

LIVING “WITH-GOD”: ETERNAL LIVING NOW

John 1:10 and 17:3
(Benoni: nine sessions)

- (1). The basic meaning of *having a life that is eternal*:
 Living interactively with God in all I do.
 The kingdom of God and our “kingdom”
 “Do all in the name...” (Col. 3:17)
 The “fire” that reveals. (1 Cor. 3:13-15)

- (2). The Liberation of Leaders into Abundant living.
 Who we are is our primary wit-ness.
 Our character as eternal liver is seen
 In the fruit of the Spirit
 And “gifts” of the Spirit.
 These set us free from *bondage to human expectations* and *fear of the future*.
 “I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

- (3). The minister should be notorious for being *the happiest person in town!*
 The case of Billy Bray—“If they put me in a barrel I would shout ‘Glory!’ out the
 bung hole.”
 Read Rom. 8:31, Heb. 13:5-8, and Ps. 23:6

- (4). This all depends upon how we think of, and what we know to be true of, God.
 ALL OF THE TROUBLES AND FAILURES OF HUMAN EXISTENCE ARE
 ROOTED IN FAILURE TO THINK RIGHTLY ABOUT GOD.
 Why “Hallowed be Thy name” is the first request in the Lord’s prayer.
 It is Jesus who “manifests Thy name” to the world. John 17:6
 “Through him we believe in the real God.” (1 Peter 1:21)

- (5). God is: **Powerful**. “All things are possible.” (Gen. 1:1, Matt. 19:26, but Mark 6:52)

 Here: (Luke 17:21, Acts 17:27-28, Jer. 23:23-24)

 Conscious of and caring for us. (2 Chron. 16:9, John 4:23-24, 2 Pet. 3:9,
 Luke 12:22-32, etc. etc.)

- (6). God is working in human history—a tiny period on earth—to produce a loving
 community of human beings that will be an everlasting dwelling place for him and a
 reflection of His magnificent greatness and goodness as the ultimate reality. We have the
 calling and opportunity to be a part of this. Here and now. The “Divine Conspiracy” is
 God’s project of overcoming evil with good in human history. We can be a part of this
 day by day, hour by hour, right where we are. (Malachi 3:16-4:2, Eph. 2:7, 22, 3:10 and
 Rev. 22:5) Hence 1 Cor. 15:58—“Your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

**LIVING “WITH-GOD”: ETERNAL LIVING NOW
(Session Two)**

“THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD
IN THE FACE OF CHRIST”

(2 Cor. 4:6)

- (1). Current confusions about faith/belief and knowledge: especially that the way of Christ is not a way of knowledge, that knowledge is “works,” not grace, etc. etc.
- (2). The biblical picture centers on knowledge, and faith environed in knowledge.
- (3). What knowledge is: ***The ability to represent something as it is, on an appropriate basis of thought and experience***—including testimony and proper authority.
- (4). In real life knowledge is or is based upon interactive relationship with what is known. Knowledge and grace. “Grow in the grace and knowledge...” 2 Peter 3:18
Grace = God acting in our life = interactive relationship → knowledge.
- (5). How knowledge differs from belief/faith, commitment, and profession.
- (6). Only knowledge confers the right and responsibility to act, direct action, formulate policy and supervise it, and to teach. “Faith” does not do that, though we often must act in faith—faith always environed in knowledge. Implications for society today.
- (7). The accurate New Testament picture of knowledge and the full array of character in the disciple of Jesus. 2 Peter 1:2-11 and Matt. 5:20
- (8). That knowledge is always limited in this life is a part of Christian knowledge. 1 Cor. 8:1-3 & 13:8-9. But knowledge is indispensable in the service of love. Eph. 4:15 → “Speaking the truth in love” is the pathway to Christian maturity in community.
- (9). We must stand in our world as those who bring ***knowledge*** that is essential to human life, and unavailable from any other source. The only hope for the “decent” world that humans dream of and build academic castles around is the knowledge of reality and life that comes to completion in Jesus. We must be sure to do our work and live our lives with that assurance, and with compassion and open profession of knowledge.
- (10). Our Pastors and public spokespersons must ***stand publically*** as “teachers of the nations.” Matt. 28:18-20; Isa. 42:1-6 & 49:6-7. In our communities.
- (11). “Secularism” is a moral illusion, and has nothing to say about the specific relations that make up human existence.
- (12). The meaning of “Wit-ness.” Our task is to make knowledge available to those who need to know. It is not to get people to do things. Knowledge in the hand of God will take care of that.

