet sees wickedness, violence, and injustice all around, he is compelled to ask God some questions.
- » **Question 1:** “Why would you allow so much corruption to continue in the land of Judah for so long without being punished (Habakkuk 1:2-4)?”
- » **God’s Answer:** God told Habakkuk that He was going to do something spectacular, He was raising up the cruel and violent Babylonians to come and crush the land of Judah (Habakkuk 1:5,6).
- » **Question 2:** “Why would a holy God allow such a wicked people as the Babylonians to come and ravage the land of Judah whom He loves (Habakkuk 1:12,13)?”
- » **God’s Answer:** The Babylonians are fearless and determined and they scoff at Kings, and they would become His instrument of judgment because of the land of Judah’s wickedness for they had forsaken God. But the mighty Babylonians would have a day of judgment coming upon themselves as well (Habakkuk 2:8).
- » We as believers today have very similar questions in regard to our times: How long is all this wickedness going to go on? Why is there so much confusion and injustice in the world?

2. Habakkuk is given assurance that righteousness will prevail and that God will ultimately save His people.

- » The Lord shows him a future time in which, “... *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Habakkuk 2:14).
- » Though wickedness is prevalent in the earth, the Lord will one day judge this world and set up His Kingdom (Revelations 19:14-16).

3. Habakkuk is told to make his vision very clear so that everyone can see and understand it.

- » Read Habakkuk 2:2-3.
- » In a time when people are questioning so many things, it is extremely important that the Church make the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom very clear (Matthew 24:12-14).
- » We must never give up hope, though He tarry (Matthew 25:5), Jesus is coming again (Luke 21:25-28).



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— Jerusalem Acres —

Post Office Box 1207

1826 Dalton Pike, SE

Cleveland, Tennessee 37364-1207, USA

Phone: 423/472-1597

E-mail: TCOGJERACR@AOL.COM

Website: thechurchofgodntj.org

Email: thechurchofgodntj.com