

WEEK ELEVEN

VESSELS OF HONOR

"In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work."

2 TIMOTHY 2:20-21

In this passage, the Apostle Paul uses household items as an analogy to describe believers and our ability to be useful to God by serving Him and fulfilling our respective destinies. We see that some items are inexpensive and ordinary, but others are honorable, used for special occasions. In the Master's hand, these are utensils that accomplish great things. Every person is at a different place in his or her walk with Christ. No two stories are the same, and no one starts out as silver or gold; it is a process. If you're unsatisfied with where you are in the process, God is eager to take you to the next level.

He is the One who prepares us, refines us, and makes us honorable. Though you may not feel very special or honorable at this moment, God sees you this way. You are not defined or limited by your past. He says in His Word that He makes all things brand new (2 Corinthians 5:17) and He wants to help you become a vessel of honor.

Write Revelation 21:5

Ask Yourself: Am I satisfied with where I am with God? How do I want my life to be different?

At times, we may look at another person and assume from outward appearances that their spiritual walk is strong. While they may appear holy and righteous, looks can be deceiving. We can't tell from the outside what is going on inside a person's heart. It's similar to looking at dishes in a dishwasher—sometimes you can't tell if they have been washed. Even if you inspect them closely and they look

clean, they may still be covered in germs. You wouldn't want to eat on a plate that is dirty, no matter how clean it looks on the surface! The Holy Spirit knows when there is something in our lives keeping us from being fit for His use, and He will convict us of sin. Will you let Him reveal those areas to you? He wants to bring you to a new level of personal integrity, and He will do a miracle in your life if you will allow Him.

What areas of your life might need to be confronted and cleaned up by the Holy Spirit? Write them out below as a way of surrendering them to the Lord.

When we talked about Spiritual Order in Week Four, we discussed justification and sanctification. Remember, justification is an event that takes place when we are saved. When Jesus becomes our Savior, at that very moment, every sin of our past is wiped clean. God removes the junk of yesterday, just as if we had never sinned.

Sanctification, however, is not an event—it's a process. It's a journey through which God molds and transforms our character. As He sanctifies us, God takes us to new stages of faith, continually making us more like Him. He sets us free from habitual sin, purifies our hearts, and empowers us to fulfill the Kingdom purpose for which He created us.

Read the four Stages listed below and identify where you are right now.

Four Stages of Christianity

1. Unbelievers become believers.
2. Believers become disciples who begin to grow.
3. Disciples become leaders who find their purpose in life.
4. Leaders become servants.

It may surprise you to discover that the highest level of our journey as Christians is servanthood. This concept is very counterintuitive to the world's way of thinking. But our greatest goal as Christians is to fulfill the purpose for which God created us, and that requires us to become His servants. Let's look again at 2 Timothy 2:21: "If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work." Here, the word "Master" is the Greek word "despotes," which refers to a person who is a ruler with absolute power and authority over others. We often think of God as a Friend, a Savior, a Protector, and He is those things—but He is also Lord. That means He calls the shots! And we are called to serve at the pleasure of our King.

Write Matthew 20:26

HONOR IN ACTION

There are three steps we can take to become vessels of honor: offer our bodies, renew our minds, and surrender our wills.

1. Offer our bodies.

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.”

ROMANS 12:1

The body is the place where sin functions. We might sin by saying something with our mouths, looking at something with our eyes, or touching something with our hands. In Job 31:1, a righteous man says, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman.” When we are intentional with our bodies, we are able to make conscious decisions to avoid sin. We will make great progress toward becoming a vessel of honor if we are willing to say each day, “Here I am Lord; clean me up. Take each member of my body and the things I have done and wash me. Take my appetites, my addictions, my habits, my tongue, and my attitudes, and consecrate them.”

Underline the first word of each command in the following verse:

Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

2 TIMOTHY 2:22

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

ROMANS 6:12–14

2. Renew our minds.

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”

ROMANS 12:2

Sin functions in the body, but the mind controls the body. Sin begins in the mind.

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3–5 NIV

In this passage, we see that spiritual warfare is an essential component of the Christian life. Many Christians love God but have no clue how to fight the enemy. We must become equipped for battle because the devil is scheming to destroy you. (1 Peter 5:8)

One of the ways we fight the enemy is by demolishing “arguments.” An argument is an “idea.” The enemy’s goal is to plant thoughts in your mind that are contrary to God’s thoughts. A lot of the ideas we’ve subscribed to, even about God, are simply wrong because they are contrary to Scripture. Don’t listen to the voice of the enemy; listen to the Word of God. For example, if the Bible says, “By His wounds you are healed” (Isaiah 53:5), believe it! Warfare is exchanging the report of the world for the report of the Lord. Peace can reign and rule in our hearts when we align our thoughts with the truth of God’s Word.

Here is the main question when it comes to spiritual warfare: Can the devil get you to believe him? We must take thoughts captive and compare them to what the Bible says is true. Minimize your exposure to the worldly thinking found in music, TV, movies, books, and entertainment, and saturate yourself with the Word of God. When you turn off the programming of the world, the voice of God will become clearer to you.

Renewing our mind by the Word of God requires us to use Scripture to combat the lies of the enemy.

Write the truth from Scripture that will dismantle the enemy's lies

LIE

TRUTH

You are confused.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:16

You are fearful.

2 TIMOTHY 1:7

There is no hope.

JEREMIAH 29:11

You're going to die.

PSALM 118:17

Something bad is
going to happen.

PSALM 91:10

God can't hear you.

PSALM 34:17

Nothing will ever change.