WHY GOD IS NOT OBVIOUS AND MUST BE SOUGHT (Session Three)

“TRULY, THOU ART A GOD WHO HIDES HIMSELF.”
(Isa. 45:15; 3:20 and Job 23:9 & 26:14)

- (1). Briefly: God is not obvious in order that:
 - We can “avoid” Him if we wish, and seem to get away with it.
 - This gives us space to follow our desires and become who we want to be.
 - But also allows us to seek him, and go through a process of transformation that will allow us to receive Him when we find Him (He finds us).
 - The profound truth that no one can see God and live. Judges 13:22, Ex. 33:20
- (2). God’s intent is to bring out of the earth a community of “kings and priests”
 - Ex. 19:6, Eph. 2:19-22, & Rev. 1:6
 - As a witness to eternity. Eph. 2:7 & 3:10
 - Ruling with him and under him forever. Rom. 5:17 & Rev. 22:5
 - The nature of, and divine appointment for humans. Gen. 1:26 & 28
- (3). This requires that we have space for choice and growth in knowledge and ability.
 - The parable of the responsible businessmen. Luke 19
 - “The mammon of unrighteousness” and “very little things.” Luke 16:9-10
 - “The least of these my brethren.” Matt. 25:40
 - Receiving a little child in his name. Matt. 18:5
 - Counting all else as loss to know Him. Phil. 3:7-10
- (4). The absolute centrality of humility to God’s purposes for us. 1 Peter 5:5-7, James 4:5-10, Luke 22:26-27
 - What humility is: complete dependence upon God. (Andrew Murray)
 - If you are not humble, you can know it by observing how things affect you.
 - To work toward humility: never pretend, never presume, never push.
 - Silence and service as disciplines helpful toward humility.
- (5). Humility sets the exaltation of self aside and makes a place for God to act with us, which is the absolute center of eternal living now.
- (6). It frees us into joyful service: love of God and others; frees us from “selfish ambition” (Rom. 2:8) and any concern about how we are doing and what is happening to us.
 - Wounded pride the curse of the church and primary hindrance to the work of God on earth.
- (7). Our practical rule is to “seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness” (Matt. 6:33) and to “seek those things that are ‘above’ where Christ is seated in authority and power.” (Col. 3:1) **God’s intent for each of us is that should become the kind of person He can empower to do what we want.**

**GROWTH IN GOODNESS AND POWER THROUGH
TRANSFORMATION OF THE ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF THE PERSON
(Session Four)**

(1). The human being is a complex system of dynamic factors that are designed to work together to make one life in submission to God and to what is good. These factors are:

Heart (spirit, will)

Mind (including (A) thoughts and (B) feelings or impulses governing desires)

Body (our natural energy source and location in our world, our identity)

Relations to others (social context)

Soul (integrating factor, making one life (hopefully) out of all the aspects.)

(2). This is, of course, the analysis of Jesus (Mark 12:29-31), arising out of the ancient “Hear Oh Israel” of Deut. 6:4. Jesus’ teaching was that each dynamic element in the person was to be devoted to love of God and neighbor. That is the total account of the good person and the good life in the kingdom of God.

(3). We must understand what love is. Love (agape) is directed toward the realization of the good of what is loved. Love is governed by what is good, not just by desire, except insofar as desire itself is governed by love.

(4). Now what does it mean, what is it like, **to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?** That would mean, to begin with, that our heart (will, spirit) was totally devoted to what is good so far as God is concerned. That is, our capacity to bring about things and events, to initiate processes, would seek only the fulfillment of the will of God. The primary function of the will is to trust God and seek what he seeks.

