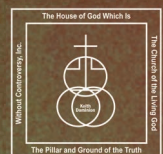


HOLIDAY COMMUNIQUE' • WINTER 2023/2024



LET THANKFUL DEEDS *Speak for you.* Colossians 3:17

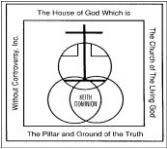
THE HOUSE OF GOD WHICH IS THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD
THE PILLAR & GROUND OF THE TRUTH WITHOUT CONTROVERSY, INC.
KEITH DOMINION



Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year



BISHOP CLARY K. BUTLER, SR., CHIEF OVERSEER & SENIOR BISHOP
AND DEACONESS PATSY BUTLER, FIRST LADY



THE HOUSE OF GOD

WHICH IS THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD
THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH
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KEITH DOMINION

BISHOP CLARY K. BUTLER, SR. CHIEF OVERSEER

WINTER 2023/2024

HOLIDAY COMMUNIQUE

Dear Beloved Saints of the House of God Church,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we stand at the threshold of a new year, it is with immense joy and gratitude that I write to you. This year, we have been incredibly blessed as we celebrated 120 years of Holiness and God's abundant grace upon our church family.

In 2023, we witnessed the hand of God moving powerfully within our congregation. Our faith and dedication to His work have been unwavering, and as a result, we've seen remarkable growth. Our local, state, and national events have seen increased attendance, which is a testament to the power of God's love and the unity within our church.

We've welcomed new members into our spiritual family, and we've seen the return of those who were once a part of our congregation. This reaffirms our commitment to "Evangelize, Bring Back the Love, and Fill God's House." These blessings are a clear indication that our work is not in vain, and our hearts are rejoicing at the homecoming of our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ.



This year started with some wonderful blessings, including an inspiring Youth Congress in Pensacola, FL. The spiritual momentum continued as we experienced record attendance and the power of the Holy Ghost at an amazing General Assembly in our newly renovated Headquarters Sanctuary in Nashville, TN. As we look forward to 2024 truly, eyes have not seen, and ears have not heard the full extent of what God has in store for the House of God Church.

As we enter the holiday season, we are often reminded of loved ones who are no longer with us. In these moments of reflection, let us be encouraged, God has not forgotten us. He is our refuge and strength, our ever-present help in times of trouble. In Him, we find grace, comfort, and peace.

As we step into 2024, let us continue to be safe, faithful, and full of hope. Philippians 1:6 reminds us, "He that hath begun a good work in you shall perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Our journey is guided by the hands of Almighty God and if God be for us, He is more than the whole world against us.

Let us approach the new year with hearts full of gratitude, faith unwavering, and a commitment to spreading His love and grace to all. As we navigate the days ahead, remember that God's blessings are upon us, and our future is guided by the Holy Ghost.

On behalf of my wife, Deaconess Butler, and I, may the love of Christ continue to bind us together, and may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guard our hearts and minds in perfect peace. Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

In His service,

Bishop Clary K. Butler, Sr.
Chief Overseer and Senior Bishop

THANKSGIVING DAY & WATCH NIGHT SERVICES

Thanksgiving is not just a one day celebration in which we thank God for the material things of life. Thanksgiving is an ongoing occasion when we thank God for both spiritual and material things that are made available to us by Him. 1) We are to thank God for His love, kindness and faithfulness. 2) We should thank Him for His judgment and His great works of deliverance.

Thanksgiving Day is Thursday, November 23, 2023. I recommend that you meet virtually or in-person locally or by districts on Thanksgiving Day at 9:00 A.M. (or at an appropriate time for your congregation) in a Thanksgiving Day Service for approximately one hour to render due praises to God for His goodness. Let us resurrect the practice of gratitude. Your service should include reading of the Thanksgiving Lesson and other forms of worship.

Watch Night is Sunday, December 31, 2023. As we faithfully assemble in person or virtually, let us gratefully praise and thank God for bringing us through 2023, while requesting His devout blessings and guidance of our souls throughout the coming year.

SEVEN DAYS FAST

Let us join together wholeheartedly as we observe the SEVEN DAYS FAST beginning Sunday, December 31, 2023, at midnight. The appointed time of the fast will be from midnight to 6:00 pm (or the approximate time of “sundown”/the setting of the sun in your location) on a daily basis and will continue until 6:00 pm (or the approximate time of “sundown”/the setting of the sun in your location) on Sunday, January 7, 2024. The first seven days of the New Year are our annual fasting days. This is a period of sanctification and consecration to help us abide in the True Vine. This will bless the Church to reunite into one body as we move forward with the Sixth Administration of this Church.

