

## Personal development and Self-leadership

(The summaries will be for each section rather than for the entire chapter.)

### Character

Summary:

1. Integrity
  - a. honesty
  - b. true words
  - c. helpful
  - d. justice
  - e. dependable
  - f. responsible
2. ways to misuse power
  - a. physical power
  - b. emotional power
  - c. influential power
  - d. economic power
3. characteristics that are not a measure of character
  - a. sport prowess
  - b. beauty or good looks
  - c. high levels of intelligence, skills, or knowledge
  - d. money
  - e. ability to have many children
  - f. great achievements
4. ways to develop character
  - a. don't get even
  - b. don't seek control at all times
  - c. don't lose your temper
  - d. don't seek pleasure
  - e. don't think "bad thoughts"
  - f. act the same where people are watching or not
  - g. build good relationships
  - h. accept responsibility for your life
  - i. serve others
  - j. do what is right
  - k. develop a cause beyond yourself
  - l. say something good no matter what happen
  - m. meet deadlines
  - n. cut unhelpful things out of your life
  - o. help everyone
  - p. other

If we are to lead others, we have to be have character. No one wants to follow someone who cannot be trusted. What is character? Character is who we are. Sometimes people have a reputation that is either better or worse than what it should be. For example, people may think we are highly intelligent when we aren't. Or they may think we are thieves when we aren't. But our character is exactly what we are, not an image or a reputation. It does not matter what people think.

Someone has said that your character is what you do in the dark (when no one else knows).

**Character is what you are  
when no one else is looking.**

Character involves integrity. What is integrity? Integrity deals with

1. Honesty. You can be trusted with confidences, decisions, money.
2. True words. It means that if you tell someone you will do something, then you do it. You do not lie for convenience. It means that you can be trusted with money. It means you can be trusted with a secret.
3. Helpful. It means that you can be counted on to help your community. You basically are a helpful person.
4. Justice. It means you will stand for justice and what is right even if it costs something.
5. Dependable. It means people can depend on you.
6. Responsible. It means you act like an adult, not on impulse.

Character also deals with how we use power. What does this mean? Sometimes people are not bad simply because they haven't had the chance. Sometimes they are afraid to do something. But what if we have power? That will often tell what a person is made of. For example, throughout history the world has been full of dictators. A dictator is an absolute ruler who does not yield political power to anyone else. A dictator is not accountable to anyone else at all.

What are some ways in which we gain power and misuse it?

1. Physical power – Sometimes when a person has more physical strength, then (s)he will use it to bully others. Perhaps you experienced this at school as a child. This also happens in more subtle ways with adults. For example, a person gets a large car and then drives those with little cars off the road. Or a person does not want to wait in a queue, so (s)he pushes ahead in front of those in front.
2. Emotional power – Sometimes in a relationship, we gain the confidence of others. Do we take advantage of the other person or do what is in their best interest?
3. Influential power – This is power due to either skill or knowledge. Sometimes a person will be promoted to “boss” at work. How does that person treat those subordinate to him/her? Does (s)he shout and verbally abuse them? Does (s)he treat them with contempt? Sometimes people with certain knowledge will withhold that knowledge to gain power over others.
4. Economic power – When people become wealthy, how do they use their wealth? Do they try to help others or merely use it for their own pleasure?

There are some things that people often associate with character or worth. However, these are not measures of our character or worth. None of these are negative things. In fact they are usually highly sought after. However, they are temporary. They can be lost in an instant. There is nothing wrong with having these things. However, they are not a measure of character or worth. Some of these are listed here because they are so common.

1. Sports prowess.
2. Beauty or good looks
3. High levels of intelligence, skills, or knowledge
4. Money (and all the things that money will buy like nice clothes, jewelry, fancy cars, large house, etc.)
5. Ability to father or give birth to lots of children
6. Great achievements

All of those listed above are good things. In fact, they are worthy of achieving. (*Having lots of children just to prove that one can have lots of children is not considered desirable.*) The point is that they, by themselves, do not mean a person has character.

**Activity:**

Look at the first list of the characteristics of integrity and the list of false measures of worth.

1. How are the two lists different?
2. How can the first list be lost?
3. How can the second list be lost?
4. Do you use any of these characteristics in choosing friends?

If character is good, then how can we gain it? Can we develop it? How can we get some of it? Self-discipline will build character. Perhaps you wanted to hear something easier. Well, there is no easy way to develop good character. Building character involves both doing something and not doing something. Let's start with the negative. These are just some ideas.

1. Don't get even. Whenever someone wrongs you, the first thing you think about is "getting even." Resist the urge to take revenge. This is especially true when the offense is relatively minor. Of course, for serious matters, seeking justice through the police and the courts may help protect others. If you are unfairly seriously assaulted, then the person who did it needs to be brought to justice. But for minor offenses, sometimes it is best to just forget it happened.
2. Don't feel you have to be in control at all times. All of us like to be in control. When we are not in control of our lives we often feel anxious and uncomfortable. But sometimes we can "let go" and not feel we have to always be in control.
3. Don't lose your temper. All of us dislike being taken advantage of. All of us dislike frustrations. However, a person who can control his/her temper is usually a person who can control other, more important matters.
4. Don't seek pleasure. Obviously we all like pleasures, especially simple pleasures like iced drinks on a hot day, sleeping late on our day off, watching television with friends, etc. There is nothing wrong with that. However, sometimes we need to forgo pleasure for more important goals in our lives.

5. Don't think "bad" thoughts. For example, maybe you strongly dislike someone. For one day, don't think bad about that person. If that person enters your thoughts, then quickly think of something else.
6. Can you think of other negatives?

What about positives? What can we do to build character?

1. Act the same whether people are watching or not. If you act differently around certain people it means that their opinion, at least in part, determines your sense of worth.
2. Build good relationships with others. Allow yourself to love and be loved by others. Practice including others into your life.
3. Accept responsibility for your life. Maybe you have been a victim, but you aren't merely a victim.
4. See yourself as someone who serves others. Do something to help build your community.
5. Do what is right. Work toward justice in your community.
6. Develop a cause beyond yourself. Leave the world, especially your community, a better place because you were there.
7. Say something good no matter what happens. Don't say negatives things but only positive things.
8. Make a list of things to do for a day and do all of them. Meeting deadlines is important for discipline.
9. Cut something out of your life that you know is wasting your time or is not helping you. Maybe it would be a television show, or hanging out at a bar with friends, or lying in bed an extra hour or two. Maybe it means giving up having a drink daily that is full of sugar, or not eating candy.
10. Help someone who cannot ever repay you for your help.
11. Other? Can you think of other positives?

Activity:

Look at the lists above. Which of these will you do? Give reasons for your answer.

## Time management

Summary:

If you don't manage your time, then:

1. you may squander your time
2. someone else will use your time
3. you may do something you regret

While this was covered in chapter one (Vision and Goal Setting), we will review it here.

Each person is given 24 hours in each day. It doesn't matter if you are very rich or very poor. It doesn't matter what your religion is or your gender or how educated you are. All people have 24 hours, no more, no less.