While focused upon God, that naturally includes all good things. Thus Phil. 4:8.

(5). To love God with all our **mind** would mean to fill our mind with God and his ways, and to share on that basis the emotional tones, impulses, and desires that he has toward all things: to want what he wants and rejoice in what he rejoices in. 1 Cor. 13.

“The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace because he trusts in Thee.” Isa 26:3.

(6). The **body** (‘strength’) that loves God is one set to do what God loves—without necessarily thinking about it. The body becomes the repository of thoughts, feelings, habits, and character, which tends to run on its own. A “living sacrifice.” Rom. 12:1-2.

(7). **Social relations** of the loving person incorporate God in all of them and conduct those relations by loving what God loves in them. “He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.” Rom. 13:8-10 and 1 John 4:7-8

(8). The **soul** (deepest part of the self) organizes every aspect of life around the love of God as the character of **the whole person**: one life, fully integrated.

(9). Our efforts toward personal growth in “grace and knowledge,” and our efforts to serve others in ministry are directed to retraining, under grace, each component of each aspect of the self around love of God and neighbor. (Wesley’s statement)

**THE TORN HUMAN CONDITION AND THE BONDAGE OF EVIL:
WHY THINGS GO SO BADLY IN HUMAN LIFE AND ACTIONS
(Session Five)**

(1). “Fleshly lusts (ἐπιθυμιῶν) war against the soul.” (1 Peter 2:11) The soul is integrative, but desire is essentially disintegrative. (James 4:1-4) Lack of integrity characterizes human life, in some more than others. This is a public fact and accounts for the failures of public and private life.

(2). Desire is disintegrative because it is obsessive. It simply aims to have that, and even shunts aside other desire, and even more so what is good.

(3). Love, by contrast, *deliberates* concerning what is good, better, and best—not simply what is wanted. The will must not be enslaved by desire—as it commonly is today. It is made to deal with alternatives in terms of their respective values. It is meant to be guided by what is good/better/best, which ultimately is God and the love of God, as we have seen. The primary function of the will is to trust God and rest in Him. (See the story of Eve and the Serpent in Genesis. This is a general structure. Cp. Matt 4:1-11 & 1 John 2:16-17.

(4). We need to help our understanding of life by observing the role of desire unchecked by love, deliberation, and what is good in human life. Honest look at ourselves and others

Consider 1 Peter 4:1-5 and Ephesians 4:17-21

And the course corrections of redemption in Eph. 4:22-5:21

(5). The evil of the flesh and spirit (will) in deadlock. Gal. 5:17-21, Rom. 7:14-24. What is evil? It is the intent to harm or at least to permit harm. “To steal, kill, and destroy.”

(6). Liberation through placing your life in the spirit/Spirit. Gal. 5: 16 & 22-25, Rom. 8.

(7). But the battle is severe, because all of the parts of the human self (discussed earlier) have been inhabited by “automatic” tendencies to do what is wrong at the behest of desire, primarily settled in the body, as Paul knew: “In my members.” (Rom. 7:23)

The case of Peter’s denials.

And watch a family, church, or political fight in progress.

(8). To find a way out and come to live in love, joy, peace...and power, we have to learn how to “have the mind of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4-8) and “walk in the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:16 & 24) Study 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

(9). The call to discipleship—salvation in the biblical sense—and the process of spiritual formation in Christlikeness which occurs as we live as disciples of Jesus. Our churches as **centers of character transformation** and lighthouses for our communities and our world.

THE RADICAL SURGERY AND ALL-CONSUMING BLESSING OF DISCIPLESHIP (Session Six)

“Therefore, be imitators of God, as dear children.” Eph. 5:1-2

(1). A disciple of Jesus is someone who is with Jesus learning from him how to live their life in the Kingdom of God as he would live their life if he were they. Their top priority in life is to do this, and they are arranging and rearranging their affairs in such a way that it happens.

