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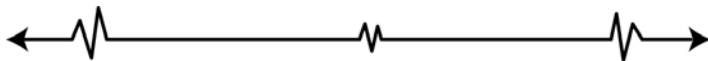
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Scripture references are taken from the
 HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
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Leader's Preface

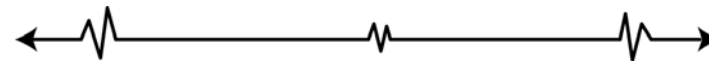
A pastor was walking along the beach one day and stumbled upon a lamp. Picking it up and wiping it off caused the lamp to shake and smoke and a genie came out. The genie thanked the pastor for freeing him from years of captivity and offered him one wish. The pastor immediately said, *"I've always wanted to visit the Holy Land but I'm afraid of flying. And I get seasick just thinking about boats. Could you build a highway across the Atlantic Ocean so that I could drive to the Holy Land?"*

The genie replied, *"You've got to be kidding. Do you realize the engineering challenges that would have to be overcome to achieve that feat? Even I have limitations. Can't you think of anything else to wish for?"* The pastor thought for a few minutes and then said, *"Okay. I know what I want. I wish for all of the members of my congregation to become tithers and fully committed followers of Jesus Christ."* To that the genie replied, *"Did you want that to be a two lane or a four lane highway?"*

It would be great, wouldn't it, if all our members were on fire for the Lord and contagiously infecting others with their enthusiasm? Well, only the Holy Spirit can make that happen. Nevertheless he has given us the opportunity to wield His weapon, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. And we want to do that as effectively as possible. We can't turn all your members into tithers and pillars in the church, but this course can be a very exciting bridge the Holy Spirit can use to do just that.

We want to encourage you to see your function in this course as more than just imparting knowledge, but also to give of yourself. This may be the only opportunity you will be given to establish a relationship with these people. They need to know that you are sincere and that you care about them, not just the material. Consider the passion of the Apostle Paul in that regard: *"So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well..."* (2 Corinthians 12:15). Why did Jesus weep at Lazarus' tomb? Because He had invested so much of Himself in their relationship. He loved him as a friend. That's the model He leaves for us.

It is said that the mind remembers 10% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 60% of what we see and hear, and 80% of what we see, hear, and do. *Fit for Life in Christ* is structured with those statistics in mind. The leader's material is generally tied in to the fill-in-the-blanks, encouraging the class to take an active part in the lesson. You will want to take advantage of the PowerPoint program sold with this course. The blanks are filled in as you go and a multitude of accompanying illustrations are included. For review purposes there is a fun "Who Wants to be Fit for Life?" program for each lesson, complete with "phone a friend, ask the audience and 50/50's". Ideally, these programs can be run from your notebook computer to a multimedia projector. T.V. monitors can also work for a smaller size class. (Copyright permission for some illustrations included in the PowerPoint programs has been obtained from Rev. Don Abdon – Parish Leadership Seminars, and from Answers in Genesis – AnswersInGenesis.org.) You may also want to patch into your church's sound system or have a couple computer speakers to pick up the sounds in the PowerPoint programs (particularly for the WWTB Fit for Life).



Unless otherwise indicated, these leader's notes are presented with an oral style, as though you were speaking directly to the class. We hope this format is helpful and that you will then excuse any grammatical improprieties. We've taken great pains to put theological words and phrases into terms that are understandable to the unchurched. The quantity of the information provided in the Leader's notes should allow you the flexibility to pick and choose and adapt to fit your teaching style.

There is a "community builder" paragraph about halfway between each lesson. These can be used around the tables in small groups. These questions aren't anything threatening, just for the purpose of building relationships. At the end of each lesson is an "Exercising Your Faith" section. These are more difficult questions based on the lesson content and again, can be used in small groups, or simply for more individual reflection after each lesson.

A note on the stories used in *Fit for Life*: Those included here are certainly only offered as suggestions. Most of them have made the rounds, some of them many times. If these don't fit your style, modify, change and add to your liking. The key is to let yourself and your people laugh. It breaks down a lot of defenses and barriers. Before they even know it's happening, people have allowed you to make a profound point and a spiritual application.

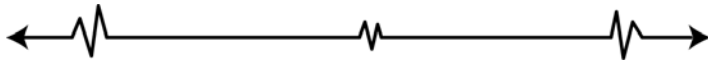
We encourage you to take a full twelve weeks (two hour sessions) for the course to allow the Holy Spirit to work with the Word over a period of time, to have time for relationships to build and develop and especially for new members to begin to lay down a foundation for the "holy habit" of regular church attendance. Our experience has been that people are still willing to make a 12-week commitment as long as they know they're not going to be bored for 12 weeks!

We would suggest using a uniform edition of the Bible in class so that you can refer to page numbers as you look up the various Bible passages. You will want to review all the passages as part of your class preparation and underline in your Bible.

Something that's been helpful for us in teaching the course is to have a volunteer record (videotape/audiotape/CD, DVD) all your sessions so that you can make them available to people when they miss.

We have chosen not to include the fill-in-the-blank answers in the student guides. In our experience, people pay more attention if they don't have access to the answers. They will also be more motivated to ask for the tape if they miss a session.

Every generation has been called upon by God to make the Gospel relevant to its day! Martin Luther was certainly the most contemporary man of his day, daring even to translate the Bible into the language of the people. We are also called upon to put the Word of God into the language of the people in our day. We hope this material will be helpful to you in that task.



Opening Stories/Icebreakers

It's a Sunday morning, and a lady goes over to her husband and shakes him (he's still in bed). And she says, "Come on get up, it's Sunday morning, time for church." And he just kind of grumbles and says; "I don't want to get up." But she stays with it, "Come on, come on, get up, get up." And she goes away for a little while - does some chores - comes back a few minutes later and her husband is still in bed, and she says, "Don't you want to get up? Come on, we'll be late for church if you don't get up."

"I don't care," he says, "I don't want to go to church!" "NOooo you've got to go to church." So he says, "Give me two good reasons why I should go to church." And she says, "No, first you give me two reasons why you shouldn't go to church." He says, "That's easy: they don't like me, and I don't like them. Now you give me two good reasons why I should go."

"Well," she says, "first of all because the message might do you some good, and secondly, because you're the pastor."

A pastor was asked to speak for a certain charitable organization. After the meeting the program chairman handed the pastor a check. "Oh, I couldn't take this," the pastor said with some embarrassment. "I just appreciate the honor of being asked to speak. I'm sure you have better uses for this money. Just take it and apply it where it's most needed." To that, the program chairman asked, "Well, do you mind if we put it into our special fund?" The pastor replied, "Of course not. What is the special fund for?" The chairman answered, "It's so we can get a better speaker next year."

Well, you may or may not get a better speaker next time you take a course of this kind, but for now, we'll have to make do with what we've got...

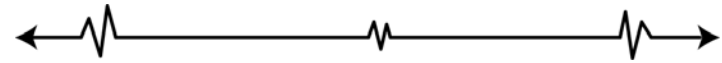
Now folks, what we do here is the work of God and it's what God does here that counts, not what we do, so we always invoke his blessings and his presence:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, some of us do not know what we're doing here or how we got here or what's going to happen here. But now that we are here we ask that this time might be blessed. We know from Your Word that when you walked on earth you opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. We ask for that miracle now so that we might truly see and hear the good things that you have done for us. We ask for the presence of Your Spirit to bless us and enlighten us as we study Your Word. We are bold to ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

A very, very big WELCOME! You may not realize this, but you are part of a big trend in our country of people who are making a return to the church. There is a tremendous interest all over the world in "religion". And I want to thank all of you, as I thank God for answering my prayer and giving me the opportunity and privilege, to be included in your search for a better relationship to God. I thank you for letting me share with you the most important thing in my life - what I feel is the most important thing in the entire universe, having a relationship, not just to an impersonal God out there somewhere, but to an intensely personal God Who came into our world in the person of Jesus Christ.



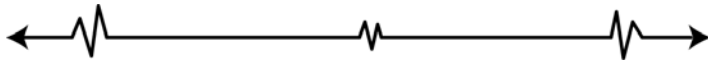
This is always kind of an interesting time - Beginning a class like this - And I'm sure you've been wondering what it's going to be like - "What am I doing here? What's going to happen to me? Am I going to get brainwashed? What will I have to do? What will all these people think about why I'm here? Am I going to be bored here?" Well, I hope not. Personally, I believe it's a sin to bore. And I make you a pledge right now that (until we get a better speaker) I will do my best to keep you from falling asleep when you come here. Because folks, what God has done for us - the way we matter to God - that's not boring. How some of us have told that message in the past, we may need to repent of, but the author of this book (the Bible) is not boring, and he wants to lead you into the most exciting life you could ever know.

One of the things that typically needs to be done at the beginning of a course is for the instructor to introduce himself. So that you don't get confused on pronunciation or spelling, here is mine: _____.

Now folks, I intend to stand right in front of you for some twelve weeks and I am a little presumptuous. I am going to try and teach you something. And some of you may think, "Well, who does he think he is? What qualifies him for that particular job?" People are concerned about credentials these days aren't they? And they should be. Well, you all know what this is (AA) right? And these are more of the same (BA, MA)...And this (PHD) is "Piled Higher and Deeper," right? Well, I have some of those. They don't really count. Not when it comes to the subject that we're dealing with. When we talk about your eternity, my opinions don't mean a bloomin' thing! Because you need something much more certain, much more graphic, much more dependable. And so the text that we will use here is not really this book (Fit for Life), but this book - God's Book (The Bible).