Think of time this way. What if you were given R1,000 each day. You could spend it any way you wished. However, any money not spent would have to be given back before

you went to bed each night. Well, in some ways, time is like this. We have 24 hours each day. If you don't spend it wisely then you lose it.

**You can spend your life any way you wish  
but you can only spend it once.**

Look at the table below.

	important	not important
urgent	1	2
not urgent	3	4

In the above table, successful people do most of their work in quadrant 3 (important, not urgent). Many people work in quadrant 1 (important, urgent). Sometimes we all have to work in quadrant 1. For example, in emergencies we have to work in quadrant 1. However, successful people work most of the time in quadrant 3.

Activity:

1. Which quadrant do you work in?
2. What can you do to spend more time working in quadrant three?

Remember, if you don't plan and use your time wisely, then three things will probably happen:

1. You will squander your time doing nothing.
2. Someone else will use your time for you.
3. You may end up doing things you later regret.

Activity:

Make a schedule of every 15 minutes of a typical day.

1. Are you using your time wisely?
2. Do you consider rest or relaxation as part of your time well spent?
3. Do you think you can do better in spending your time? How?

## **Self-discipline**

Summary:

1. take responsibility for your life
2. deferred gratification
3. don't give up
4. take some time to relax and rest

Self-discipline means you are under control. It means you are in charge of your life in a planned, rational way rather than living merely on impulse and whims.

Developing self-control and discipline is actually freeing. It is not depriving yourself of all fun and living like a Spartan. People who are self-disciplined are able to reach their goals. Actually self-disciplined people do have fun and they have lots of fun. They allow time for fun. The difference is that they control their lives and their time. They don't let what is good at the moment stop them from doing what is best in the long run.

How can we develop self-discipline? First of all, others can help but ultimately each person is responsible for his/her own self-discipline.

There is a term called "*deferred gratification*." This merely means that we put off (or defer) gratification (pleasure or a feeling of accomplishment) into the future. This does not mean that we defer all things in life. That would be dreary and boring. No one wants to live like that. But it does mean that we work now for some future reward. Let's give some examples.

Betty wants to become a nurse. Therefore, she studies each evening after her classes during the day. She could spend time hanging out with friends or watching television. But she studies diligently in order to become a nurse.

John wants to become a good football player. He spends time getting his body in good physical shape. He lifts weights and runs many kilometers per week. He does not smoke nor drink and watches his weight. He avoids going to bars a night so that he can get plenty of sleep and rest.

Jerry and Belinda want financial security. They want a strong marriage, a good family, and respect. Therefore, they work hard and save their money. Jerry does not sleep with other women and Belinda does not sleep with other men. They do not run around with the wrong crowd.

All of us are far from perfect in the area of self-discipline. When you fall – and you will fall – don't give up. (We didn't say "*If* you fall," we said, "*When* you fall" because all of us do.) Just pick yourself up and continue the progress you have made. Let's give some examples. Ronald knows he is spending too much time watching television. He therefore, decides to go to the library and read a few hours each day. He does this for the first week and is happy with himself. However, during the second week he has a serious fight with his girlfriend. He is so upset. He is angry. He is hurt. He sure doesn't want to go to the library. Instead he sits down in front of the television and watches it for six hours. The next morning he is so upset with himself and thinks he has ruined his goal of watching less television. He thinks, "what's the use?"

What should he do? He should make some allowances for his behavior. He needs to learn from this experience. However, he needs to start this day new. What he did yesterday negatively should not delay his getting back on track today.

Abigail is overweight. She decides to start eating correctly and walking for exercise. She does great for three weeks. But on Saturday she goes to a wedding. There is lots of food and she is hungry. She eats lots of cake as well as other food. She feels bad later for "losing it." She decides "oh, well, I have lost it" and starts eating too much again.

Again, what should Abigail do? Like Ronald, she should make some allowances for her behavior. She needs to learn from this experience. She needs to start this day new. What she did yesterday negatively should not delay her getting back on track today.

Remember, we should always allow some time for rest. Being self-disciplined does not mean we plan every moment with an activity. We need to relax and rest. Actually resting is part of being well disciplined.

Activity: This can be done in small groups of three or four.

1. List some activities in your life that you are happy about.
2. List some activities in your life that you are not happy about.
3. What changes are you willing to make to become more self-disciplined?
4. Draw up a plan (include a schedule or specific steps to be taken) for becoming more self-disciplined. Did you allow for periods of rest and relaxation?

### **Life-long learning**

Summary:

1. all people can learn
2. learning is active
3. learn what interests you
4. keep it fun

As we grow older our bodies change and so do our goals. For example, a 15 year old may be very interested in sports. A 45 year old may be interested in learning a skill. One of the secrets of successful people is that they continue to “re-new” themselves. One way of doing this is by constantly learning.

A lifetime of learning may turn some people off. Some people did not like school and, for whatever reasons, did not enjoy the learning that went along with schools. Well, learning does not have to mimic schooling. For example, a person wants to learn how to cook. This is a “hands-on” type of learning that probably will not involve a lot of reading and a written examination.

There are many examples like this. Here are some:

1. learning to sing
2. learning to sew or knit or crochet
3. learning to tune an engine
4. learning to bake a cake or braai meat
5. learning to take photographs
6. learning to draw pictures
7. learning to play the guitar
8. learning to repair clocks
9. learning the Bible
10. learning to cut hair
11. learning to grow vegetables
12. learning to drive a car
13. learning to ride a bicycle
14. learning public speaking
15. learning to train dogs
16. learning about your ancestors

17. learning to tell jokes or funny stories
18. learning to make traditional baskets
19. learning computers
20. Can you think of other things?

When we master a skill or become an expert in some field of knowledge, then our self-image greatly improves. Of course, becoming a master or expert does not happen overnight. It will always takes a long time and lots of hard work.

**Activity:**

Walk somewhere you are familiar with. This time walk slowly and try to observe things you may have missed before. For example,

1. What do you smell?
2. What do you hear?
3. What animals (insects, birds, etc.) are present?
4. What evidence shows that there is constant change?
5. What else do you notice that you have never noticed before?

**Activity:**

Observe a group of people socializing.

1. What does their body language say?
2. Who is in charge or who is the leader? What evidence shows that (s)he is in charge? What body language does the leader exhibit to show (s)he is a leader?
3. Are the people having fun or not? How can you tell?
4. Would you want to be part of this group? Why or why not?

**Activity:**

1. Divide everyone into groups of about four or five people.
2. Have them list some skills or knowledge they would like to acquire. Let them use their imagination.
3. Pick one item from the list and make out a schedule on how to become a master (skill) or expert (knowledge).
4. Is the schedule realistic? (Note: There are some things that are not realistic. For example, let's say you are blind, have only one leg, and suffer from asthma and shortness of breath. If that is the case, then mountain climbing may not be a realistic goal for you.)
5. If the schedule is highly realistic, then tell why you are not doing it. If you are doing it share the progress you are making.

As you can see from the above, life-long learning can be fun and highly meaningful. If you are a person who did not like school, then learn without sitting still and holding a book.

Notice small children. They are constantly learning. They put things into their mouths. They explore. They can't help but learn. For them learning comes very naturally; in fact, they are learning machines.

Here are some things to remember.