(2). The tragedy of the contemporary church and the human history in which it is now embedded is that discipleship is not thought of as a natural part of being a Christian. Compare the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20.

(3). The word “disciple” is partially replaced, as the New Testament moves along, by the word “saint.” Saints are people set aside by the action of God as being of “another” reality. They are to “shine like stars in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.” Phil. 2:15

(4). How might that look today: Joyful non-cooperation with evil, wherever we are, and living sacrificially for what is good as Jesus did.

(5) Spiritual transformation involves a Vision of Eternal Living in the Kingdom of God, Intention or decision to live that way, and the employment of Means that will bring it to pass. (VIM, Chapter 5 of *Renovation of the Heart*) Only the vision brought by the gospel of Jesus (life now from “above” in the Kingdom of God) can support the radical decision or intention to possess that life, no matter the cost.

(6). Counting the cost on both sides. The cost of non-discipleship! Luke 14:25-33, Matt. 10:32-39 & 13:44-46

(7). What are the things I am learning as his disciple”

How to do—become the kind of person who does—the things he said.

How to conduct the affairs of ordinary life in the rule of God.

How to engage the power of God to accomplish what is beyond my ability.

(8). Where am I a disciple? Everywhere I am and in everything that I do. Especially in my home and at my work.

(9). Discipleship is not for the sake of the church, the church is for the sake of discipleship. The church is for discipleship and discipleship is for the world—the world which God loves. Discipleship is not a religious thing, but a life thing. All of creation is groaning, waiting eagerly for the revealing of the children of God. (Rom. 8:18-22) Can you identify the groans right around you and beyond. It calls to us: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Col. 3:17

HOW TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF (Session Seven)

Summary: We want to find a realistic understanding of this as something we can do in our actual world, our real circumstances. We must see why it is the “Second Commandment” and not the “First.” That is because it is something that can only flow from a life grounded and surrounded in the Kingdom of the Heavens. We must see what that means in practice. That we are not to love everyone as we love ourselves, but our “neighbor.” Who that is. Think small here: with humility and boundaries based on humility. How many “neighbors” would you have. Investing in a few relationship. Openness. Planning to do it. Learning as you go. The place of spiritual disciplines in all of this. Steps.

Scriptural basis: Leviticus 19:18 & 34; Micah 6:8; Matt. 7:12; Luke 10:25-37

Other human beings as “under God.”

The higher opportunity and standard among disciples of Jesus. John 13:34-35

The higher standard is the healing standard from which broken human relations are restored.

The Good Samaritan story of Luke 10:29-37. Designed to make certain points:

That religiosity may displace the two great commandments, and especially, here, the second.

The quibble-question (vs. 29) and the need to justify oneself. Give up!

But it is a serious practical question, especially today when we are overwhelmed with people.

What really distinguished the Samaritan? Not what he did, but who he was. He was a person who had compassion in him. The other two guys did not. They saw the wounded person. But the Samaritan, “when he saw him, he felt compassion...” (vs. 33)

The compassionate “lord” and forgiveness. (Matt. 18:27)

What love is: We love something when we are devoted to its good or well-being. This applies to God, our “neighbor,” our flower garden, or our bank account. Love is will-to-good. Not the same as desire. And not always directed rightly or ordered rightly. Love involves compassion.

A person of compassion is one who feels the needs of others. Com-compassion. Compassion is not something that can be turned on and off like a water faucet. It is always on—or not. It is a constant burden of life, which many people reject. It requires resources of personal strength and it requires wisdom in action. Loving your neighbor as yourself is a matter of who you are, not, primarily, of what you decide to do.

You can “afford” to be compassionate only if you know there is abundant compassion for you, toward you, by persons who have appropriate means. This is primarily God. “We love because he first loved us.” (I John 4:19) The perfect love of God toward us casts our fear. (vs. 18) Think of the role of fear in the “Good Samaritan” story! This perfect love is what allows us to eliminate anger and lust from our relationships to others.