All of us operate on three levels of truth: 1) I think; 2) I feel; or 3) God says. What level do you operate on? Quite honestly, I am going to try to lead you to operate on the level where "God speaks", where you live your life on the truth of God's Word. To that end folks, let me ask you a question: How do you know that the things I am going to be sharing with you during this course are true? The Bible says loudly and clearly that there are going to be a lot of false teachers and false prophets as a sign of the last days. How do you know I'm not one of them? You see, somehow you're going to have to come up with a skill - you're going to have to come up with a spiritual litmus test to determine which guy is for real and which guy isn't. It can't just be on the basis of charisma ("I like this guy, so he must be telling the truth..." or "I don't like this guy, so he must not know what he's talking about...").

I'm told that of all the ways that banks use to teach people to recognize counterfeit money, the best way just comes naturally from counting money. People get so used to the real thing that they can immediately identify a counterfeit when it comes along. Well folks, that's the bottom line for you too. Unless you're in this book (the Bible) faithfully - unless you determine to have at least a basic Biblical understanding of the Christian faith, then I can say whatever I want, and if it sounds good, and if I have some good speaking skills, you have no defense but to say, "Well, I guess that must be the way it is, after all, he went to the seminary." You know, throughout the history of the world, the people who have always corrupted the church doctrinally are the clergy. Did you realize that? And the only way they've been able to get away with that is that people either did not have access to the Word - as in the Middle Ages - or they've decided they don't need to read it - as in our ages.



Folks, that's why this course is built on and around God's Word. And I encourage you and I plead with you not to take my word for anything in the next 12 weeks, but to check up on everything I say and make sure it rings true in this book (The Bible).

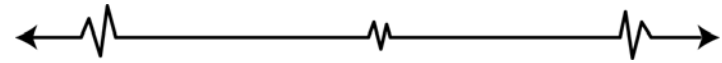
If you want to know the part that I play, and I think you should know, let's do a little Bible work and turn to **JOHN 9:1-6** "*Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes...*" Now just think about that! What a gross way to heal someone - hack in the dirt and take a blob of mud and smear it in a man's eyes! I don't think too many ophthalmologists would get away with that type of technique today. Why in the world doesn't Jesus do it like the faith healers on T.V. - wave his hand over the guy, bop him on the head and say "COME OUT!!", or just go "snap, presto, you're healed?" Why go through all this muddy process? Well as we look at the Bible throughout this course we're going to see more and more that generally when God does things, He uses means. And He lets people, through those means, believe and participate in the process. Very rarely does He work "immediately", or "without means". So when Jesus uses the mud, He's simply being consistent.

Now, let me ask you a question as you look at that particular section. Do you think it's the dirt, the spit, the mud, or the power of Christ that gave this man his sight back? It's the power of Christ, isn't it? But He chooses to exercise that power through means. Well I am the mud - in this class. I cannot make you see anything; I have never converted anyone. I don't have that power or ability. That is the realm of the Holy Spirit. The only thing I have a right to do and a responsibility to do is to speak God's Word as clearly, as concisely, as excitingly, as I possibly know how, and let God's Spirit work in your heart.

Leader's Note

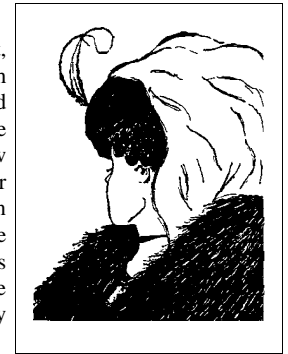
Miniature pictures of the PowerPoint illustrations will be shown throughout the course on the right side of your leader's notes, with our suggested lecture material on the left.

The following "Old Hag" pictures have been around for a while, but are still quite useful. The same exercise can be done with the "Baby in the tree" illustration. The composite picture (FFL 1) could be shown briefly to the whole class. Then you can ask what they saw. Some will see an "old hag" and some will see a "pretty woman". You can then use the pictures of the "old hag" and the "pretty woman" to help get the whole class to see them both.



Old Hag/Pretty Woman

All of us approach the church, pastors, the Bible, faith in Christ, from different perceptions based on how we've seen them through our experience. The frustrating thing is that all of us have had different experiences, so all of us are naturally going to have different perceptions of those things. Well folks, how do you know your perception is accurate? For some of you, when you consider the church, all you can see is the "old Hag", because that has been your experience. Maybe you really were treated badly by the church or by a pastor and you've judged the whole church of Jesus Christ based on that experience. What I would like to do in the next 12 weeks, is to challenge your perception. You don't really know if the picture



you have is accurate unless you've looked at things long enough to get "the big picture". You know the Church is called the "bride of Christ." Folks, there are no ugly brides. Stay with me through this course and let me show you the "pretty woman" of the faith in Jesus...

Baby in the Tree

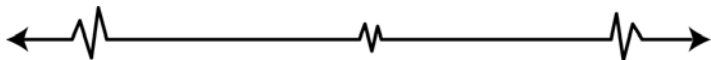
If you've seen the old hag and pretty woman picture before, maybe you haven't seen this one. Can you tell me what you see here? (Give them time to catch it.)



Now folks, because you saw the baby before or after someone else in the class does not make you a better or worse person right? It just means that you had an initial perception that was different than others. On the other hand, it is also

true that a person's perception is reality for him/her, so if you didn't take the time to examine this picture more closely you might go away with an inaccurate perception of what it really is.

In the same way folks, is it not true that we all come with certain perceptions about the church, the pastor, about the Bible, about the Christian faith, and so forth? But how do you know that your perception is accurate? Again, all of us have had different experiences and we judge based on our experiences. Sometimes my job is to unteach the unbiblical ideas people have picked up over the years... Anyway, maybe there's something to the faith you haven't seen. I challenge you in the next 12 weeks to let me show it to you.



Story

Josh had heard a family rumor that his father, his grandfather and even his great-grandfather, all “walked on water” on their 21st birthday. Well, today was his 21st birthday and he figured if they could do it, so could he.

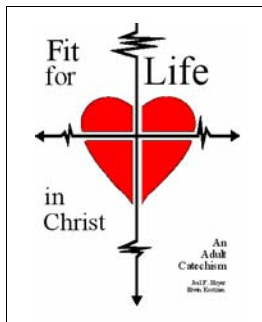
So, off he went in a boat with his friend Jake. When he got out in the middle of the lake, he got up and stepped out of the boat.... And nearly drowned!

The next day, Josh asked his grandmother why he wasn’t given the same gift as the others in his family. His grandmother told him that his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been born in February, not in August like he was.

Folks, I would simply suggest to you that before you try to walk on water, make sure you have all the information you need...

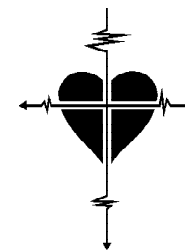
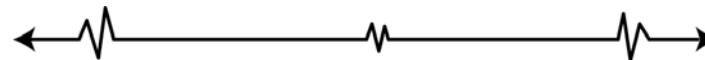
About the Cover

Now let’s get into this course. First of all, I would like you to place this manual directly in front of you with the cover closed. This picture on the cover is going to represent what we’re about for the next 12 weeks. You see the EKG line coming down from above, representing the fact that life comes from God. Then you see that the line goes into a heart and forms a cross in the heart. And we simply say that God in Grace has made us *Fit for Life* with Him through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The horizontal EKG lines show that the *Fit for Life* story doesn’t end with the coming of Christ, and the sacrifice of Christ. God loved us and gave His Son to die for us, **so that** we can share the love of Christ with others.



Finally, if you lay the cover on the table, one arrow is going to be pointing directly at you. Folks, you need to know that right now the one God is most concerned with is you. Not the other guy/gal – you. You are the one who matters to Him; you are the one He wants to fill with His love and His life.

Folks, I have a phenomenal message for you in this course. You matter to God! God wants a relationship with you! God wants to live with you forever! I want to teach you and drive home to your heart that Jesus Christ would rather suffer hell for you than to be in heaven without you.

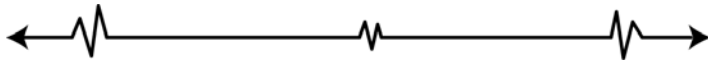


Fit for Life in Christ

**“I have come that they may have life,
and have it to the full.”
John 10:10**

AN ADULT CATECHISM

By
Joel F. Hoyer
Erwin Kostizen



Fit for Life Preface

We all know about “physical fitness”. It is quite common to hear people talk about their cholesterol and their blood pressure, and their total body fat and so forth. Of course, it’s one thing to talk about being “physically fit” and it’s another thing to get there. The saying holds true: “There’s no gain without pain”. If you really want that kind of *Fit for Life* body, then you have to work and sweat and make it happen. But in the coming weeks we want to introduce you to a whole different concept - a “fitness” and a quality of life that doesn’t come from our pain and work, but from the pain and suffering of Jesus Christ.

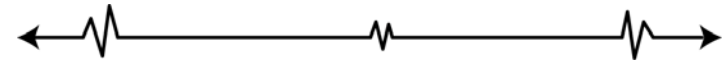
Jesus said, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!*” Folks, how many of you feel that you have enough life - you’re satisfied - you don’t need any more? All of us want more. And that’s what Jesus came to bring! But that’s not the perception of the church, is it?

Basically there are three reasons why people shun churches today. They feel it takes away their freedom, takes away their fun, or takes away their fulfillment in life. Well, those misconceptions may come from the preacher or from the Church, but it sure didn’t come from Jesus. Jesus is the one who has said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” Free from guilt, free from blame, free from sin, free from shame.

How about “fun”? Well, I’m into fun; I’m not one of these sour-faced preachers that don’t think you can have any fun. But you know something that’s interesting is that the word “fun” isn’t in the Bible. In the Bible God talks about “joy”. One is produced on the exterior, and the other is produced on the inside. To have “fun” you need a bigger fix, a bigger drink, a bigger chest, a bigger toy, etc. But “joy” is a satisfaction and a peace that comes from within...