1. Learning is active, not passive.
2. Learn things you are interested in.
3. Keep it fun.

## Spiritual growth

Summary:

1. Christianity is relational
2. God is faithful
3. finding a Christian group or church (5 items)
4. disciplines
  - a. Bible study
  - b. prayer
  - c. worship
  - d. service
  - e. obedience and trust
  - f. fasting
  - g. sacrifice
  - h. evangelism
  - i. suffering
  - j. missions
  - k. humility
  - l. submission
  - m. solitude
  - n.
5. standards
6. a note of caution about churches

What is spiritual growth? In fact, let's ask "what does *spiritual* mean?" Here spiritual means something beyond the physical. It means something that is not observable with the physical senses (sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling). Here we will deal with things of God. One of the premises of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is that God reveals himself to people through revelation. Revelation is not through the senses. Revelation is not through intellectual or logical reasoning. Revelation is God showing himself to humans via spiritual means.

As mentioned in chapter two, some worldviews hold that there is no spiritual dimension. At World Changers Academy we believe that there is a creator God and that he has in the past and continues to reveal himself to us as human beings.

The following few pages take the Christian worldview or perspective. More specifically, it takes the evangelical Christian worldview or perspective.

Many, but not all, of the personnel at World Changers Academy are Christians. We know that some of the participants may be Muslim, Hindi, or something else. We also realize that even within Christianity there are disagreements. This is not a session that will try to indoctrinate you into some specific belief system. No one should feel that (s)he is being pressured or coerced into some belief system. We welcome open, honest discussion and fully realize that there will be differences. We feel that only in an open, honest, caring environment in which people can freely examine their lives, can optimal growth and learning take place.

This is a time to reflect and examine your spiritual life. Perhaps you feel you have no spiritual life. That is okay. Feel free to discuss. Come with an open mind and be ready to grow and learn.

### **Introduction**

First of all Christianity is relational. In other words, it is not about rules but relationships. It is a relationship with a person, namely God. This is fundamental to understanding all else. Christians are God's children. Of course, God is many things. He is the King of Kings; he is Creator of all the universe; he is a judge; he is our Redeemer; he is the good shepherd; and on and on it goes. However, fundamentally, he is our father.

**Christianity is relational.**

One of the best analogies used to explain Christianity is that of marriage. In fact, this metaphor is used throughout the Bible to refer to God's relationship to his people. Marriage is not about following a set of rules, it is about a husband and a wife having a relationship with each other.

While there are no formal rules in a marriage in which one is legally bound to follow, there are responsibilities. For example, someone has to cook, someone has to clean, and someone has to generate income for food, clothing, and shelter. In the same way, there are certain responsibilities one has to undertake in one's relationship to God if growth is to occur. A marriage will not last if both the husband and the wife are not committed at making it work. Likewise, there will be no growth in our relationship with God if we do not do our part. We can be sure that God is always faithful and will always do his part.

**God is always faithful.**

Contrary to popular thought, we do not know God merely through Bible study and prayer. Bible study and prayer are vital but we will only know God by being obedient to him. If you wish to learn history, then you must read and study. If you want to be good at soccer, then you must practice. However, if you want to know God you must be obedient to him.

<b><u>Ways of knowing</u></b>	
Facts	Observe, read, and study
Skill	Practice
Knowing God	Obedience

Obviously, there is a massive amount of material written on spiritual growth. While perhaps most of it is a value, some of it is not. So the question comes, how can one know what is valid and true and what isn't. Probably the best suggestion is to ask a mature Christian. Finding a group or church is best.

Again, like written material, there are many different kinds of churches. How does one know which is best? While this course can not prescribe which church is best, there are some guidelines to follow. It is important to be careful which church you decide to join and be active in. First,

1. Ask a trusted person, especially a mature Christian.
2. Observe the behavior of the church's members. Are their lives Christ-like?
3. Ask yourself if you are comfortable in the church during worship and socializing with the members. Some music and worship styles are a matter of personal taste. Many people are more comfortable with people of the same language, social class, educational level, and so forth. Many churches are rather homogeneous in their membership but some aren't. It is important that a church is a correct "fit" for each person.
4. Ask if you are growing as a Christian in the church.
5. Check to see if the church tries to follow the teachings of the Bible or is merely maintaining traditions? While some churches have great fellowship and spirited worship, there is little actual Christian growth that takes place.

While no church is perfect, joining and belonging to the right church for you is important.

While Christian growth is a personal responsibility, we feel it is of great importance that Christians come together for support. It is strongly important to join a church or group of people who are committed to living and growing in the Christian life.

#### Activity

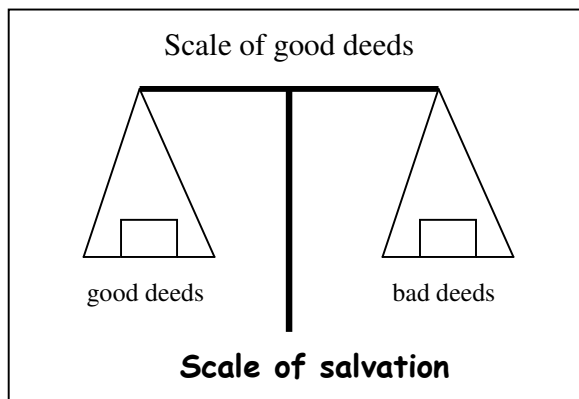
1. How do you see Christianity? Do you see it primarily as rules? Do you see it as (a) ethnic and cultural, (b) universal, or (c) both? Do you see it as private, as community, or both?
2. Often people see God in some ways as they view their earthly father. In other words, if their earthly father was kind and loving, then they will see God that way, but if their earthly father was cruel and distant, then they will see God as cruel and distant. What is your view of God? Loving father? Grandfather or "the man upstairs?" Stern judge? Policeman? Close or distant? Other?
3. How many different churches have you visited? How would you categorize the different churches in Durban? How many different ways could you categorize them?

### **Christian Disciplines**

Like anything else, growth in the Christian life takes discipline. Discipline brings good habits. That does not mean that living the Christian life has to be harsh and tasteless. Many mature Christians see growth as an exciting adventure. Again, think about a marriage. A marriage will not work unless the husband and the wife work at it. If one of the spouses simply does nothing and expects the other marriage partner to do all the work, then the marriage will not work but will fail. In the same way, if we expect God

to do all the work, then we will not grow at all. We have to do our part and let God do his part.

What is God's part? Only God can save us. Only God can give us salvation. Only God can forgive us of our sins. We cannot do anything at all to earn our salvation. This is sad because many Christians try to "earn" their salvation. They think, like other many world religions, that doing "good works" or "good deeds" will earn them salvation. The diagram on the right shows what many people think about salvation. This is wrong. Many people think that if they are good enough or if their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds then God is somehow obligated to give them salvation.



Again, God's job is to forgive our sins and save us. Our job is to trust God and be obedient to his will. Again, remember that God is always faithful; not sometimes, but always.

One way in which Christianity differs from other religions is that most all religions are "works" religion. In other words, one has to do something to *earn* salvation. Christianity teaches that no one can earn salvation. No one can do anything to obtain salvation. One person put it this way. Other religions are spelled "DO" while Christianity is spelled "DONE."