As we prepare for the Seven Days Fast, let us pray, cry, repent and allow God to fix our hearts so God will anoint and bless us as we go forth, fishing for lost souls in the “Great Sea of Humanity.” Pray for God’s anointing as we sanctify the altar in God’s House, that the Church might be filled with the great harvest of lost souls.

As we prepare for the Seven Days Fast that pleases God, let us observe how Paul and Silas in Acts 17:11 searched the Scriptures daily to see whether the things taught were of God. The sacred fast that pleases God can also be a type of the Christian Church that was born on the Day of Pentecost, when individual believers for the first time were baptized with the Holy Ghost into a unified spiritual organism, likened to a body of which Christ is the Head. For there is one Holy body, which is the body of baptized believers, and Jesus died for us all.

THE **2024** HOUSE OF GOD CHURCH

SEVEN DAYS

Fast Lessons

A man in a dark suit and white shirt is kneeling on a grey carpet, praying with his hands outstretched. An open Bible lies on the floor in front of him. The background is a blurred interior space with a flag visible.

SEVEN DAYS FAST LESSONS

FASTING DAY ONE
I'M SORRY GOD, AGAIN

FASTING DAY TWO
HE IS A GOD OF A SECOND CHANCE

FASTING DAY THREE
DO YOU HAVE A SEAT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

FASTING DAY FOUR
HELP! MY LIFE IS FULL OF DISASTER
AFTER DISASTER

FASTING DAY FIVE
I SAW YOU

FASTING DAY SIX
COME NOW AND LET US REASON TOGETHER

FASTING DAY SEVEN
DO YOU BECOME DISCOURAGED OR DEPRESSED?

I AM SORRY GOD, AGAIN

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 78:35-40 And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passed away, and cometh not again. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness and grieve him in the desert!

COMMENTARY

Many times, God turned his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath when they did wrong. They had to return to God and say, I am sorry God, again, and God being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not. They continued this pattern of disobedience to God over and over again. For a just man falls seven times and rises up again: Each time he falls he must acknowledge his transgressions. I am sorry God, again. Rejoice not when thine enemy falls and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turns away his wrath from him. Proverbs 24:16-19

Remorse-being godly sorrowful for our sins.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: *(Discussion/Small Group Questions)*

1. What does humility mean to you in the context of your Christian faith, and how does it relate to your relationship with God and others?
2. Can you share a personal experience when you had to practice humility and engage in repentance? How did it impact your spiritual journey?
3. How does the example of Jesus' humility and his teachings on repentance guide us in our own lives?
4. What are three ways our group can collectively support each other in remaining humble and seeking repentance when needed?

Blackboard Emphasis

Applying Today's Lesson to your life!

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1. **Lamentations 1:20** O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled.
 2. **2 Corinthians 7:10** For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.
 3. **Psalms 147:3** He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.
 4. **Jeremiah 44:10** They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers.
 5. **Matthew 27:3-4** Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.
 6. **1 Chronicles 21:17** And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.
 7. **Matthew 26:75** And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly.

ACTIVITY

Take some time (perhaps 2 or 3 minutes or whatever may be appropriate) to silently ask God for forgiveness. You may take any burden to God in prayer because He said we can cast all of our cares upon Him. He cares for us. After you have taken time to repent (which is asking God for forgiveness for known and unknown sins) come back together as a group and allow a few minutes for group members to share a testimony of God's goodness. This is a great opportunity to express gratitude since God promises to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

HE IS A GOD OF A SECOND CHANCE

LESSON TEXT: Jonah 3:1-2 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

COMMENTARY

He is a God of second chance. He gave you another chance and another chance and another chance. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. God does not punish us for everything we do wrong. Sometimes he gives us mercy and a second chance. *Revelation 2:21-22* And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering toward us. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. *2 Peter 3:9* Don't give up on God and he won't give up on you. He is a God of a second chance. Even when we break our covenant and promises to GOD, He gives us a second chance to get it right and to do His will. Everyone can receive that second chance as long as there is breath in your body.

Peter needed a second chance after he denied Jesus 3 times and began to curse.