And how about “fulfillment”? In the world’s eye’s it’s when I get this car or house or job etc., but have you noticed - those things never really seem to give you a lasting sense of fulfillment, once we achieve one stage, there’s always something else we think we need. We’re never satisfied. We’re expecting **things** to provide the fulfillment that only God can give. Well folks, Jesus came into this world to make your life as full, as rich, and as meaningful as it can possibly be.

Now, I’m going to be very honest about the object of this class. I want to lead you to a dilemma. I want to lead you to the cross. And the bottom line when you get there is going to be, “*Are you going to let Jesus save you, or are you going to walk away and keep trying to make it on your own?*” (The Frank Sinatra religion - “I did it my way!”) Do you realize that the church is the only organization/institution on earth in order for which to qualify, you have to admit that you don’t belong? The church is a spiritual hospital for the sick. We don’t go to church because we think we’re better than other people, but because we realize that we need help. Just so you know where I’m going, the heart of my message to you in this course is “*God loves you. You matter to God. He makes you Fit for Life in Christ.*” And here at least is one place where I hope that you will feel safe and accepted and loved...

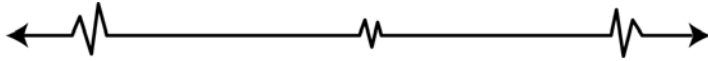


Preface

Physical fitness is “in”. The message of the health clubs is that if you just work hard and get your body into good enough shape, then you’ll be “fit for life.” Advertising has embellished this theme to amazing heights. The right kind of deodorant will turn you into a macho “110%” athlete. The use of a certain toothpaste is your key to getting the girl/guy of your dreams. The consumption of certain kinds of light beer will guarantee you a flat belly, bulging muscles and lots of friends. It’s to the point where many people believe that they are only one commercial away from fulfillment.

Now, nothing against deodorants, toothpaste, beer, or many of the other things that have been connected with being “fit for life,” but if you’ve exercised enough, used enough deodorants, or drank enough beer, you know that those things just don’t come through on their promises. No matter how much you exercise you can’t stop the wrinkles from coming or the hairline from receding. No matter how much deodorant you use there are still times when you’re going to sweat and stink. And obviously, if you drink enough beer it will only help to make you “unfit.” On the other hand, even if we take perfect care of our bodies physically, there is a spiritual dimension to our lives that demands even more attention. Someone has said, “Eat well, stay fit, die anyway.” And then what?

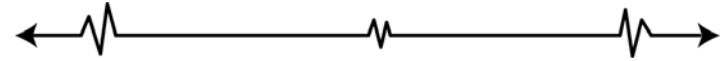
This book will show you a different kind of life, a life that is made “fit” not by the world’s standards, but by a gift of God. Jesus said, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!*”(John 10:10). Jesus promised to give you more life! He fulfilled that promise by dying on the cross to take away your sins, and by rising to life again. Jesus is the Lord of Life. Open your ears and your heart to His Word and let Him be the Lord of your life.



Preface cont.

Someone has said, “*Christianity is the hardest as well as the easiest religion in the world.*” I believe that’s true. I think sometimes the hardest thing for us to do in life is to admit that we’re not SELF-sufficient. But folks, you need to know that you cannot get yourself into heaven. You can’t exercise and sweat your way into heaven. You can’t “pretty” your way into heaven. You can’t act your way into heaven. That is a gift that God gives. Most of you would probably say, “*Oh pastor, I’m not such a bad guy. I’m at least better than the average Joe Shmo. I’ve tried to live a good life, I’ve tried to keep the 10 Commandments, I live by the golden rule...*”. But the question I want to raise to you is this: If we are such good people, then why did there need to be the Cross in history? Why did Jesus have to die? See folks, the Bible is always more realistic than we are with ourselves. And the Bible simply comes along and says, “*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God...*” But the Good News for us is that passage goes on to say that we are “*justified (or made fit for life with God) freely, by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*” The Bible also says: (1 John 5:12) “*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*”

We are *Fit for Life* with God - BY GOD - through Jesus Christ. “*All this,*” as Luther says, “*purely out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.*”

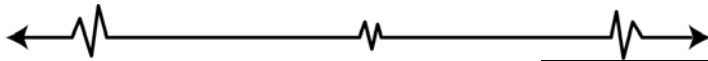


Preface

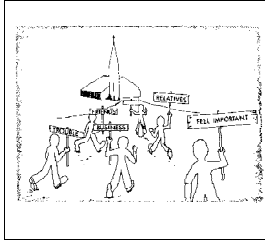
Physical fitness is “in”. The message of the health clubs is that if you just work hard and get your body into good enough shape, then you’ll be “fit for life.” Advertising has embellished this theme to amazing heights. The right kind of deodorant will turn you into a macho “110%” athlete. The use of a certain toothpaste is your key to getting the girl/guy of your dreams. The consumption of certain kinds of light beer will guarantee you a flat belly, bulging muscles and lots of friends. It’s to the point where many people believe that they are only one commercial away from fulfillment.

Now, nothing against deodorants, toothpaste, beer, or many of the other things that have been connected with being “fit for life,” but if you’ve exercised enough, used enough deodorants, or drank enough beer, you know that those things just don’t come through on their promises. No matter how much you exercise you can’t stop the wrinkles from coming or the hairline from receding. No matter how much deodorant you use there are still times when you’re going to sweat and stink. And obviously, if you drink enough beer it will only help to make you “unfit.” On the other hand, even if we take perfect care of our bodies physically, there is a spiritual dimension to our lives that demands even more attention. Someone has said, “Eat well, stay fit, die anyway.” And then what?

This book will show you a different kind of life, a life that is made “fit” not by the world’s standards, but by a gift of God. Jesus said, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!*”(John 10:10). Jesus promised to give you more life! He fulfilled that promise by dying on the cross to take away your sins, and by rising to life again. Jesus is the Lord of Life. Open your ears and your heart to His Word and let Him be the Lord of your life.



In this illustration you see people all flocking to church. We're used to seeing that aren't we – people breaking down the doors of the church to get in... Well, maybe not, nevertheless, over time, people are making their way to this place. And all of them come for a reason. They're all carrying their signs. Some come just because it's "good for business." They meet contacts and get a good rep. Some come in a crisis situation. Some come just to feel important for a change. Some people come to church because a friend or relative asks



them. In fact, most surveys show that around 80% first visit a church for that reason. What does that tell you about your role in bringing people here??

And then there's you... the one with the blank sign. I don't know why you're here. Who knows, maybe I even twisted your arm a little. But now that you are here, I hope we can write on that sign: "I want to be Fit for Life!" I want a relationship with Jesus Christ that is going to fill my life up and give it meaning. Because that's what we're about here. So let's get started. Let's examine this *Fit for Life* idea a little more closely. Just how "fit" is man?

Physically

As usual, the Bible is always more realistic than we are, and it very simply shows to us the common denominator that makes us all alike...(Psalm 90:10)

Psalm 90:10 - The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

The older you get the more you realize how true those words are, and how short is the span of life.

Emotionally/Morally

Here is the glowing description of man in his natural condition:

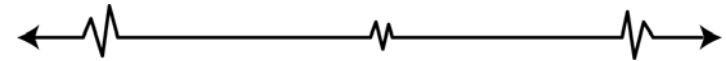
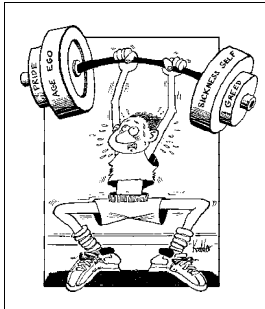
Romans 1:29-31 - They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless...

That is the advertisement for the next CBS Mini-series. It's amazing how current this list is, isn't it? And how true? This is the state of the world – without Christ. As you can see from the cartoon, our poor Fit for Life guy has some serious problems: pride, age, ego, sickness, self, greed. The reality is, on our own; we simply are not Fit for Life with God.

Spiritually Blind, Dead and Enemies

Do you ever wonder sometimes, why it's so difficult to do God's will? - Why, in spite of the best "fitness plans" for our lives physically and mentally, we still can't seem to feel fit for life with God? It's because we aren't! It's pretty hard to find God or come to Him when by nature we don't want to have anything to do with Him.

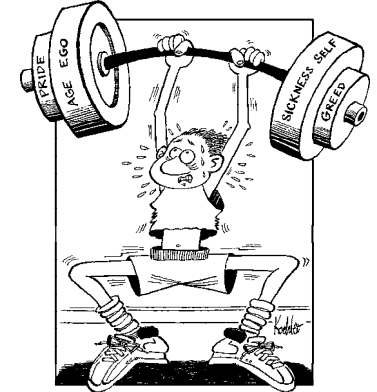
Many people talk about their great search for God. Well I have news for you folks, God was never lost! The problem with that concept is, we are the ones who are lost. God is the one who always has to look for us. Let's just take a look at the "lost and found" chapter of the Bible to show you what I mean... ([Luke 15](#))



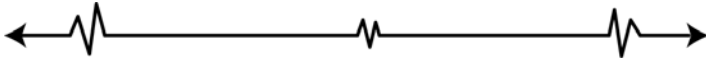
Lesson 1

Fit For Life Through Grace

I. How Fit Are You?



- A. Physically (Psalm 90:10)?
- B. Emotionally/Morally (Romans 1:29-31)?
- C. Spiritually (Luke 15)?
 - 1. We are spiritually **blind** (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).



Spiritually Blind, Dead and Enemies Cont.

A lot of folks have said as they approach our church, “Pastor, I like this church and the people and everything, but I have to confess that I don’t like the part in your order of service where I’m supposed to confess that I’m a poor miserable sinner.” “Well, what don’t you like?” I’ll say.