This does not mean that good deeds or good works are not important. They are. Think about a marriage. If the husband or the wife does no work at all, then the marriage is in trouble. But one doesn't work in a marriage in order to get married. In Christianity people should do good works *because* they are saved, not in order to be saved. In the same way that a loving husband or loving wife does good works in a marriage, Christians do good works in order to please God.

**Activity:**

1. How do you see Christianity? Do you see it as a religion of "works?"
2. Why do you think many Christianity see it as "works?"
3. Give some examples of ways in which religious people do good works (good deeds) in order to try to *earn* salvation.

There are some things that most Christians would agree are important in Christian growth. Christian growth is in some ways like the body. When a child grows all the parts need to grow together. If only the feet grew and the rest of the body didn't, then the child

would look very strange. In the same way, all aspects of the Christian life need to grow together.

Probably the two most important disciplines of spiritual or Christian growth are (1) Bible study and (2) prayer.

*Bible Study.* As stated earlier, merely studying the Bible will not let us know God. However, it will help us to know about God. Reading the Bible will help us to know what God requires of us. Of course, then we have to obey God's will for us. For a Christian, it is assumed that the Bible is God's word to humankind. The Bible is God's revelation of himself. The Bible does not merely contain truth; it is truth.

### The Bible is God's word.

How does one study the Bible? Many think studying a specific book of the Bible is good. Most suggest starting in the New Testament. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell about the life of Jesus. Paul's letters, especially Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, are good for study, as are the books of Hebrews and James. Some Bible study with others will help to see how others view the Bible and God's will. Also there are all sorts of aids to help one study the Bible. It is suggested that daily Bible study, if only for a few minutes, is vital for Christian growth.

A good way to study the Bible is with other people. This helps each person to be accountable for actual study. It also helps us to see other perspectives about the Bible.

Remember, in growth there will be change. If you study the Bible and are obedient to what you know God wants you to do, then you will change your worldview, your values, and your beliefs. This will change your behavior. For some people this change is threatening. It scares some people. However, mature Christians see this as a great adventure as they expect God to always be faithful.

#### Activity:

1. Have you ever read the whole Bible?
2. How would you rate your knowledge of the Bible?
3. Do you have a desire to know the Bible better?
4. What is stopping you from studying the Bible alone or with a group?

*Prayer.* Many people have some incorrect ideas about prayer. The primary purpose of prayer is not to get material possessions from God, such as a new car, a new job, or a wife or husband. Some believe that if they pray long enough and hard enough, then God is somehow obligated to give them whatever they want. This is incorrect. The primary purpose of prayer is to know God.

### The purpose of prayer is to know God.

First, how does one pray? Well, praying to God is in some ways like talking to a person. There is no one correct posture that one has to maintain. Many people "bow their head and close their eyes" when praying. This body language of bowing the head suggests humility. Closing the eyes tends to shut out other stimuli so that one can

concentrate only on God. However, one does not have to pray with the “head bowed and the eyes closed.” Prayer can be anywhere at any time in any posture. Don’t worry, God will hear you.

Second, it is vital that during prayer that one is honest. Remember, God knows all about you before you pray. If you are dishonest to God you are really just dishonest with yourself. If you are angry with God, then you must tell him. If you don’t want to be bothered with God at times, then you must tell him.

There are several aspects to prayer. One is praise. If a husband loves his wife, then he will praise her for her good qualities. In the same way, in prayer we praise God for who he is and for what he has done.

Another aspect of prayer is confession. Remember we must be totally honest with God. If we do not confess our sins and wrong doings, then we cannot grow spiritually. Sometimes we may not share all of our feelings, ideas, emotions, and motives with other people, even close friends. However, it is important that we share everything with God. He created the entire universe so nothing is too large for him. He also knows every hair on our head, so nothing is too small for him.

Some people think of confession as only telling something that is wrong. However, confession can also be something positive. Confession can be telling God what we are excited about, what we are happy about, and what pleases us.

**We must be totally honest with God.**

A third aspect of prayer is asking. We need to ask God for whatever we need. Of course, this does not mean merely material possessions. We can pray for strength, for kindness, for a forgiving spirit, and so forth. He knows our needs and wants us to ask for them. In this way we get to know God better.

A fourth aspect of prayer is intercession. This means that we pray for other people. We don’t merely pray for ourselves but for others, including our enemies. Again, this helps us to know God better.

A fifth aspect of prayer is letting God talk to us. We may think of prayer as a monologue of us talking to God, but it should be a dialogue. We always need to let God speak to us. God can speak to us in various ways. He speaks to us through his word, the Bible. He speaks to us through other people, through circumstances, through dreams, through difficulties, and so forth. One may ask how to be sure God is speaking and not something else. As we grow in faith and know God better, we know his voice better. This is like knowing a person. If you know a person very well, then you know their voice and know many of their feelings before they even speak. Sometimes people attribute voices to God and do crazy things in the name of religion when, in fact, it is not God’s voice at all.

#### Activity

1. Why do you think it is so hard for us to be totally honest with God? Do you think God knows all of your secret thoughts and deeds?
2. If we hide things from God, aren’t we really just hiding them from ourselves?
3. Do you want to be closer to God? Why and why not?

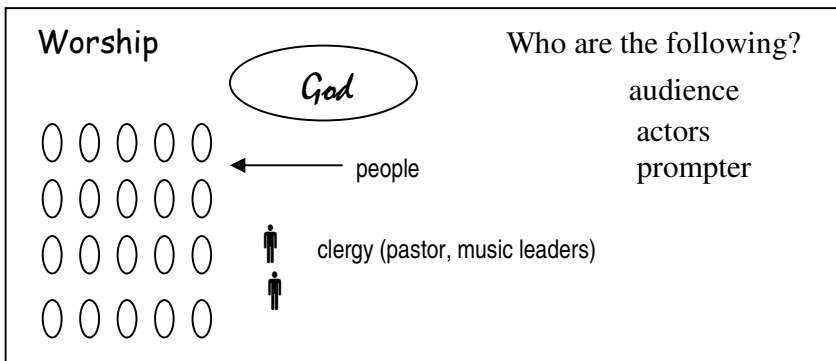
There are other disciplines to spiritual growth. Some of the others follow.

Worship. Worship can be individual and private as well as with others. Generally people set aside time on Sundays to worship. Singing, praying, reading the Bible, taking of the bread and wine, and preaching are usually part of such worship. It has been stated earlier that being with a church is important. One of the benefits of belonging to a church is worshipping together with others.

Some may not think of worship as a discipline. This is probably because many see worship as passive. In other words, one merely shows up and “goes through the motions.” True worship requires readiness. In other words, one must ready him/herself for worship. Running around late on Saturday night and then showing up half asleep on Sunday morning is not the way to properly ready oneself for worship. True worship requires decisions, sacrifices, and changes in one’s life.

In the performance of a drama, there is a “prompter.” This person stands offstage, yet close to the actors. (S)he has a copy of the script and will help the actors if they forget their lines. Soren Kierkegaard said most people think of worhsip like a drama. The preacher and the music leaders are the actors. The congregation (people) is the audience and God is the prompter. Is this model of worship correct?