So **the first major step in becoming one of those who love their neighbors as themselves** is to decide to live compassion. Now let us be clear: This is a decision to receive the abundance of the Kingdom of the Heavens as the basis for your life. Matt. 6:33 is what we do. We must understand it practically in order to turn loose of the self concern, the self-kingdom (-queendom too) This explains why neighbor-love is not the first, but the second, commandment. They are not two separate commandments, but one with two aspects. (Compare the closely associate teaching about forgiving others and having God’s forgiveness. Mark 11:25-26 etc. They are not separate things.)

Now, suppose, you are a person who has received compassion and can, therefore, afford to be compassionate. **Your next major step is to decide who your neighbors are**. We said this is a serious question, though it can be used to justify not loving. The word “neighbor” comes out of older English where it referred to “the boor that is nigh thee.” (“Boor” is still in use in South Africa.)

Here I want you to think of your neighbor as simply those you are intimately engaged with in life. The Samaritan found himself in intimate engagement with a victim of violence, and he responded accordingly, while the priest and the Levite rejected the engagement, which they in fact had. They did not love their neighbor and did not “prove to be a neighbor to the man.” (Luke 10:36)

A common usage of the word “neighbor” today locates the neighbor as one who lives “next-door” or close by. A “next-door” neighbor is one with a special degree of intimacy, on this understanding, and there is something to that. But on this understanding my most important neighbor is overlooked: the one who lives with me, my family or others taken in by us. They are the ones most intimately engaged with in my life. They are the ones who first and foremost I am to love as I love myself. If simply this were done, nearly every problem in families would be resolved, and the love would spread to others.

But our closest intimates frequently are also the ones we have most hurt and been hurt by. Here is where the fellowship of disciples comes in. Here is where the higher standard of “as I have loved you” can/should/would create a context of restoration of compassion and love for those near us in life. The local assembly (“church”) would, realistically, be like a hospital, with various people at various states of treatment and recovery. Then we move out in love to those around us in the natural connections of life.

So **the second step** is actually rather complicated, but it can be described as **the decision to have compassion upon those closest to us wherever we are**, at home, work, school, neighborhood and....

Now it is very important to understand that the command is not to love everyone. God does. You can’t even begin to. Love can only be specific, and love cannot exceed our resources. Suppose the next day the Samaritan came upon a similar case. And the next day. And the next. At what point does the “as yourself” come into effect? There is no general rule. We must respect our limitations and prayerfully seek the presence of God in action with us. You have the responsibility to care for yourself under God, though in the rare case that may mean radical sacrifice or even death. But that is not the normal case. You have to make judgments in faith. If you take too much you will not be able to effectively love anyone. Burnout and breakdown are at hand.

So now, **third step**, do a little exercise. **List the few people** you are most “intimately engaged with in life.” This should be a pretty small number—though obviously not in the case of a large “family.” Now list a “next” circle of degree of engagement. (No more than 8 or 10) And, finally, a third circle. In beginning to love your neighbor as yourself, do think small. Humility is crucial to love, always. The range can grow as you grow. But if you find yourself wanting to start this exercise with the AIDS orphans in Africa, for example, you are probably suffering from sentimental abstraction. If your circumstances and calling are such that you can, in the context of all your neighbors, really do something for the AIDS orphans, that is a different matter. But few people can start there, and it is easy to lose your way if you do.

So, now, **fourth step**, begin with that inner circle as best you can, and **devote serious attention, thought, prayer and service to two or three people**. Allow time for this to develop (probably a few months, at least) until it becomes a grace-sustained habit, and then you can bring more people into the range of your effective neighbor-love.

You will find it necessary to practice a range of standard “disciplines for the spiritual life” in order to receive the compassion, grace and growth required to live a life of neighbor love. You will never feel adequate to such a life, in view of the needs around you. But that is right and good. You aren’t adequate! You are to stand with others in the fellowship of disciples and under the presence of the Kingdom of God

So **here are the steps in effectual loving of our neighbor as ourselves**: Decide to receive compassion as a way of life, decide to be compassionate on the particular people around you, list those people in terms of degree of closeness, begin to pay attention etc. to them, engage in the spiritual disciplines that enable you to operate from a constant fullness of grace.