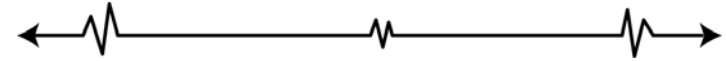
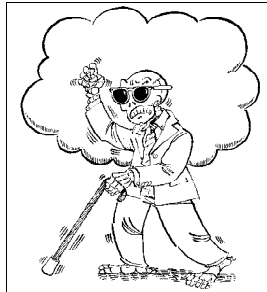
“Well, I can maybe admit that I haven’t been quite as good as I should have been, or quite as good as God wants me to be, but after all, a ‘poor miserable sinner?!’ I think that’s a little too much...” So, often I say to those folks, “You know, maybe you’re just the person I’ve been looking for. I need someone to volunteer for testing out some new equipment we’ve got for the church. Yeah, modern technology has made available a large video screen that we can place up front here, and we can hook up some electrodes and play for the congregation every thought that has passed through your head today.” You know I haven’t had a volunteer yet!

Folks, I want you to know something. God already has one of those machines. He knows every thought that has passed through your mind, every wrong thing you have ever said or done or thought, and all the good you have failed to do. And yet He still loves you. How do we know? The proof is in the cross. He sent His Son to die for us. Jesus didn’t die for good people, but for people who are physically, emotionally/morally, spiritually unfit for life with Him...

Spiritually Blind

Your illustration shows three important truths about man without God. We are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. For instance, most people like to think they see pretty well, but without the “light of Christ shining in their hearts” their eyes are really only open to themselves.

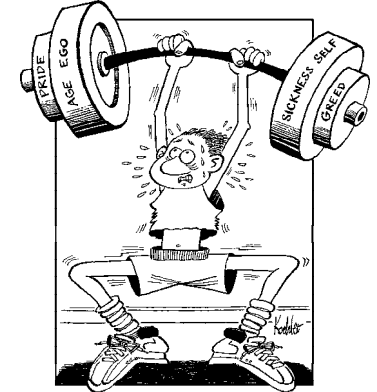
2 Corinthians 4:4 -- The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.



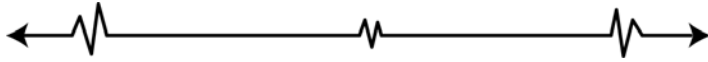
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Spiritually Dead

Again, most folks think they have life, but did you realize that we have people out there in every walk of life that are dead? There are people working at their jobs who are dead, people driving their cars who are dead, (don't dwell on that when you get in your car and leave tonight) people with their hearts beating a mile a minute, but they're dead because they don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the source of life and light. And here we see things a little bit differently than a segment of Christianity that talks about "making a decision to believe in Jesus". Folks, how can I do that if I'm dead? People who are spiritually dead have no impulse for God. They cannot just make a decision to believe whenever they want to. God is the one who has to take the initiative. Jesus put it this way: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (**John 6:44**).

Ephesians 2:1-5 -- As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world...Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.

See also:

John 6:65 - He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

Matthew 16:17 - Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

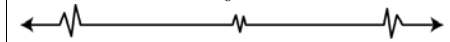
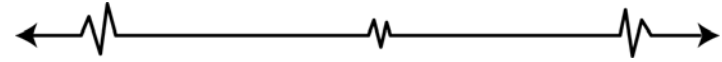
John 15:16 - You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

What do these verses say about the idea that I can choose to believe in Jesus whenever I want to?

God's Enemies

Folks, if Christ was everybody's friend, they'd be breaking down the doors to get to church. But we don't see that happening, do we? In reality, by nature we have the opposite feeling toward God. People don't like to be accountable to God for their lives, so instead of coming to him in humility and repentance, they avoid him and set themselves up in His place. They may even deny the existence of God - because "gods" don't like to be accountable to "God".

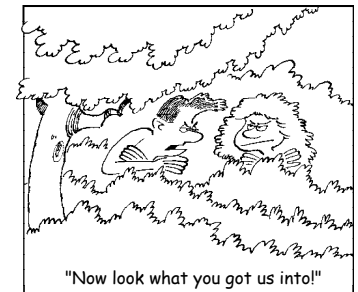
Romans 5:10 - For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

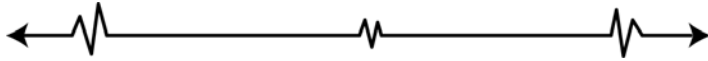


2. We are spiritually **dead** (Ephesians 2:1-5).
3. We are by nature God's **enemies** (Romans 5:6-10).

D. The Rise And **Fall** of Man.

1. In the original plan all things were **good** (Genesis 1:31).
 - Man and woman were originally made in the **image** of God and were "*fit for life*" with Him (Genesis 1:27, Ephesians 4:24).
2. But Satan's temptation appealed too well to the eye (**I**): "Your eyes will be opened, and you will be **like God**" (Genesis 3:5).
 - a. In reality their eyes became open only to themselves.





Fall

You know there are a lot of “self help” programs, a lot of “positive thinking” programs out today that talk about the “rise” of man. “Unlock your Potential”... “Be all you can be...” etc. And a lot of that is great stuff. God has great plans for you folks, and we need

to dream big and think positively about what He has in store for us, but at the same time, there is a reality that all of us must face, and that is the “fall of man” into sin.

In your illustration you see that in the beginning everything that God made was good. The created order was good, the relationship between Adam and Eve was good and the relationship with God was good. After the Fall of man into sin all of that got messed up. The created order is messed up, the world is broken (Paul says it’s groaning – Rom. 8:21), the relationship between people is messed up - snarly faces (how do you think Eve felt when Adam blamed the first sin on her?), the relationship with God is messed up - flaming sword, banished from the garden.



Good

Not just O.K. Everything was just exactly the way it was meant to be.

Genesis 1:31 -- God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...

Image of God

Certainly not that God somehow physically looks like us, but that spiritually they were like Him - no sin - created in the righteousness and holiness of God. They were naked and were not “ashamed.”

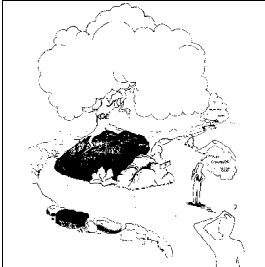
Genesis 1:27 -- So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

See also Genesis 2:25 -- The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

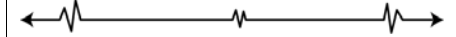
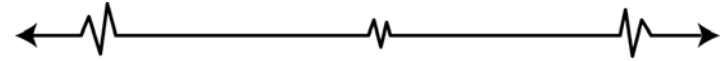
Ephesians 4:24 -- ...created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Like God

(Genesis 3:1-7 Narrative. Here we generally walk the class through Genesis 3 and its importance) Satan, the deceiver, always twists God’s Word to his own ends, making promises that always make “I” into “#1”. This temptation is by the way, as popular as ever with the rise of “New Age” religions and eastern mysticism. In the illustration the tree in the middle looks fabulous – has Satan ever given you a temptation that looked lame? Eve’s thought bubble shows the strategy of Satan with temptation. First he casts doubt on God’s Word, then he contradicts and twists the Word, then He makes promises of His own.



The illustration also brings out another interesting thought. How many trees were in the middle of the Garden of Eden? There were two, weren’t there. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they were commanded not to eat from, but the tree of life was also there. But in the midst of temptation, God and His promises seem far away.



2. We are spiritually **dead** (Ephesians 2:1-5).

3. We are by nature God’s **enemies** (Romans 5:6-10).

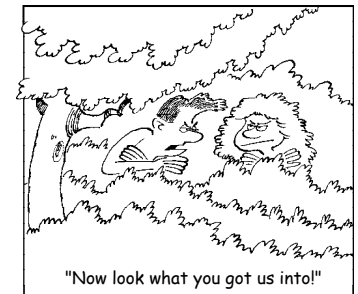
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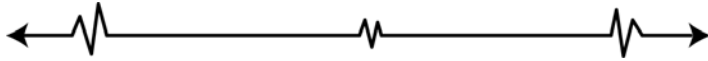
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Like God cont.

By the way, it was Eve who was deceived, right? Adam had nothing to do with it. He was clean on the other side of the garden minding his own business, right? What does the Bible say? “She gave some to Adam, who was with her.” So the Bible, in the New Testament, gives Adam the responsibility, because he could have put a stop to it. Instead, he joined her in sin.

Fear

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day....” and they ran out and said, “Here we are! We’re sorry, we blew it, please forgive us...” No. “They hid from the Lord God...” That’s what we do, isn’t it, when we sin. We hide. Don’t be surprised because you haven’t been to church in a while, or that people don’t seem to want to go to church. We’re still hiding! We know our sin and don’t want to come to the light where it can be exposed.

But God shows us here that’s not what he wants. That’s not what’s going to help us get our relationships back in order. So He comes to them and He calls out, “Where are you?” Now folks, obviously He knew. He is the All-knowing, All-seeing God. So why does He ask the question? Sometimes I wonder if it isn’t to show them dramatically how ridiculous it was for them to try to hide from God. Certainly though, it was to give them an opportunity to repent. To say, “Here I am. I confess. I blew it. Please forgive me.” Instead he answers, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” Folks, he’s not just talking about the fact that he suddenly realized after all this time he didn’t have any clothes on. He was also talking about the inner shame and nakedness he was feeling for the first time over what he had done.

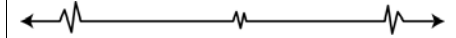
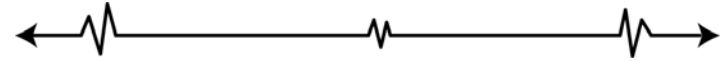
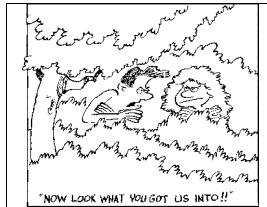
So God again gives Adam an opportunity to confess, to join in the process of getting the relationship back together...He says “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Again, obviously God knew what had happened. But He was giving Adam an opportunity to take responsibility for his sin. Instead, what happens?