Kierkegaard said this notion of worship is wrong. Rather the members of the congregation are the actors, the preacher and music leaders are the prompters, and God is the audience.



Service. Every Christian has a spiritual gift. You can read about them in several places in the Bible (I Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-12, I Peter 4:10-11). Mature Christians enjoy exercising their spiritual gifts in the church. While good deeds don’t “earn” us our salvation, the good deeds are evidence of our salvation. For example, let’s say the husband provides food, clothing, and shelter for his family. He is not doing it to become married; he is doing it because he is married and loves his family. In the same way, when we do good deeds it is not to earn our salvation; it is because we are saved. We love God and want to do his will.

Christian service means we will sometimes have to “get our hands dirty.” It means we will have to leave the “four walls of the church” and “go out into the world.” However, this is one of the ways we grow.

Obedience and Trust. Part of spiritual growth is living out what we learn from prayer and Bible study. For example, in Luke 6: 27, Jesus says “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.” Obviously this is not easy, even for mature Christians. As we grow in

faith, then our faith will be tested and often it comes when we least expect it. Will we trust and obey God and his word, or will we trust anything else including ourselves?

Many Christian scholars have listed many other disciplines. Some of these are listed below:

*Fasting*. This does not mean merely going without food, but foregoing anything that would hinder our closeness to God.

*Sacrifice*. Some would argue that without sacrifice our worship, commitment, and discipleship are limited and not mature. Many Christians speak of “sacrificial giving” or sharing our material possessions with those in need. Giving does not mean only money. It can also mean giving of our time.

*Evangelism*. This implies that we have the “good news” and we should share it with a lost world.

*Suffering*. This implies that we can know God more clearly when we identify with the suffering of the oppressed of the world as God does and also with the suffering of Jesus.

*Missions*. Some see the importance of going cross-culturally to carry the gospel to those who have not heard the “good news” of the gospel. While going to foreign lands may be a part of this, often for many the focus is going to subcultures within one’s own society. For example, one may serve in neighborhoods of different social classes, in prisons, with homeless or “street people,” with AIDS patients, with gamblers, with prostitutes, with those in debt, and so forth.

*Humility*. Often, success is associated with aggression, wealth, strength, power, and so forth. Humility is using strength and power properly. It means, among other things, not controlling others, not being arrogant, not boasting, not being selfish, and not insisting on always being right.

*Submission*. Paul says (Ephesians 5:21) “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Submission is not identical to obedience. It means putting others ahead of ourselves. It means doing what is best for others. It means seeing ourselves as servants of all others. A good example of this is when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:3-17)

*Solitude*. Solitude means being alone. It means being intimate with ourselves and God. Sometimes people are so busy with activities that they do not have time to reflect on their lives and their relationship with God. Solitude gives us time alone with ourselves and God.

This list could go on and on. It needs to be emphasized that God created each person unique and with certain gifts and talents. While God calls all human beings to salvation and to a closer walk with him, he also calls us to exercise our gifts in ways that are unique to each of us. As you grow as a Christian, you should hear the call of God more clearly and be able to find your “niche” in his kingdom. Remember, God’s call is not merely to a place doing a specific job. It is fundamentally obeying God’s word and will in everything we do.

#### Activity

1. What other disciplines could you add to the above list?
2. Does it help you to work with others who share your objectives? Do you think joining with other Christians enhances your spiritual growth? How?
3. What can people do to make themselves more disciplined?

How can we know if we are growing spiritually? Again, the Bible is a good mirror with which to see ourselves. Do we measure up to the life of Jesus Christ? One verse (Galatians 5:22) is used by many to check and see if they are growing spiritually. This verse says that the fruit of the spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.” Others look to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters five, six, and seven) as a standard to strive for.

*A note of caution about churches.* There are two types of churches that need to be avoided. One is a “cult church.” Obviously churches never call themselves as cults. A cult is one who has deviated substantially from Christianity in that it is teaching and practicing a false Christianity. Most cults with either deny the deity of Jesus or the humanity of Jesus. In other words, they will deny that Jesus was fully God or that Jesus was fully human.

The second kind of church to avoid is the one that preaches a “health and wealth” gospel. In other words, these churches preach, sometimes in a subtle manner, that if a person has enough faith, then one will be healthy and wealthy. Often they will put great emphasis on worship that makes people feel good as well as on healing. These churches are often fairly popular because they preach and teach only what people want to hear, namely that faith will bring health and wealth.

#### Activity

1. Can you name any churches that deny the deity of Jesus? The humanity of Jesus?
2. Do you think worship should make a person feel good, bad, or both?
3. What is true worship?
4. Does faith bring about health? Wealth? Is it ever wrong to preach that faith will bring health or wealth?

#### Emotional maturity

##### Summary:

1. “hierarchy of needs”
2. emotions
  - a. anger
  - b. regret
  - c. fear
  - d. guilt
  - e. doubts
  - f. grief

As we grow and mature all parts of our personality change. We should grow in emotional maturity. But what exactly is “emotional maturity.” It refers to being mature with our feelings, our desires, our impulses, our wants, and our needs. These things are all internal. In other words we can have feelings and keep them to ourselves and no one else will know what our feelings are. While that is true, we usually “show” our feelings. Even if we wish not to show our feelings, they usually come out sooner or later.



The fourth need is self-esteem. That means that people feel good about themselves. That does not mean that we feel we are better than everyone else. It does not mean we feel superior to others. It means we have a healthy respect for who we are. How do people obtain self-esteem? It helps to have skills, knowledge, physical fitness, achievements, accomplishments, and good relationships with significant others. Again, remember that we will generally not have self-esteem until the three lower (physiological needs, safety and security, and love and belonging) needs are met.

The fifth need is autonomy and control. All of us want to control our own lives and our own destiny. Often we feel “trapped” in our lives with poverty or a low-paying meaningless job, poor relationships, lack of skills, poor health, etc. Sometimes we feel our choices are very limited or even that we have virtually no choice as to what happens to us.

The sixth and highest level is that of self-actualization. This means that we are able to find deep purpose in our lives that brings us peace of mind and joy. This does not mean we don’t have problems but it means that we feel our lives count and that we are able to benefit from much of what life can be.

By understanding the “hierarchy of needs” we can better understand why we behave as we do. It should help us to make better decisions as to what we want out of life.

Let’s look at some feelings or emotions that we all experience. By understanding why we experience these emotions we can handle them in a better way. We are not saying that you should not experience these emotions. To try to deny them or to somehow suppress them is not good. We do have these emotions and feelings. We just need to understand them and use them appropriately.

<b>Feeling or emotion</b>	<b>Possible reasons for the feeling or emotions</b>
anger	something happens to us
regret	missed or lost opportunities, something we did or did not do, losing something we can never regain
fear	what we have to face in the future (this fear may be real or imagined)
guilt	what we did to ourselves/ others what we did not do to ourselves/ others
doubts	confusion due to change new values loss of control
grief	losing something (person, thing, opportunity, reward, etc.)