THE SECRET OF THE EASY YOKE

TRAINING WHEN NOT “ON THE SPOT”—SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

(Session Eight)

(1). The positive and negative instructions of Jesus not only seem but **are** difficult or even impossible to the person whose “heart, soul, mind, and strength” have not been transformed by the process of spiritual formation which the disciple undergoes. How then can his yoke be easy and his burden light? Burnout and breakdown will result.

(2) The answer is found in the “M” from the “VIM” pattern of personal transformation. There are means that can be adopted, which, wisely used and accompanied by grace, result in the progressive transformation of the inner dimensions of the self, cleaning “the inside of the cup (Matt. 23:25-26) They answer the question, “How can I grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” as I am commanded to do.

(3). Intelligent application of means, not just trying, is what enables us to “mortify the deeds of the body by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:Col. 3:5), to put aside anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, and lying (Col. 3:8-9), and to “put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” (3:12)

(4). Spirit led applications of means grow us toward the point of **routine, easy obedience** to all that Jesus taught. There is nothing he indicated we should do that we cannot do if we follow the route of inward transformation. This was taught by example by Jesus himself and by his immediate followers. Imitation was the method of transferal. (Heb 13:7, 2 Tim. 3:10-14, Phil. 4:9) The original disciples spent years with Jesus observing him and practicing what he did. Example is how they in turn, following “the Great Commission,” taught disciples to do “all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”

(5). **A discipline** is an activity that is in our power, that enables us to do what we cannot do by direct effort. That is true for both the natural life and the spiritual life. There is almost nothing of value in human life that does not require disciplines. They are usually activities engaged in outside the times when we are “on the spot” trying to perform some difficult activity. The athlete or artist knows the necessity of an overall life of training.

(6). Some of the most useful spiritual disciplines that have proven themselves to the followers of Christ through the ages are: Solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. These involve some kind and degree of abstinence. Disciplines of engagement are study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission. There is no exhaustive list of practices that might serve as disciplines.

(7). Consider briefly Solitude, Silence, and Fasting, and how they break the grip of destructive habits:

Solitude is spending some extensive, regular time alone, doing no work.

Silence is getting away from noise, including the noise of your own voice.

Fasting is abstaining from food and/or drink to some significant degree.

These—along with disciplines—put us in better position to love God and our neighbor, to speak truth and help others find their way to God. To be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

**WHAT TO DO “IN CHURCH”
ETERNAL LIVING FOSTERED BY CHURCH ACTIVITIES
(Session Nine)**

- (1). Public identification of local assemblies and denominations as disciples that are making disciples. The “Christian” as a student or “apprentice” of Jesus. All other public identities subordinate to this one. How history has confused the issues.
- (2). The three parts of the Great Commission: Make disciples, submerge them in Trinitarian reality, and teach them in such a way that they routinely and easily do the things Jesus did and said.
- (3). Adopt this as you “mission statement,” and announce that in your church you do what Jesus said and teach disciples how to do it. Put this on your sign out front and on your letter-head and other literature.
- (4). Organize your whole program around this statement. It doesn’t require special expenses, buildings, or expertise. Just the VIM, now applied to congregations.
- (5). You will need to make explicit arrangements to teach those who are ready in such a way that they begin to easily step into some specific things Jesus or his Apostles said. For example, directing their language to beneficial and grace-filled words. Luke 6:45, Eph. 4:29-31, James 3:2-12, etc. How much of anger comes out of the mouth, or envy and lasciviousness? How to deal with this. Can solitude, silence, service, scripture memorization help change this? How to practice these fruitfully. How can all this be integrated with our activities? In this way the eternal kind of living is made a part of life in church, and extends to life beyond that. Communities are transformed by individuals living the life of Christ.
- (6). The “vessel” is now glorified by the “treasure.” 2 Cor. 4:7 The vessel is essential, whether it is our body or our tradition, but it is not the treasure, which is “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (vs. 6)

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The remainder of time in this last session will be devoted to questions and practical issues.