He says, “Yes Lord, I’m sorry. I did it.” No. He kicks off a game that has been played again and again in relationships ever since that time. The Blaming and Shaming Game. “It was the woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree...” It’s not my fault God. It was that woman. And by the way, I didn’t ask for that woman. You were the one who made her, so take her back, give me back my rib and everything will be o.k. again. Not only does he blame Eve, He blames God for putting her there.

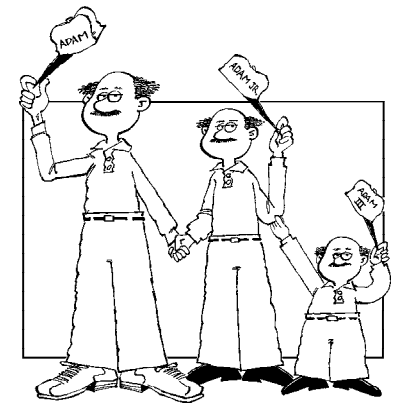
And of course, the blaming game continues. The Lord confronts Eve, “What is this you have done?” Again, giving her the opportunity to take responsibility. Instead, she continues the game and passes the buck to Satan. “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” “The devil made me do it.” Which has been a pretty popular excuse ever since. Of course the Devil never makes us sin, he just displays our options.

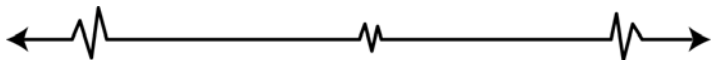
Hurt

Instead of supporting Eve and admitting his mistake, Adam tries to save his own skin at Eve’s expense. Again, just try to imagine how Eve must have felt to hear Adam selling her out, when he was there the whole time and just as responsible for the Fall as she was. The walls continue to go up...



- b. The “likeness” of God was not gained, but lost.
 - c. Trust in God became **fear** of God (Genesis 3:10).
 - d. Help between man and woman became **hurt** (Genesis 3:12).
 - e. The blessing of creation became a **curse** (Genesis 3:16-19).
3. When man fell, he fell all the way.
 - a. We are now born in Adam’s “image” (Genesis 5:3).





Adam & Eve Story

When Adam stayed out late for a few nights, Eve became upset. “You’re running around with other women,” she charged.

“You’re being unreasonable,” Adam responded. “You’re the only woman on earth.”

The quarrel continued until Adam fell asleep, only to be awakened by someone poking him in the chest. It was Eve.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Adam demanded.

“Counting ribs,” said Eve.

Curse

Life is now “fit” only for death. By the way, this is the reason why we have to experience thorns and thistles and blood-sucking mosquitoes today. This is also why we have the suffering & death caused by earthquakes, famines, volcanoes, etc. The created order was cursed. In the illustration you see the cobra and mongoose “fighting it out”. The other elements of the curse are there as well. Eve will bear children in pain. Her husband will “rule” over her instead of serving with her. Adam’s work will no longer be easy and pleasant. “By the sweat of His brow” he will eat his food. The center of the world shows the skull and crossbones. Death has now entered the world, relationships are destroyed. Barriers go up – between God and man, between mankind, and between man and creation.

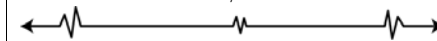
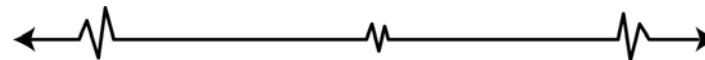


But already in the pronouncement of the curse we see the Grace of God at work. The one who would “crush Satan’s head” is promised. God has pity on naked Adam and Eve and clothes them in something more long-lasting than fig leaves! There’s hope and a future.

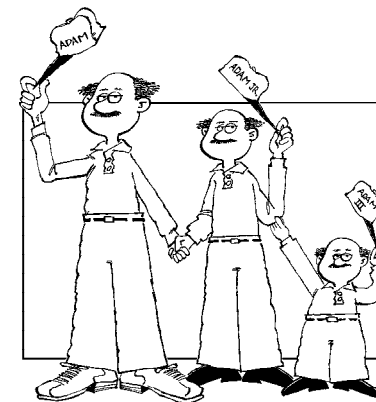
Genesis 3:16-19 -- 16 To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” 17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

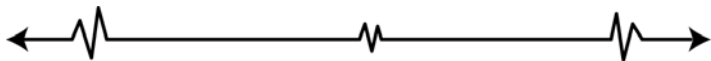
For the “Cursed Creation” See Also:

Romans 8:20-21 -- For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.



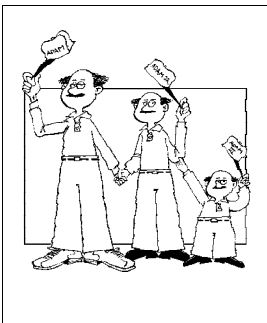
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"Image" Story

A pastor was introducing a liturgical worship format to his congregation. And they spent some time practicing the liturgy before the service began. At one point the pastor addressed the congregation saying, "Now Remember, I will say: 'The Lord be with you', and you will respond, 'And also with you.'" Unfortunately, the pastor was also trying out one of those new wireless microphone systems and as the service began he was having some difficulty getting it to work. Tapping it in frustration, he mumbled under his breath, "There's something wrong with you." But of course, the sound system took that moment to operate loudly and clearly, and without missing a beat, the congregation rose and replied in unison, "And also with you!"



And of course, there's a lot of truth to that story isn't there? There **is** something wrong with me and something wrong with you. My unethical behavior, my selfishness, my pride, the wrong things I do and think...that something the Bible identifies as SIN. And folks, like it or not that's a problem that you have and that's a problem I have. In fact, the devil probably works overtime on preachers and church leaders, because if he can get us, he has a better chance of getting you, doesn't he?

No, all of us, as the Bible says, have sinned (and continue to sin) and fall short of the glory of God. That's why we're here, in this spiritual hospital, to find cleansing and healing and new life...

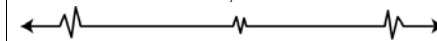
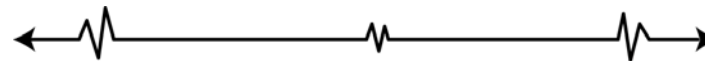
Genesis 5:3 -- When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

Bonus Break Time Story

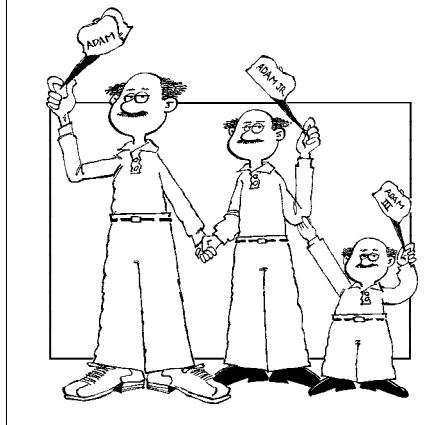
A pastor and cab driver die and they go to heaven, and up in heaven they are assigned their condos and apartments. And this cabby, he gets this French Villa that you would not believe, and the preacher gets this shack! Practically an outhouse! So the preacher gets a little perturbed and he goes to see St. Peter to register his complaint. "Hey," he says, "I'm sorry, but there's gotta be something wrong here. I did everything for you down there. I worked and I sacrificed. And I was so faithful, and here this cabby gets this villa, and I get a shack. There's gotta be some mistake."

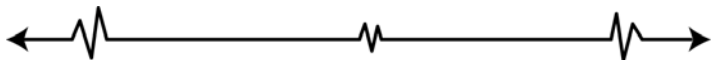
And Peter looks at his records and says, "No, no mistake at all." And the pastor says, "Well, how can it be?"

Peter says: "Well, it's very simple. When the cabby drove, people prayed. When you preached, they slept."



- b. The "likeness" of God was not gained, but lost.
 - c. Trust in God became **fear** of God (Genesis 3:10).
 - d. Help between man and woman became **hurt** (Genesis 3:12).
 - e. The blessing of creation became a **curse** (Genesis 3:16-19).
3. When man fell, he fell all the way.
- a. We are now born in Adam's "image" (Genesis 5:3).





Inclination

There's a big argument today about why people turn out the way they do. Some say "It's the environment," some say "It's genetics." In any case, the prevailing opinion is that mankind is basically good. It's a philosophy called "TABULA RASA," simply a fancy way of saying that when you were born into this world, you came in with a "clean slate." Then, because of the failings and shortcomings of your parents, relatives, teachers, the government, etc., as you grew up your life got messed up. The Biblical model says, "No, from the moment you were conceived you had a nature that was sinful." I am not a sinner because I sin, I sin because I am a sinner. Sin is not just about what we do, it's about who we are. Just to give you an example, let me ask you: Do you ever have to teach your children to be selfish, to cheat, to lie? No, those are the things that just come naturally. But try to get them just to do some simple things like say "Please" and "Thank-you"...It's like pulling teeth, isn't it? Well, where does that come from - the baby formula? No, it comes from the "fall" of man. You see, I not only **commit** sin, I do it because I **am** a sinner.

In a sense, sin is a genetic defect that has been passed down to all of us. Oh, they'll never be able to isolate it in the lab, but it's there just the same and we can never "breed" it out. (Theologically speaking, the concept we are talking about is "Original Sin.")

You can take a sow, and get the old scrub brush, and clean it up and perfume it and tie a pretty pink ribbon around it, and the next time you walk by a mud puddle watch what it will do. It's the same way with people. (2 Peter 2:22) People sin because it is their nature to do so. Luther said that we are "At the same time sinner and saint." The world says: "Get educated and you'll be a good person." But don't we see people today with top degrees who are filled with greed, lust, envy, selfishness, adultery? Some of the most highly educated people we have in this country have become the most corrupt. In recent years we have seen company after company forced to reveal fraudulent accounting practices and schemes that have cost stockholders billions of dollars. Folks, those aren't company sins, those are very high placed owners and white collar workers who are simply stealing from the company to satisfy their own evil desires.