Jesus said, all that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. *John 6:37-38*

God gave Jonah a second chance- The LORD told Jonah to go preach to Nineveh, but Jonah fled in the opposite direction unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD and went down to Joppa. The Lord gave Jonah a second chance. The LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship's progress was stopped. Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, and the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. *Jonah 2:10*

Blackboard Emphasis

Applying Today's Lesson to your life!

1. Matthew 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

2. Colossians 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

3. Proverbs 24:16 For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.

4. 1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

5. Micah 7:18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

Let's Talk About It

1. Can you share a personal experience when you felt you received a second chance from God, and how did it impact your faith journey?
2. What does the Bible teach us about God's mercy and the concept of second chances? Are there specific verses or stories that resonate with you?
3. What are 3 ways we can overcome feelings of guilt, shame, or unworthiness and fully accept God's mercy and forgiveness in our lives?
4. What steps can we take to actively seek and embrace God's second chances in our daily lives and relationships?
5. In what ways can we extend God's mercy to others, helping them find their own second chances and experience His love?

DO YOU HAVE A SEAT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 8:11 Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

COMMENTARY

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. Matthew 25:31 We are not asking for a seat on the right hand of Jesus, nor for a seat on the left hand of God. Jesus said to sit on my right hand or on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. Mark 10:40 Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Therefore, my heart's desire is to be ready when Jesus returns, for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man cometh.

Jesus Christ has been exalted to sit at the right hand of God. Psalm 110:1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Do you have a seat in the Kingdom? Jesus is on his way back. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteous. Repent and believe the gospel.

The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. When the question was asked, where is the kingdom of Heaven?

God answered it: Heaven is my throne. The Earth is my footstool. I am from above, you are from beneath. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Heaven is high above the earth. The Lord is higher than all nations, and he is above all nations.

Do You have a seat in Glory? Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, you that work iniquity. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life. We praise and thank God for his precious gift, Christ Jesus. We praise and thank God for the sacrifice of Jesus which gives each believer the opportunity to receive everlasting life. Do you have everlasting life? Do you have a seat in the kingdom of God?

Blackboard Emphasis

Applying Today's Lesson to your life!

1. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. *1 Corinthians 15:50*
2. No whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of God. *Ephesians 5:5*
3. Don't you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom. A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you've been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master. *1 Corinthians 6:9*
4. If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. *Hebrews 10:26*
5. The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Romans 6:23*

Let's Talk About It

1. If everyone has sinned and the result of sin is death, who can be saved?
2. What does the concept of eternal life mean to you, and how does it influence your daily life and choices?
3. What Bible verses or teachings emphasize the promise of eternal life, and how do they provide assurance and guidance in your faith journey?
4. In what ways can we help others understand and accept God's gift of eternal life? How can we share this message with those who may not yet believe?
5. What practical steps can we take as a group to deepen our understanding of eternal life?

HELP! MY LIFE IS FULL OF DISASTER AFTER DISASTER

LESSON TEXT: Job 1:18-19 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

COMMENTARY

A Disaster is when calamity sets in, it seems like your life has turned upside down, and the day of your calamity is at hand. There is even bad news at the Doctor's office. COVID 19 has affected and disrupted our lives. Our families are dying with no hospital visitation to say, good-bye. It seems as if car accidents, break-ins, mass shootings, earthquakes, tornadoes, freezing temperatures for weeks, fire breaking out and spreading all over the land, drought, thunderstorms, and deadly hail storms, reminds us of the dangers to come.

God can allow destruction to occur because of man's disobedience. However, it is written, if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Finally, we must have faith in God (even in adversity). We must trust and obey. We might not always know why we suffer but we must bring every pain to God in prayer. We must trust God's wisdom and character no matter our circumstances. When fear comes like a whirlwind, when we have suicidal thoughts, when our loved ones have betrayed our trust, when depression sets in, when bills are due and it all seems overwhelming, when we feel unsettled, worried and anxious, seek God by trusting in his word. Jesus is the answer. He will never fail. There is absolutely nothing too hard for God. In the midst of disaster after disaster, the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news! Amen.

Let's Talk About It

Applying Today's Lesson to your life!

1. Can you share a personal experience when your faith in God helped you overcome a significant challenge or adversity in your life?
2. How do you define or understand the role of faith in facing life's difficulties and finding strength in God?
3. What specific Bible verses or stories inspire you to have faith in God during challenging times?
4. In what ways can we support and pray for each other in overcoming our current challenges and trusting in God's plan?