It should be stated that feelings as listed above, in and of themselves, are neither “right” or “wrong.” One may view feelings as gifts from God. That is not to say that all feelings are good. If we deliberately try to encourage negative, hurtful, and destructive feelings then that is not good. But generally speaking feelings are neutral in the sense that we should not feel guilty for having them.

Assuming that all people want to be self-actualizing, it is clear that most people aren’t presently self-actualizing. What happened? Most of us are frustrated in reaching our

goals and desires even if we are not totally clear what they are. All people experience anger and frustration, usually daily. Why is that?

Frustration is a denial of our desires. We want something and we can't get it so we get frustrated or angry. If we can not handle our anger then we often get ourselves into trouble.

## Anger

Summary:

1. ways of dealing with anger
  - a. let it run wild
  - b. bottle it up
  - c. control it constructively
2. sources of anger
3. expressing anger
4. appropriate expressions of anger
  - a. acknowledge the problem
  - b. ask for help
  - c. speaking appropriately
  - d. listen
  - e. use "I" statements
  - f. use good timing
  - g. do not attack people
5. inappropriate expressions of anger
  - a. shouting
  - b. talking without thought
  - c. questioning motives
  - d. stating judgments of opinions as facts
  - e. making "you" statements
  - f. saying hurtful things
  - g. not listening
6. dealing with anger
  - a. talk to a friend
  - b. "acting out"
  - c. do something constructive
  - d. exercise
  - e. forgive

Let's look at the first feeling or emotion listed above, anger. All of us have it. If we are human then we have anger. Someone has defined anger as "frustrated love." In other words, we experience anger when we are frustrated. For example, we want to make an "A" in history class. When we score a "C" we become angry. Why? We were frustrated. Again, anger in and of itself is not bad. Anger can be destructive but it doesn't have to be.

### General ways to deal with anger

Someone has described anger like a wild horse. A wild horse has plenty of energy. What can we do with a wild horse? We can do three things. First, we can let the horse run wild. This does us no good. Second, we can fence in the horse so that he can not run. Soon or later he will try to break lose. Third, we can harness the horse and use his energy for something constructive.

It is the same way with our anger. We can let it run wild. This is usually destructive. We lose our temper and say and do things that hurt others and even ourselves. No one wants to be around someone who cannot control his/her temper.

Like the horse we can bottle up our anger. However, sooner or later it will come out. When it does come out it usually is more destructive if it has been bottled up for a long time. Sometimes people hold their anger for years or even decades. Some experts think that holding anger inside of us may also leads to health problems, such as ulcers.

The third alternative is to use the anger constructively. There are several ways to do this. First we can confront the source of our anger. If we made a “C” in history, we can determine why. Maybe we did not study enough. If that is the case, we can channel our energy into history study so that we make the “A” next time.

### Sources of anger

Often people are not fully aware of their anger. For example, if you make a “C” in history, who are you angry with? To begin with, you may be angry with yourself. You may also be angry with the teacher. But that is not all. You may also be angry with your classmates, your parents, your friends, society, the government, even God. Yes, you may be angry with God for not making you more intelligent. Often people think they have no right to be angry with God so they suppress their anger. Later it comes out as anger against the church or religious people.

Sometimes we are not fully aware of our anger however. For example, you make a “C” and you are angry with yourself. You are not aware of it but you also have some anger with your parents for not helping to make your home to be more conducive for study. You bottle up your anger for a long time. Later some small incident happens and you lash out in anger at your parents. Your parents can’t understand why some trivial, small matter would cause so much anger. Well, it has been bottled up for a long time and finally explodes. When that happens it is usually destructive.

When a child dies, often one parent is angry with the other parent. Sometimes they are angry with the child himself for dying. Usually the parents are angry with God, their friends, and themselves. The list could go on and on. Facing one’s anger is healthy and important to do.

### Expressing anger

But maybe you do not know how to express your anger appropriately to your parents. Then you take out your anger on your little sister or brother. Some call this “*delivering your mail to the wrong address.*” People do this all the time. They are angered by someone with lots of power. They can’t express their anger toward the powerful person (boss, parent, teacher, government official, etc.) so they take their anger out on the weak and defenseless. Sometimes we don’t know how to appropriately express anger.

Sometimes we are not allowed to show anger toward a certain person at all. For example, in some countries people are not allowed to criticize the president at all.

There is a story where a man is angered by his boss. He can't express his anger toward the boss so he comes home and shouts at his wife. The wife is afraid of her husband and can't express her anger toward him so she shouts at the child. The child is afraid of his mother and can't express his anger toward her so he kicks the dog. The dog is afraid of the child and can't express his anger toward the child so he bites the cat. The cat is afraid of the dog and can't express his anger toward the dog so he chases the mouse! And so it goes.

Sometimes people escalate their anger. For example, let's say someone bumps into another person. The one who was bumped into, pushes the other person. That person gets angry and shouts at the other one calling him bad names. One hits the other and a fight starts. One pulls out a knife and the other pulls out a gun. Friends jump into the fight and then it becomes a brawl. It continues until it becomes a riot. It escalates and is harder to stop until many have been hurt.

#### Appropriate expressions of anger

Good communication skills help us to express our anger toward the proper source without causing the situation to escalate. For example, if you are angry toward your parents because you feel they do not help make the home conducive for study, then if you have good communication skills you might try the following:

"Mom, dad, I have a problem. I really want to make an "A" in history. However, it is difficult and I know I have to study a lot. I was wondering if you could help me. I need a quiet place to study. Sometimes the radio and television is so loud that it is difficult to tune out the sound. Sometimes your friends come over and there is so much noise and laughter that it is difficult to tune out. I get angry about this and I don't want to be angry.

I study hard Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings. But I do need some time off. I want to spend Friday here at home just relaxing. I like to spend some time with you then. On Saturday evenings I like to go out with my friends. Could we set down and make a schedule that will help me reach my goals? Could we set some guidelines that will help me make an "A" in history?"

What did the child do correctly? There are several things. They are listed below.

1. Acknowledging the problem – Notice that the child recognizes his has a problem with his anger toward his parents. He does not try to pretend the problem doesn't exist but rather confronts the problem (his anger).
2. Asking for help – Asking your parents for help will usually elicit a positive response if the request is reasonable.
3. Speaking appropriately – The child does not shout. The child obviously thought about what he was going to say before he went to his parents. The child uses a "calm" voice.
4. Listening – The child asks a question (will you help me?). The child wants to parents to speak back to him.
5. Using "I" statements – The child says "I want... I like... I am..." This avoids placing the blame onto the parents. If I say "I am angry with you" then I am taking

responsibility for the feeling of anger. If I say “You make me angry” then I am shifting the responsibility to you.

6. Timing – The child doesn’t speak when the parents are tired, angry, enjoying a visit from a friend, hurting, or busy. The child talks to the parents at a relaxed time.
7. Does not attack the person – The child does not attack the parents, making derogatory statements about them.

Contrast this to the child shouting to the parent in an angry voice, “Hey, I’m trying to study. Turn down the radio. You don’t care about me. You don’t care if I pass or fail. You are bad parents. I hate you.”

What did the child do wrong? There are several things. They are listed below.