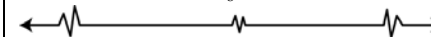
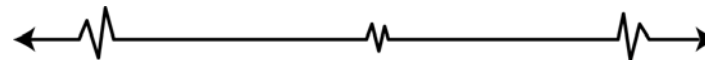
Romans 7:18 -- I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

Reconcile

For those of you who are married, you know when you've had a "good" fight? One of those butt to butt arguments, when you're laying in bed with your backs to each other waiting for him/her to apologize? And then you finally do make up and get back in each other's arms and things are almost better than before?... That's what this word "reconcile" is all about. That's what needs to happen between God and us. And that is what has happened through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Already in Gen. 3:15, after the fall, God had planned what he would do and prophesied the coming of the Savior. Also in Genesis 3:21 we see God taking pity on Adam and Eve and clothing them in something more permanent than fig leaves. In fact, the Bible says that He clothed them in animal skins. Well, how do you get an animal skin? He must have killed at least one animal. This

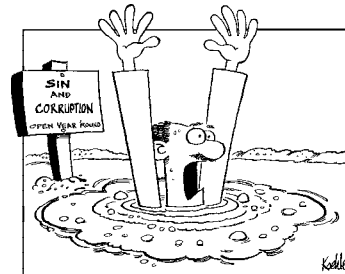


illustration presents it as a lamb, a picture of the promise of God to send a redeemer, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



b. Our **inclination** is no longer to do good, but to do evil (Romans 7:14-25).

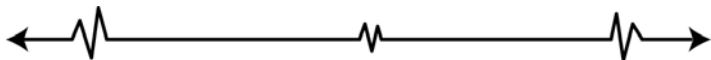
4. The whole remainder of the Bible is the record of God working in history to **reconcile** man to Himself and **restore** the original relationship (Genesis 3:15). God must lift us up. We cannot do it ourselves (John 3:1-15).



"Help... I've fallen and I can't get up!"

E. Question: Why Did God Let it Happen?

Answer: Because He **loves us**.



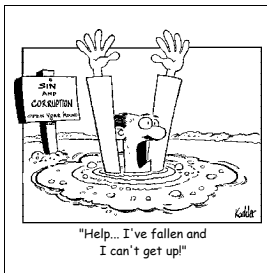
Reconcile cont.

Genesis 3:15 -- And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

God Must Lift Us Up

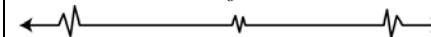
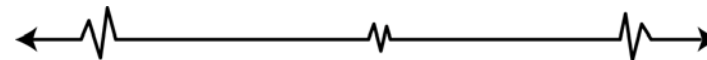
The adverb “*ἀνωθεν*” from John 3:3 is a picture word to describe something coming down from above... Tell me folks, how much did you have to do with your physical conception? Were you responsible for the gleam in your daddy’s eye? Well then why do we somehow think that we have to be the ones responsible for our spiritual birth? God is always the one who brings us into the kingdom. We’re just like the guy who’s fallen and can’t get up. God is the one who has to lift us up from the mire of sin.

John 3:3 -- In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born from above.”



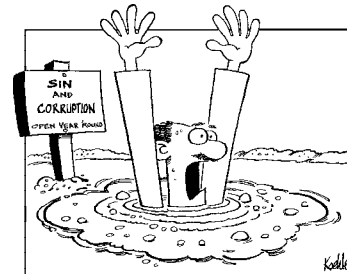
He loves us

Did you ever wonder why God created the universe in the first place? Well, the Bible says that “God is love”. In other words, loving is not just one of the things God does...It’s what God does all the time! It’s who God is. Now, can you see a God who “is love” just sitting in heaven with his arms around himself loving himself for all eternity? He needed someone upon whom to bestow His love - even though He knew beforehand how painful that love could be. And because He wanted a real, loving relationship with us, He had to build into us the ability to reject Him...



b. Our **inclination** is no longer to do good, but to do evil (Romans 7:14-25).

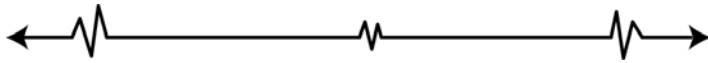
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Rejection

Love cannot be forced or compelled. Of course God could have created the world to be in eternal harmony with no disease and no death and no sin forever and ever, but in order to do that, He would have had to install little computer chips in all of us and program us to do exactly what He wanted. And there would have been no true love relationship with God. God had to build into man a free will in order for him to truly and freely love Him and others.

Without Choice

God wants us to love Him because we choose to love Him, not because we have to, not because we're afraid of Him.

Consequence

And how we hate the consequences... But if we choose to reject God, then we must accept the consequences of that rejection.

Fixes

Theologically speaking, we are talking about "repentance". This is fast becoming a foreign concept in our society today. Very rarely will anyone admit they were wrong. For instance, from time to time in our society, various public officials are called upon to make public apologies for something they've screwed up. Almost inevitably, that apology will be more in the way of explanation than admission of wrongdoing. (Nixon, Magic Johnson, Clinton, Jesse Jackson, etc. you pick the latest public figure...) Folks, in our relationship with God, that won't wash. He knows everything we've done and failed to do. If we are to stand before Him at all, we must do so in humility and sorrow over our sins. It's like the guy with the cholesterol clogged arteries from eating too many burgers. He finally comes to the point of needing more than exercise. He needs surgery. We can't do anything ourselves to take care of our sin problem. We must allow him to give us a new heart and a new spirit. And Jesus, the "Chief Physician" is able to do just that as He confronts and comforts, breaks you and binds you up with the Word of God, the Bible. God says in Ezekiel...



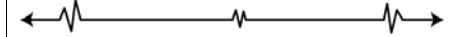
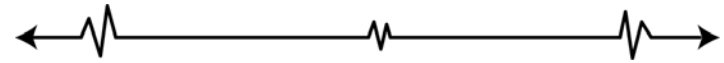
Ezekiel 36:26 -- I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

2 Peter 3:9 -- The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

By the way, for this surgery to be successful, we need a complete transfusion. My word must be replaced by God's Word.

My

Our practice is to try and rationalize our sin - to pretend it doesn't exist or that it's really not all that bad - that we're not really that spiritually "out of shape". We no longer accept responsibility for our actions. We either accuse or excuse. We blame the environment or our parents or society. Our apologies are: "I'm sorry you feel that way." or "I'm sorry you took it that way."



1. Love always runs the risk of **rejection**.

There is no love **without choice**.

2. There is no choice without **consequence**.

Community Builder: What are you tempted by that is sinful, expensive, or fattening? When during your growing up years did you get into big trouble with your parents? Tell about an occasion when you were afraid of God.

II. God's Fitness Program

A. He **fixes** Your Heart
(Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Peter 3:9).

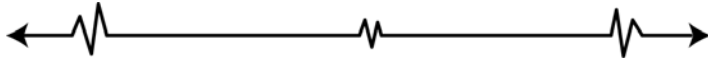
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2. **Repentance** is the mark of a Christian.

B. He forgives your sins - By **Grace** for Christ's Sake through Faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

1. Definitions of Grace:

"**Undeserved love**" and forgiveness (Romans 11:6).



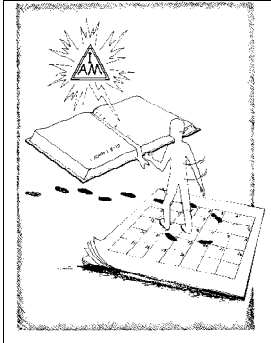
My Cont.

Well as always, God's Word is far more realistic. It simply tells us to stop kidding ourselves and see the truth. We need to stop and realize that God has your whole life on DVD. Every wrong thing you've ever done and every evil thought. How would you like to have Jesus sit down with you in your living room and play the 10 most revealing segments?

1 John 1:8-9 -- If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Repentance

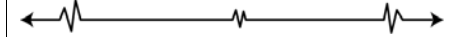
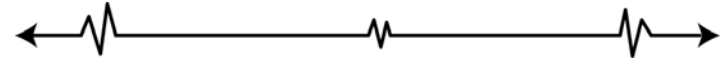
The first step back to "fitness" with God is REPENTANCE. Repentance involves saying something that is very difficult for the modern U.S. citizen to say - the three hardest words in the English language, "I WAS WRONG." "Period." No excuses, no explanations. Just "I was wrong, please forgive me." It's the admission that you were going the wrong way with your life and now you have resolved to turn around and walk with Jesus. The reason the guy is on the calendar in the illustration is that unfortunately, this isn't just a one time thing. Every day we fall into sin and every day we need to come clean with God. We need to repent and turn back to Him. That's the distinguishing mark of a Christian. Certainly we want to be growing in faith and in living out our faith, but it's the ability to sincerely repent of your sins that shows that faith is present. People who don't believe in Jesus don't feel that same need to repent. Rather, they feel the need to keep their sin buried and hidden. The Christian brings it out into the open before God so that it can be forgiven.



Repentance Story

You've all probably heard the one about a man who won a contract to paint a small country church. The man showed up on Monday with his paint but nobody was there to supervise him. The painter was more interested in making a buck than doing a good job, so he took the paint and thinned it with two quarts of water. He painted like this on the first side of the church then began to paint the second. Still nobody had shown up to supervise him so he took the paint and thinned it even more. This was going to be a lucrative job. He had hardly used any paint.

Well, late in the day he began the third side of the church. He looked around and saw that nobody was watching him so he got ready to thin the paint out even more. Suddenly, without any warning, a huge blast of thunder and lightning split the heavens, knocking the crooked painter off the ladder. And a booming voice came from the sky: "REPAINT AND THIN NO MORE!"