ACTIVITY: Faith-Building

This activity allows your friends to share their personal experiences and testimonies of how faith has helped them overcome challenges, inspiring and encouraging one another to lean on their faith in God during difficult times.

1. Allocate time for each member to prepare a brief personal testimony (2-3 minutes) sharing a challenging life experience and how their faith in God played a role in overcoming it. Virtual groups may use the chat to share.
2. Have each person share their testimony with the group, focusing on the journey from difficulty to triumph.
3. After each testimony, encourage group members to discuss common themes that can be applied to each of our challenges (e.g. patience, prayer, seeking God's word, etc.).
4. Conclude with a time of prayer, where each person prays for the challenges mentioned and asks for increased faith and trust in God's plan.

I SAW YOU

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

John 1:48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

COMMENTARY

We cannot hide our sins from God. If you have sinned against the LORD, be sure your sin will find you out. Numbers 32:23 He sees and he knows all. He sees us sitting on the porch and under the fig tree. The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Just as God saw David when he arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful and he looked upon her, God also saw you when you walked upon the roof with eyes full of adultery. Psalm 69:5 O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.

When we do wrong it may not come to the surface at first, but if we do not repent, the cover will be pulled back. Matthew 10:26-27 for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

Whenever we try to cover up our evil deeds remember the words of Sir Walter Scott, a historical poet: "Oh what tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive. What it means is that when you tell a lie, you will need to tell more lies to cover up the first lie." When the Lord comes, he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make known the evil thoughts and intents of the heart.

Every move we make is seen by God. Sometimes men behave as if there is no God and as if they had no wives. 1 Corinthians 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none. Even though Paul's words had a spiritual meaning, these words are also true naturally.

We get involved in cover-ups and plots. We must repent because these plots and cover-ups will not work. Destruction is sure to come. Your foot shall slide in due time and the day of your calamity is at hand. Proverbs 1:26-30

I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

Adam tried to hide from God. Genesis 3:9-10 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. Adam hid, but God saw.

We must come to God in faith. Do we want to die filled with secret sins? Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. Your life is hid with Christ in God. This is your chance to be saved. Don't waste another moment. Repent and turn to God. Judgment Day is coming.

The Lord is looking down from heaven. He beholds all the generations of men. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable. Hebrews 4:13 (NLT)

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: (Discussion/Small Group Questions)

1. How do you personally experience and recognize the presence of God in your daily life, especially in ordinary moments?
2. Can you share a specific moment or situation when you felt a deep sense of God's presence and guidance, even in an unexpected place?
3. What Bible verses or stories reinforce the idea that God is omnipresent, and how does the knowledge of God's presence encourage you?
4. How can we be more mindful of God's presence in our daily routines, and how might it change the way we approach life's challenges and joys?
5. In what ways can we help others understand and experience the omnipresence of God?

COME NOW AND LET US REASON TOGETHER

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

COMMENTARY

Even today God is offering forgiveness and cleansing to his people that will obey him. 2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

We must not stay angry forever. Psalm 30:5 His anger endures but a moment.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. *Isaiah 1:19* If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: *Isaiah 1:20* But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Love is kind, love is not puffed, love doth not behave itself unseemly. *Ephesians 2:8* For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

Acts 10:34-43 God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him. 1 John 1:7 If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleans us from all sin.

God knew what his people needed was not to multiply sacrifices and prayers, but they needed a new heart. For it is written, *Psalms 51:10* Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Jesus said in *Matthew 22:37-39* Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD. Love God with a pure heart.

1 Peter 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.

Let's Talk About It

Applying Today's Lesson to your life!

1. Can you share a personal experience when you faced a conflict or difference with someone and felt God's guidance in resolving it?
2. How do you believe the Bible can help us in reconciling differences and maintaining strong Christian relationships?
3. Are there specific Bible verses or stories that emphasize the importance of trust in God for conflict resolution?
4. What are 3 practical steps we can take to trust God more in reconciling our differences, even in challenging situations (answer individually)?

ACTIVITY: Circle of Trust

This activity creates a safe and supportive environment for group members to share their experiences and challenges related to reconciling differences while emphasizing the importance of trusting God in the process.