1. Shouting – Shouting usually escalates the situation. No one likes to be shouted out. It rarely yields positive results.
2. Talking without thinking – Usually we say things we later regret when we speak without thinking.
3. Questioning motives – The child says the parents don’t care for him. That is probably untrue. But even if it were true, how would the child know? We cannot read another person’s mind. To question another person’s motives often makes the other person defensive. This leads to escalation of anger.
4. Making judgments or stating opinions as facts – The child says the parents are “bad.” This is an opinion and not a fact. Again, this often makes people defensive and leads to escalation of anger.
5. Making “you” statements – Instead of saying “I get angry when you do…” we might say “You make me angry when you do …” If we say “you” it is saying the other person is controlling us or doing something to us. By using “I” we are saying the problem is with us. By saying “I” we do not place blame onto the other person.
6. Saying hurtful statements – Telling others that you hate them, even if you don’t really mean it, is not conducive for building a good relationship.
7. Not listening – The child makes statements and is not at all interested in listening. Good communication with another is best when it is a two-way conversation.
8. Other?

**Activity: Role-playing**

Have participant’s express anger appropriately over the following concerns (or you can make up your own)

- Took a pen without permission
  - Said something untrue about a person
  - Laughed at someone for not knowing the correct answer
  - Ignored and did not greet someone
  - Forgot to do something you said you would do
  - Failed to pay back money owed
  - Playing music too loudly in the workplace
  - Chewing gum too loudly
  - Having bad body odor and not bathing
- (Continued on next page)

- Forgetting to turn out the lights and lock the door
- Talking rudely to others
- Arguing too much about little, insignificant matters
- Smoking in a closed area with others present

Being able to communicate anger appropriately is a skill that takes practice to master. Expressing anger does not mean that we never display the anger. Obviously, we sometimes have to speak while we are still emotionally charged with anger. But these situations need to be rare. Even in such moments we need to be careful not to attack the integrity of the other persons, question their motives, make judgments, or say hurtful statements.

### Dealing with anger

Sometimes we cannot face the source of our anger. For example, let's say a thief steals your money and we don't know the thief and he runs away. What then?

There are several tactics that can be used to defuse anger.

1. Talk to a friend – Sometimes just having a sympathetic ear to listen to our problems is a big help.
2. “Acting out” – Sometimes we feel we need to hit something or verbally shout at someone. We can do this to an inanimate object, such as a doll.
3. Do something constructive – If the thief steals your money you might take steps to prevent this happening again. For example, you might initiate a community crime prevention committee. If you make a “C” in history rather than an “A” you might study more. Even working on a hobby can help by taking one's mind off the anger.
4. Exercise – Vigorous exercise helps to dissipate anger as well as tension while helping your body stay healthy. Some sports like soccer or rugby allow the person to “take his anger out” on the other team in an appropriate manner. If the anger is great or intense then there will be lots of energy to dissipate. Finding a way to use the energy constructively rather than destructively is certainly an advantage.
5. Forgiving – This was dealt with in chapter two.
6. Other?

Activity: (in groups of three to five)

1. What are some things you angry about?
2. Who all are you angry with?
  - a. yourself?
  - b. friends?
  - c. people of other ethnic groups?
  - d. teachers?
  - e. parents?
  - f. taxi drivers?
  - g. society?
  - h. the government?
  - i. the past apartheid government?
  - j. rich people?
  - k. poor people?
  - l. the church?
  - m. God?
  - n. big business and industry?
  - o. the weather?
  - p. changes?
  - q. lack of change?
  - r. other?
3. Pick one thing that is causing you anger and do the following:
  - a. What is the source of your anger? List as many sources as possible.
  - b. Are you in denial about any source of your anger?
  - c. List all the ways you have dealt with the anger.
    - i. lost your temper?
    - ii. bottled it up?
    - iii. took out your anger out on a weakling?
    - iv. tried to dissipate your anger?  
How? i) talk to a friend  
ii) "acting out"  
iii) doing something constructive  
iv) exercise or sports  
v) forgiving
4. How do you want the anger to be resolved?

## Grief

### Summary:

1. emotional responses
  - a. denial
  - b. numbness
  - c. bargaining
  - d. guilt
  - e. hopelessness
  - f. acting out
  - g. defensiveness
  - h. destruction
  - i. sadness
  - j. acceptance
2. crying is good
3. children should have grief modeled for them

As stated earlier, grief is losing something. In the case of the death of someone who is close to us, the grief may be intense. There are several emotions associated with grief. If we understand them, then we can better cope with the intense emotions we may experience.

All people experience grief differently. There is no one set way that is appropriate for people to express grief. However, generally grief will fall within several well-known emotional responses.

1. Denial – When we first hear of death we usually immediately say “no.” We don’t want it to be true.
2. Numbness – Often when the truth sinks in we go numb. Of course we may cry but we block out other concerns of life. We do not want to eat or work.
3. Bargaining – We may silently bargain with God. For example, we may say “if you will bring him/her back then I will do such-and-such.” Of course we know this is not logical, but is common in grief. We tend to blame ourselves and say “What if....?”
4. Guilt – We will often blame someone for the death. We may blame ourselves. We may even blame the person for dying. We may blame God. We may blame society. Sometimes we will blame ourselves for not having done something. Maybe we didn’t resolve an argument or didn’t ever express our admiration to the dead person.
5. Hopelessness – Often we will not want to do normal things. We may neglect eating, bathing, and other daily routines. Sometimes this will cause a lack of concentration that affects our work.
6. Acting out – Sometimes we may do unusual or non-normal activities as a diversion or to stay busy so we don’t have to think about the death. For example, we may sweep the house or garden over and over even after it is clean.
7. Defensiveness – Sometimes the relation with the dead person was not always good. For example, if this was a parent then the child may over-react with grief. Or the child may become defensive when the topic of grief is brought up.
8. Destruction – While this is not an emotion, it is a behavior that may be associated with grief. If the death has caused anger, this may be a factor in the person engaging

in destructive behavior. Sometimes intervention by friends can help the person to avoid destructive behavior.

9. Sadness – We miss the dead person and feel very sad over their loss.
10. Acceptance – Usually after about six months or so we come to terms with the death and then move on with life. Please note that “six months” is typical. Some will take longer. If the person cannot gain some degree of acceptance after a year or so, then perhaps professional counseling is needed. This does not mean we forget about the person. It does not mean we are no longer sad. It does not mean we do not miss the person. It means we have emotionally come to terms with the fact that the person will no longer be part of our lives.

Two things should be noted in dealing with grief. First it should be noted that crying is normal in grief. No one should be ashamed of normal crying. Crying is therapeutic in that it helps us to deal with the stress of the grief. Crying is normal and should not be suppressed. However, if crying persists for a long, long time then counseling should be sought. If you are still crying for long periods a year after a loss, then counseling should be sought.

Second, children should not be shielded from grief. Sometimes well-meaning adults will not allow small children to see adults crying so as to spare the child any sadness. This sends a message that the adults are not sad. Sometimes adults will tell the child the dead person has “left for a long time.” Children may then feel the person has abandoned them and no longer cares for them. Children need to see adults in grief. Proper expressions of grief will model appropriate responses in children. Loss and death are a normal, but painful, part of life that none are spared. Children can not be shielded from loss or death for long and they, like all people, need to learn how to appropriately handle it.