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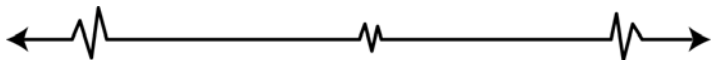
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Grace

The second part of God's fitness plan, the beautiful, glorious, central part, is FORGIVENESS. (Ephesians 2:8-9) The Bible says that we receive forgiveness and faith itself as a gift, "not by works, so that no one can boast." Folks, if we could be saved by works, we would boast about it, isn't that true? Because then we would be smarter than the average Joe Blow who doesn't believe in Jesus, because we'd have figured it out and by virtue of our superior intellect. But here the Bible says that even our faith is a gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 -- For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast.

Undeserved Love

God just loves us, that's why He sent His Son, that's why He saves us. We're not saved "by faith" by the way, but "by **grace - through** faith". There's a difference. God doesn't save us because we believe in Him, but because He wants us to be saved. Faith is only the receiving hand that humbly accepts what God has already done for us in Christ. Essentially, it is always God who is coming to you, chipping away at the hardness of your heart with the good news that He loves you and forgives you despite what you've done or failed to do in your life.

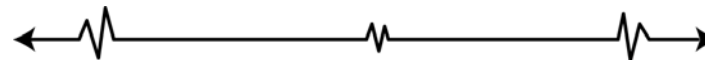
Now all this doesn't mean that God is just winking at the evil things you have done. The Bible says that as a just God He does punish sin. And we all want a just judge, don't we? We detest a judge who let's the guilty find loopholes that let them go free. So, if we're consistent with wanting to see justice done, we'll also want a God who is just and will punish sin. Unfortunately for you as a sinner, that means He also has to punish your sin. That's where the "fitness" plan of God becomes so incredible. For God so loved the world and He so loved you that He couldn't bear to bring the full punishment for your sins down on you. And yet His justice still demanded that they be punished, so He let the judgment fall instead on His own Son, Jesus Christ. That's the other side of God's grace, His mercy. "Grace" shows us His love that we don't deserve, but the flip side of that is His mercy. "Mercy" is the fact that we don't get what we do deserve.

Now folks, the Bible says: "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). My guess is that some of you here have never yet gotten to that point in your life. And now you've heard again about the amazing grace of God in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is knocking at the door of your heart and you're ready to open the door and become a believer. Or maybe you've been there and kind of gotten away from God's fitness plan and His Word and you'd like to talk to Him again about starting over. Folks, there's no time like the present. The Bible says: "Now is the acceptable time, Now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2) Let's go right now to God in prayer. Please bow your heads and pray with me:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I admit to you today that I need some serious heart surgery. I have been selfish and self-centered and sinful. But Lord, I want to change. I do believe you died for me and were punished for all my sins. I believe you rose from the dead and you give even me, eternal life. Come into my life, my Savior and Friend. Help me from this day forward to follow You and live for you. Amen.

Romans 11:6 -- And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.



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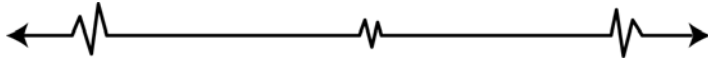
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Salvation by Grace Cont.

Then Buddha comes along. And he looks down on you in the pit and says, “Ah, my dear brother, I see you have fallen into a pit and I am indeed sorry for you. But you must know that the Four Noble Truths can only be learned through suffering and meditation. Thus you may learn to deny the self and experience rebirth by following the eight-fold path of virtue. My friend, you are in the perfect position to achieve Nirvana.” And he leaves you in the pit.

Along comes Shirley McLaine (The great New Age prophet) and she looks down and sees you in the pit. “Ah, my dear brother, I see you have fallen into a pit... But you know, brother, in truth, we are all the same. Just because you are in the pit and I am up here does not make me any better than you. You are god, I am god, the snake is god, the pit is god. We must learn to be at one with the universe.” And off she goes...

You see, every other religion outside of Christianity leaves it up to you - To contemplate, to meditate, to work, to strive, to do something to lift yourself up by the bootstraps.

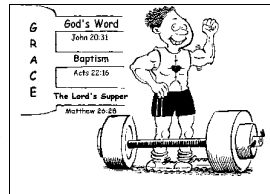
Along comes Jesus Christ. He takes one look, doesn't say a word, jumps into the pit with you, pushes you out, and as you get pushed out of the pit, he gets bit by the snake...

That's the difference between Christianity and all other religions. That's the grace of God by which he intervened and set His Son to take the venom of our sin into Himself on the cross.

Means of Grace

If I were to tell you that some Arabian oil sheik left you \$1,000,000 in a special bank account, what would you want to know? (How to get it right?) Well, wouldn't it be strange if God, who has all this grace that He wants to give us, would leave us with no way to get that love? It would be strange. And God didn't do that. The Bible tells us that God's Grace is

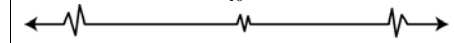
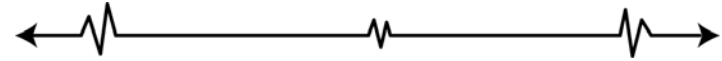
like a never-ending tank of love and forgiveness. He brings that love and forgiveness to us in three ways: by simply hearing His Word, by Baptism, and by the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, you can shut those means down - by not hearing/reading the Word, by rejecting your baptism, or refusing the Lord's Supper. The sad thing is that ultimately this is a refusal of the Holy Spirit and puts people in peril of being shut off from God forever.



John 20:31 -- But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Acts 22:16 – And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

Matthew 26:28 -- This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.



God's

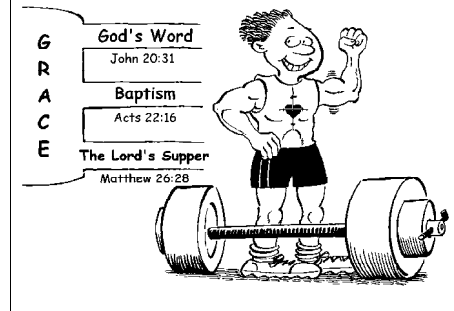
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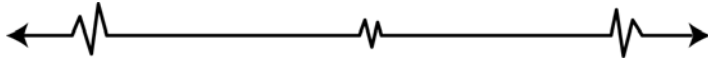
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Christ's

Expense

2. There is no other way for man to become fit for life (Romans 3:21-24).
3. Salvation by Grace sets Christianity apart from all other religions.
4. God's grace comes to us in three ways: (Means of Grace).





Side Note: Prayer is not a means of grace

In prayer we can request grace from God, but it is not the means God uses to bring his forgiveness to us. Example: If I want to order something from a mail-order catalog, let's say "Cabelas" the wish book for men, I call them up and place my order. Now, just calling up does not place the goods immediately in my home. They have to send the UPS truck to deliver. The means of Grace is God's delivery system...

Grace Story

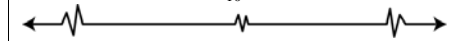
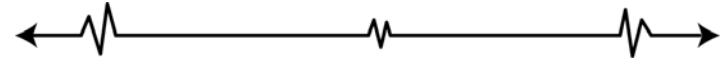
An active church officer died and was brought before the Pearly Gates. And St. Peter met him and said, "It takes a thousand points to get in, so tell me something about yourself." So the man said, "Well, until I was 21 years old, I never missed Sunday School, unless I was sick in bed. I have a string of perfect attendance medals that almost reaches the floor. St. Peter said, "That is extremely good. That gives you one point. Tell me something else about yourself."

The man said, "Well, I am 70 years old. I attended church regularly, served on various boards, sang in the choir...I always gave 10% of my income to the church. To which St. Peter replied, "That is truly remarkable! That gives you another point. Tell me something else about yourself."

The man, growing a bit concerned, said, "I tried to live the Christian life, I lived by the Golden Rule, I obeyed the Ten Commandments, was truly concerned in word and deed about my neighbor and always welcomed strangers." St. Peter said, "That is truly wonderful! That is another point. Tell me more about yourself."

By this time the man was getting a little desperate, and if the truth were known, a little irritated, and he finally blurted out to St. Peter, "Look, at this rate the only way I'll ever get into Heaven is by the grace of God." St. Peter said, "That is worth one thousand points, and with the three you earned, it makes one thousand and three. Would you like to come in now?"

Well of course, that story is not quite the way it is... the part that's wrong are those extra three points. The "How" of our going to God is only by the Grace of God in Christ. Only because He loves us and wants us to come and we believe His Son is the Way.



God's

Riches

A†

Christ's

Expense

2. There is no other way for man to become fit for life (Romans 3:21-24).
3. Salvation by Grace sets Christianity apart from all other religions.
4. God's grace comes to us in three ways: (Means of Grace).

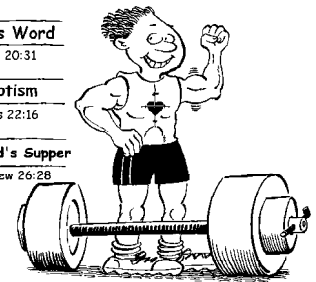
God's Word
John 20:31

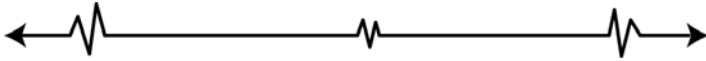
Riches
Acts 22:16

A†

Christ's

Expense
The Lord's Supper
Matthew 26:28





Universal

This is the issue of “Why are some saved and not others?” It is one of those issues that honest Christian people disagree on. If I were God and had all the power of the universe at my disposal, and I wanted “all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” I would make sure it happened. Of course, that would be resorting to law to accomplish my will. I would make everyone submit to my authority. But God has not chosen to come to us in that way. He comes in love and resists the temptation to make us all puppets. Unfortunately, that means that he will allow us to reject Him and His kingdom.