1. Arrange the group in a circle, ensuring that everyone can see and hear each other.
2. Start by discussing the importance of trust in reconciling differences and how it relates to our faith.
3. Pass an object (a small item or a symbolic object representing trust, such as a permanent marker or prayer cloth or important key, etc.) around the circle. As each person holds the object, they briefly share a situation where they need to trust God in reconciling differences.
4. Encourage group members to listen actively and supportively as others share their stories.
5. After the "Circle of Trust" exercise, discuss common themes or insights that emerged from the stories shared.
6. Conclude with a prayer for God's guidance and trust in reconciling differences within the group and in other relationships.

DO YOU BECOME DISCOURAGED OR DEPRESSED?

LESSON TEXT: 1 Peter 5:10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.

COMMENTARY

It is easy to become discouraged and depressed when you have trouble on every side. Sometimes we question our faith and may even become angry and begin to question God Almighty. The storms of life will come but be encouraged and know that God is on your side and that no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD spoken of by the LORD in *Isaiah 54:17*. God will give you the strength to endure and go forward, and then you will be able to help strengthen and encourage others.

Do not allow Satan to cause your faith to waver. Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you... if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed; but glorify God. *1 Peter 4:12-16*

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution... As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 8:35-39*

Is there anything too hard for God? *Jeremiah 32:27* Even today in the midst of your trials and discouragements and disappointments you must continue to praise God. Remember that everyone does not have the same season. Your season is coming. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD. *Psalms 27:14*

Satan has many weapons to use on the saints. Two of his most powerful weapons are the weapon of discouragement and depression. These weapons have side effects such as:

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- **Discouraged: To become disheartened, a feeling of hopelessness.**
 - **Depressed: A Feeling of sadness and rejection when faced with life's problems.**
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1. **Malice:** Satan wants to get you so discouraged and depressed that you desire to inflict injury, harm, or suffering on someone else. It is often said, hurt people hurt people.

2. **Jealousy:** You resent the fact and you become discouraged and depressed when someone you love has left you and moved on with someone else. Your disposition changes, you have a different state of mind and you become moody and out of control because of the depression and discouragement that you are experiencing.

3. **Confusion:** It is the Devil's job to keep your mind in a state of confusion, tumult and chaos. God is not the author of confusion. Satan wants you to be confused between what is good and what is evil. In times of trouble, when you do not know which way to go or who to turn to you will soon become discouraged and depressed which may lead to taking desperate measures to resolve your problems.

Discouragement and depression is the poison that Satan uses to hinder you from receiving your blessings. Satan wants to stop you because God is about to bless you.

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Hebrews 12:12-13

Be encouraged it is time to walk in your blessings and in your healing! Depression and discouragement does not have dominion over you. Stop blaming others and take control of yourself. YOU have to decide, I want to be blessed. Shake off depression, shake off discouragement. Walk in faith and wisdom, and in the love of God and you will be blessed.

Make up in your mind that you are going to rejoice no matter what storm comes your way. Get rid of anger and speaking evil against your fellow saints and be quick to forgive. Depression is a state of mind that will cause you to lose your mind. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Let's Talk About It

Applying Today's Lesson to your life!

1. How has the past year affected your emotional well-being, and are there specific challenges that have led to feelings of discouragement or depression?
2. What are some bible verses that provide comfort and encouragement during difficult times, and how can they apply to our current situations?
3. Share 2 personal strategies or practices that help you overcome discouragement or depression (answer individually).
4. How can we set positive goals for the new year to help overcome discouragement and find hope in Jesus?

ACTIVITY

According to the Bible, songs and music that proclaim God's goodness can sooth sorrows and drive away fears.

Allow each group member to share a song that inspires them in times of discouragement and/or difficulty. The group member should choose an uplifting song and describe why they chose that song. The group member may also choose to sing a verse or two if they desire. If the group is meeting virtually, you may share the song via YouTube or another music platform (if time permits).

Conclude with a prayer. If helpful, during the prayer you may recall some of the lyrics of the encouraging songs as you ask God to keep each group member in perfect peace as we begin a great new year!



Fast Lesson One

ACTIVITY:

Take some time (perhaps 2 or 3 minutes or whatever may be appropriate) to silently ask God for forgiveness. You may take any burden to God in prayer because He said we can cast all of our cares upon Him. He cares for us. After you have taken time to repent (which is asking God for forgiveness for known and unknown sins) come back together as a group and allow a few minutes for group members to share a testimony of God's goodness. This is a great opportunity to express gratitude since God promises to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Fast Lesson Two

ACTIVITY: Prayer and Gratitude Journaling

1. For this exercise each group member should have journal notebook and pens or something that can be used to collect their thoughts (such as the notes section in a tablet or phone).
2. Start with a time of prayer, asking for God's guidance in recognizing and embracing His merciful second chances.
3. Encourage each person to reflect on and write down moments in their life when they felt they received a second chance from God.
4. Ask them to describe how these second chances made them feel, what lessons they learned, and how they have grown in their faith.
5. Conclude by having each member share a brief summary of their journal entry with the group, highlighting the importance of recognizing and being grateful for God's mercy and second chances.