Activity: small group activity

1. Think of a time when you experienced intense grief.
2. How did you handle grief?
3. How many of the above-mentioned feelings did you have?
4. Do you think these emotions and feelings will occur over any loss, not just death?

### **Control and Bullying**

Summary:

1. bullying comes from a lack of control
2. well adjusted people have no need to bully

Sometimes people with little power will try to control others. This is a very common occurrence. From the school-yard bully to the politically powerful dictator, this behavior can be seen all over the world.

Someone once said, “All cruelty comes from a feeling of inferiority.” Why does the bully behave as (s)he does? Why does the dictator behave as (s)he does?

Remember, one of the needs of people is to control. When we have control of our environment we have power over it. We want to know what will happen. We want predictability; a chaotic world is threatening to all of us. When we feel we do not have control we feel threatened. We want to gain control. Sometimes we feel powerless. We want to gain power. Therefore, sometimes people will engage in bullying others to gain a sense of power and control.

A person who is secure and self-actualizing does not need to engage in bullying to feel in control.

Bullying behavior does not always have to be physical. It can be verbal or emotional. As mentioned before, the need to control others is usually due to a feeling of inferiority, loss of control, or the threat of loss of control.

Activity:

1. How did you deal with bullying in school? (This assumes you were not a bully yourself.)
2. How do you deal with bullying as an adult?
3. What are some forms of bullying that adults use?

## **Stress**

Summary:

1. primary reasons for stress
  - a. loss of control
  - b. uncertainty
  - c. conflict
2. reasons people feel stress
  - a. money problems
  - b. health problems
  - c. relationships
  - d. job problems
  - e. crime
3. how to lessen stress
  - a. pray or meditate
  - b. exercise
  - c. rest
  - d. relax
  - e. fitness
  - f. handle anger properly
  - g. laugh

All of us experience stress. Some stress is necessary for living. However, many people have too much stress in their life.

What causes stress? When is stress good and when is it bad?

Some stress is necessary for life. For example, when we are in a threatening situation our heart beat increases. This is an example of good stress. The stress helps us cope with

the threat. Our bodies are made to face threatening situations with a flight-or-fight response. In other words we either run away or we stay and fight it out.

While this is good for us in the short term, it isn't so good if we are faced with threatening situations all day long. Some of these threatening situations do not call for a flight-or-fight response. Stress is caused by three primary reasons.

1. loss of control
2. uncertainty
3. conflict

As mentioned before, stress in a conflict situation that is physically threatening is generally good. But what about other reasons?

There are all sorts of reasons that people feel stress. Some of these are:

1. money problems
2. health problems
3. relationship problems (family, friends, enemies)
4. job problems (security, poor conditions, etc.)
5. crime
6. other?

A look at the above lists tells us that virtually everyone persons has stress from these items. Too much stress can cause all sorts of health problems.

What can people do to lessen stress in their lives? Here are some strategies:

1. Pray or meditate – Many people find this helpful.
2. Exercise – Vigorous exercise helps to dissipate stress and tension.
3. Rest – Getting plenty of rest helps to reduce stress.
4. Relax – Breathing deeply and learning to relax is helpful in reducing stress.
5. Fitness – Maintaining physical fitness helps to reduce stress.
6. Anger – Learning to control and use anger constructively not only helps us avoid trouble but also helps to reduce stress.
7. Laugh – Laughing helps to reduce stress. Even in difficult situations, emotional mature people learn to laugh.

Managing stress cannot be done in isolation to other dimensions of a person's life. Also one can be rather creative in how one manages stress. Remember that all people have stress. It is how we handle it that makes us different.

Activity: (small group activity of three to five people)

1. What are some things that cause you great stress?
2. How do you handle stress?
3. Some people see problems as internal (a person is responsible for his/her own life) while others see problems as external (outside influences mostly affect his/her own life). Which are you?
4. How do you think successful people handle stress?

## Revenge

Summary: Don't take revenge

Revenge is punishing someone for an injury or wrong. Why are people so eager to take revenge? Part of the reason has to do with justice or fairness. If someone wrongs us, then we want to wrong them to even the score. Most people get very angry when there is unfairness. We all like a sense of fairness.

Over 3,500 years ago the Bible speaks about revenge when it says.

Jesus said (Matthew 5:38-39) "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too."

Many have given different meanings to what Jesus said. Most, however, feel this is not to be taken only strictly literal. In other words, we are not merely to turn our left cheek when we are slapped on the right cheek. In fact, since most people are right handed, a slap on the left cheek would usually be a backhanded slap, like an insult. Obviously this does not mean that we should just allow people beat us up.

By not taking revenge we do not let the other person control our behavior. By not taking revenge we do not cause an escalation of violence. By not taking revenge we do not let our emotions rule our behavior.

However, what about some huge injustice? Should we just ignore it? What should we do if someone breaks into our house? What should we do if someone beats us up? Obviously no society can exist if the criminals are free to do whatever they wish.

There is no easy rule to follow on what should be ignored and what should not be ignored. Serious crimes should be taken to the police and justice should be pursued. Serious crime is not just against one person but against all of society.

It should be remembered that taking revenge almost always gets us in to more trouble and problems than it solves. An emotionally mature person should be able to suffer a minor injustice and not feel the need to take revenge.

Activity:

1. When do you feel the need to take revenge?
2. What kinds of injustices cause you to feel angry?
3. Give an example when you have suffered an injustice and did not try to take revenge.  
Do you think that was the best thing to do?

## Friends

Summary:  
characteristics of friendships

1. trust
2. share hopes and dreams
3. share disappointments
4. share fears
5. easy communication
6. help each other
7. care about each other
8. support each other
9. share intimacy

As part of our growth, we have friends. While some friends may have hurt us, life would be dreary without some friends. What makes a friend?

We may have friends who hurt us. We may have friends who make us angry. We may even have friends who betray us at times. However, a friendship cannot endure without some degree of trust. In fact, one characteristic of all constructive relationships is trust. No constructive relationship can survive long without trust.

What other characteristics do constructive friendships have? Here is a list:

1. As mentioned above, trust is essential.
2. We share our hopes and dreams with our friends.
3. We share our disappointments with our friends.
4. We share our fears with our friends.
5. Friends have a mutual or shared understanding that makes communication very easy.
6. We help our friends.
7. Friends care about each other. Yes, friends like each other but also friends care about each other. Friends want to help each other.
8. We support our friends. When friends fall or make mistakes, we are there. We don't abandon our friends when they mess up.
9. Friends share intimacy. Some of what we do and say with friends is not told to others. It stays with the friends themselves.
10. Other? What other characteristics do friends share?

Some people have the idea that if two people have a lot of interests in common then they will be good friends. This is not always true. While friends do have interests in common, two people can have the same interest and not be friends at all. For example, A and B both like soccer. However, they are not friends as they do not trust each other.

Activity:

1. What are some characteristics that you look for in a friend?
  2. What do all of your close friends have in common?
  3. What characteristics do dogs have that make people call them "man's best friend?"
- Bonus question: Do you have any friend closer than your dog?