1 Timothy 2:4 -- This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

John 6:40 -- For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Reject

Jesus, when he approached Jerusalem for the last time, looked at the city and sighed:

Matthew 23:37 -- O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Just as many people today are unwilling. And God has chosen not to force them. Martin Luther put it this way: “God does not drag people into heaven by the hair.” If people are saying, “Nuts to you, God. I don’t want anything to do with you,” God eventually says, “Fine, I will let you live without me. And I will let you live without Me forever.” But then don’t blame God. Don’t say that God is sending people to hell. God sends no one to hell. But God allows people the choice to live without Him. Again, if God were not to allow that choice, then we’d all have to be puppets or robots programmed to do whatever God wanted us to do. That might be nice, but it wouldn’t be a true loving relationship.

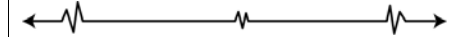
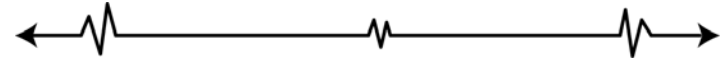
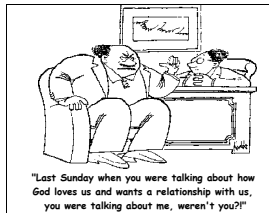
Acts 7:51 – You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit!

Romans 1:21 -- For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened....

God's Attitude

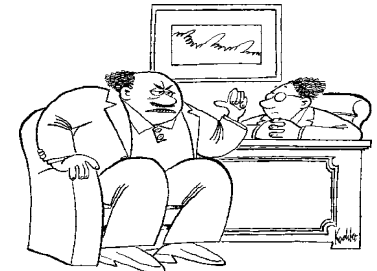
Folks, as the cartoon indicates, when I was talking tonight about how God loves us and wants a relationship with us, I was talking about you. Please make no mistake about what we’re doing here. This is not just an intellectual exercise. This is your opportunity to be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...



5. God’s grace is **universal**. God clearly wants all men to be saved. (1 Timothy 2:4, John 6:40).

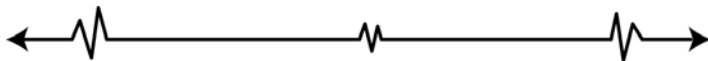
- a. However, man does have the power to **reject** salvation (Matthew 23:37, Acts 7:51).
- b. Those who are saved receive eternal life solely by the Grace of God as a gift. Those who are lost have rejected that free gift, preferring instead their own “wisdom” (Romans 1:21f).



"Last Sunday when you were talking about how God loves us and wants a relationship with us, you were talking about me, weren't you?!"

C. God’s Attitude toward the Spiritually “Unfit” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

1. Is unlike man to man/woman relationships.



Reconciled

Folks, God's love for us was such that he didn't wait for us to get reconciled to Him. He'd still be waiting. God accepts us on an "as is" basis. He forgives us, restores us, and lifts us up to a new life. That is, by the way, the model He now leaves for us in our relationships with others. He has given us the "ministry of reconciliation." We need to grasp the fact that we don't live in the garden of Eden anymore. We aren't perfect and we aren't rubbing elbows with perfect people. That means that sooner or later you're going to be hurt by other peoples' sinful behavior - even by other church people. The sooner you accept that fact, the sooner you can prepare to be a "reconciler" - someone who will graciously extend the forgiveness that was graciously extended to you by Your God.

One of the things we've noticed is that people who are investigating the church often feel very inadequate as they begin to study the Bible and think about their relationship with God. And I just want to say, there are many reasons why God might not want you - but don't worry, you're in good company: Moses stuttered - David's armor didn't fit - John Mark was rejected by Paul - Hosea's wife was a prostitute - Jacob was a liar - David had an affair - Solomon was too rich - David was too young - Abraham was too old - Timothy had ulcers - Peter was afraid of death - Lazarus was dead - Naomi was a widow - Paul was a murderer, so was Moses - Jonah ran from God - Miriam was a gossip - Gideon and Thomas both doubted - Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal - Elijah was burned out - John the Baptist was a loud-mouth - Martha was a worry-wart - Mary was lazy - Samson had long hair - Noah got drunk...

Do you get the point folks? God doesn't wait around for perfect people. He doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom He calls. Step out of your limitations and trust God to make more of you than you ever thought He could.

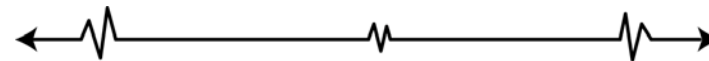
Ministry

God doesn't want us to just sit around and soak up instruction but never do anything about it. When you come to understand the reconciliation of God to you because of the sacrifice of Christ, He gives to you from that moment, a ministry (a job, a task, a service) to be His reconcilers - to seek out people who are separated from God and reunite them to God in Christ. Nothing in life is more important than that ministry. And your life will never really be fulfilled unless you are taking part in it.

Closing Remarks

Folks, we'll make room if you want to bring a friend or relative next week. In fact, why don't you write down tonight in your notes the names of two people with whom you want to share the simple message of how you hope to get to heaven? And ask them if they would like to join you in a journey through God's Word.

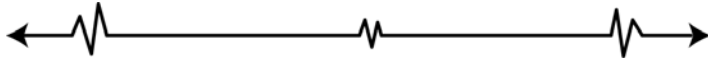
Please, during this time when we will be together in God's Word, don't deny yourself the opportunity to come to Church! Make a commitment to yourself and to your God to come each week and grow in the faith. Review this week some of the things we've studied tonight. And pull out a Bible and read. I would suggest reading the Book of Mark along with this course. It's only 16 chapters, a couple chapters a night, no big deal...



2. God is already **reconciled** with man.
3. He implores us to be reconciled to Him through Christ.
4. He gives to us the same ministry.

Exercising Your Faith

1. How spiritually "fit" do you feel after this lesson? Why?
2. What do you like about self-help programs? What is one problem with such methods when it comes to our Spiritual lives?
3. Why do you think God created the heavens and the earth?
4. How would you have planned creation to keep evil and suffering out of the world? What are the pros and cons of your plan?
5. What is the difference between Christianity and other world religions?
6. If God wants everyone to be saved, why do some people still go to hell?



Closing Remarks cont.

For those of you who are not Lutheran I would ask that you would please trust us, and be patient and wait in the matter of communion. Communion is a very special and intimate sacrament, closely related to community and fellowship. And what we want to do is allow God to build a real community and fellowship among us, before there is communion. You know, it's interesting that this is what Jesus Himself did with His disciples. He was with them for three years in an intimate instructional relationship before He finally instituted His Supper... We hope that you will see the wisdom of that approach as we go through this material, and respect that as the position of our church.

Leader's Note

This picture is another tool in getting people to examine their perceptions on the Christian faith/life. The picture must be rotated one turn to the right. If you look closely you will see the face of a cow appear. Some people invariably consider themselves intellectually superior to the Christian faith. Like the blind Pharisees they claim to clearly see the whole picture. In order to challenge those perceptions further, why not show them this overhead during your break, or at the end of the class. (You might even make it into handouts for people to take home, and not tell them what it is until the next class. Then you can start the next lesson with a revelation of what it is and a review of the perceptions concept as it pertains to the course.) Let them percolate on it for a while, and try to discover what it is, then help them to recognize the cow, possibly by outlining the ears and head, then finish with this comment.

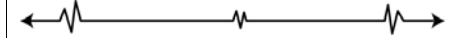
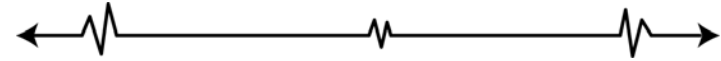


“Folks, don’t you think it might be possible for there to be some things you haven’t seen before in God’s Word? Give me a chance in the next 12 weeks to show you.”

Leader's Functional Note

One of the chief goals of a course of this kind is to build community. The old time church had it right with the traditional potluck. Nothing builds community like eating and drinking together. For the first night, you provide the goodies for a break time. On following nights, to involve people in this community setting, ask them to take turns providing something to snack on.

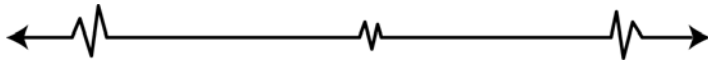
You might also want to give the class members the opportunity to help with the costs of the materials for the course. Simply tell them what the costs of the books are if they would like to contribute in that way.



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5. What is the difference between Christianity and other world religions?
6. If God wants everyone to be saved, why do some people still go to hell?



Final remarks

If our greatest need in life would have been information

God would have sent us an Educator.

If our greatest need in life would have been technology,

God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need in life would have been political,

God would have sent us a politician.

If our greatest need in life would have been money,

God would have sent an economist.

If our greatest need in life would have been military,

God would have sent a general.

If our greatest need in life would have been pleasure,

God would have sent an entertainer.

If our greatest need in life would have been social,

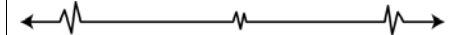
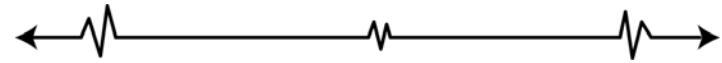
God would have sent a social worker.

BUT OUR GREATEST NEED WAS FORGIVENESS, SO HE SENT US HIS OWN SON...

...who died in our place and rose again. That's what makes Him our God. Not because He changed water into wine or walked on water, but because He died and rose again for us. And since He rose from the dead we acclaim Him as the LIVING GOD. And if that God then says to us, "I have a word for you about your death and your life," it seems reasonable as well as logical - you don't have to check your brain in at the door when you enter this church - that we'd better listen. And I thank you for listening tonight.

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for making me and loving me, even though I have ignored you and gone my own way and done my own thing. It's good to know and to hear tonight that You haven't given up on me, that I still matter to You. I realize that I need you in my life. I am very sorry for what I have done wrong and failed to do right. Please forgive me. Thank you for dying on the cross for me and giving me new meaning and hope for my life. I so much want to be adopted into Your family, Lord. And then teach me to live like one of Your children. Amen.



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