This activity, coupled with the questions, promotes self-reflection, gratitude, and a deeper understanding of how God's mercy and second chances can shape one's Christian journey.



Fast Lesson Three

Share a personal experience or testimony of how you came to accept God's gift of eternal life through faith in Christ?

**If you have not accepted God's gift of eternal life yet, you do not have to participate in the first part of the activity but if there is something you want to know or do before accepting eternal life this is a great time to ask or share with the other members of the group. It is important to remember everyone is on a journey. God resists the proud but gives grace to those that are humble. ** *James 4:6*

Fast Lesson Four

ACTIVITY: Faith-Building Testimonies

This activity allows your friends to share their personal experiences and testimonies of how faith has helped them overcome challenges, inspiring and encouraging one another to lean on their faith in God during difficult times.

1. Allocate time for each member to prepare a brief personal testimony (2-3 minutes) sharing a challenging life experience and how their faith in God played a role in overcoming it. Virtual groups may use the chat to share.
2. Have each person share their testimony with the group, focusing on the journey from difficulty to triumph.
3. After each testimony, encourage group members to discuss common themes that can be applied to each of our challenges (e.g. patience, prayer, seeking God's word, etc.).
4. Conclude with a time of prayer, where each person prays for the challenges mentioned and asks for increased faith and trust in God's plan.

Lesson Activities



Fast Lesson Five

ACTIVITY: Walk and Reflection

- 1. Arrange a walk (in a park, forest, safe walking path or outdoor setting). You can also adapt this activity to an indoor setting (e.g. mall, church, stadium, gym, etc.). It would be great if the chosen space has natural elements such as water, plants, sunlight, trees, birds, etc.).*
 - 2. During the walk, encourage group members to observe and appreciate the beauty of nature and to pay attention to the environment.*
 - 3. As you walk or explore, have moments of silence for reflection and prayer, inviting everyone to consider the presence of God in the natural world around them.*
 - 4. After the walk, gather as a group and share your experiences, discussing how the beauty of nature illustrates God's omnipresence.*
 - 5. Conclude with a prayer of gratitude for the reminder of God's presence in the world around us and for the opportunity to connect with Him in this way each day.*
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Fast Lesson Six

ACTIVITY: Circle of Trust

This activity creates a safe and supportive environment for group members to share their experiences and challenges related to reconciling differences while emphasizing the importance of trusting God in the process.

- 1. Arrange the group in a circle, ensuring that everyone can see and hear each other.*
- 2. Start by discussing the importance of trust in reconciling differences and how it relates to our faith.*
- 3. Pass an object (a small item or a symbolic object representing trust, such as a permanent marker or prayer cloth or important key, etc.) around the circle. As each person holds the object, they briefly share a situation where they need to trust God in reconciling differences.*
- 4. Encourage group members to listen actively and supportively as others share their stories.*
- 5. After the "Circle of Trust" exercise, discuss common themes or insights that emerged from the stories shared.*
- 6. Conclude with a prayer for God's guidance and trust in reconciling differences within the group and in other relationships.*

Fast Lesson Seven

ACTIVITY: According to the Bible, songs and music that proclaim God's goodness can sooth sorrows and drive away fears.

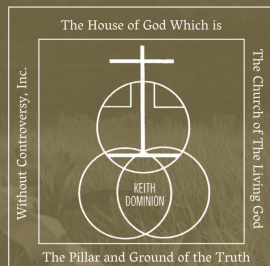
Allow each group member to share a song that inspires them in times of discouragement and/or difficulty. The group member should choose an uplifting song and describe why they chose that song. The group member may also choose to sing a verse or two if they desire. If the group is meeting virtually, you may share the song via YouTube or another music platform.

Conclude with a prayer. If helpful, during the prayer you may recall some of the lyrics of the encouraging songs as you ask God to keep each group member in perfect peace as we begin a great new year!

Notes

Thought: _____

Dates: _____



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