ISAIAH 43:18–19

3. Surrender our wills.

“Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”

ROMANS 12:2

The body carries out sin, and the mind controls the body, but the will controls the mind. As we surrender our will to God, His perfect will becomes the motivation of our lives. In Matthew 6, Jesus tells us to pray this way: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done.” Instead of coming to God with our agenda, we should approach prayer with this mentality: “Father, I want what You want. Have Your way.” Come to Him with a neutral heart. If we are biased toward a specific answer to our prayer, God’s voice will be difficult to discern.

Write Luke 22:42

When we pray like this and surrender our will, we are able to honor God with every part of our lives. In this way, we become honorable and useful to the Lord. He will stir up purpose within us and empower us to fulfill our God-given destiny and expand the Kingdom of Heaven.

PREPARE FOR BATTLE

“You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.”

1 PETER 2:9

Being useful in the Kingdom is the greatest honor of our lives, but it comes at a price. When we begin to walk in our purpose, we will get the attention of the enemy. We should anticipate his attacks and take them as a sign of encouragement. We are a threat to his plan to keep the world in darkness. Hold on to this truth: you belong to God, and the enemy cannot change that. No one can snatch you out of God’s hand. (John 10:28) But we still need to prepare to go to war with the enemy. We need to study our opponent’s tactics. The enemy knows the best way to combat our spiritual growth and Kingdom purpose is to trap us in sin. Satan will try to derail us with temptation, making something that is harmful to us seem extremely appealing. When we are tempted, our character is tested through desires in our soul and body.

“And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else.”

JAMES 1:13

We need to understand that God never tempts us! Satan and his demons are the tempters. Unlike God, Satan cannot be everywhere at the same time. But the Bible says that when he fell from heaven, he took one third of the angels with him (Revelation 12:4).

and he has sent them out on mission to destroy our lives. They are always looking for an opportunity to trap us in temptation. Satan has been tempting mankind since he tempted Eve in the Garden. Even Jesus was tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) Jesus, our High Priest, “understands our weakness, for He faced all of the same testings we do, yet He did not sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) And because “He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world,” we can stand against temptation. (1 John 4:4 NIV)

Read James 4:7. What happens when we choose to resist the devil’s temptations?

Write 1 Corinthians 10:13. What will God do for you when a temptation seems unbearable?

Jesus gives us insight into how we can withstand temptation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, before He was arrested and crucified, Jesus told His disciples, “Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!” (Matthew 26:41) In other words, we need to keep the dialogue going with God. Open communication keeps us safe and aware. Wise parents of teenagers know the value of simply talking to their children. A strong, open relationship between parents and children provides protection. Can you see the active role you play in your own deliverance from evil? You have the choice and available power to withstand the enemy. You can choose to succumb to satan’s pressure and give him a foothold in your life (Ephesians 4:27), or you can submit to God and be empowered to defeat the enemy.

THE BREAKDOWN

For rock climbers, a foothold is the place they step so they can advance up the side of a mountain. For the enemy, it is a base for advancing his destruction of God’s plans in our lives. A foothold gives him control over an area of our soul, and we allow him to take hold of it when we give in to temptation. Over time, as we give in over and over to a particular temptation, satan’s control in that area will grow. Proverbs 5:22 says, “An evil man is held captive by his own sins; they are ropes that catch and hold him.” A foothold can ultimately become a stronghold, or an enemy fortress, in our soul. Strongholds are highly dangerous to our spiritual condition and must be torn down.

Areas of bondage that can become footholds in our lives can look like anger, rage, abuse, lust, alcoholism, drugs, profanity, lying, or many other things.

Footholds can get lodged in our souls early in life, particularly if a certain sin was part of our environment. For example, if there was often rage in your home, rage might feel like a natural way for you to respond. Areas of bondage can also be the result of the generational sin of our parents or grandparents. Jesus says in John 8:34, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin.”

How to Break Out of Bondage

“Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will believe the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.”

2 TIMOTHY 2:25–26

As Christians, God has given us the power to overcome the attacks of the enemy and areas of oppression in our lives. To be free of bondage, we need to repent of sin and cast off the powers of darkness.

Repentance

Often, people believe that just the admission of sin clears their conscience and frees them from any consequence or responsibility. While admitting a sin is part of repentance, it is not full repentance. Repentance not only means admitting your sin but turning away from the sin and choosing to no longer continue in it. Titus 2:11–12 (NIV) tells us that through God’s grace and salvation, we can say “‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.”

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. What might be missing in a person who struggles with turning from sin?

Read Romans 2:4. What else leads us to repentance?

Write Romans 13:12.

If you find yourself in a cycle of sin, don't give up hope! God desires to help you break the cycle. Ask Him to give you godly sorrow that leads to repentance, and meditate on His goodness and His kindness. And remember, "The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand." (Psalm 37:23-24)

Casting Off Darkness

1 John 1:7 says that if we are repentant, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. But sometimes people can feel that they aren't forgiven even after they have confessed and repented of a sin many times.

If you are feeling this way, it may be because you need to cast off a demon spirit associated with the sin. Over time, sin will allow the enemy to gain a foothold, which feels like a "hook" lodged in your soul. When you are least prepared, you will experience a tug on that hook that makes you feel unworthy and defeated. Those feelings are lies! Because you have repented of that sin, it is covered by the blood of Jesus, and you need to tell the enemy to get out by casting him off in the name of Jesus and removing the hook. This will destroy the demonic hold in that area and release you to experience the complete peace of God's forgiveness. After the hook is removed, ask the Lord to heal the wound and fill the space with His peace and power.

You don't need to be afraid to do this because God has given you the authority in Christ over sin and any dark spirit. The Holy Spirit is with you, and God promises to never leave or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:8). Remember "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, NKJV)

Below is a list of common struggles you may need to overcome. Identify the areas where satan may have a foothold in your life, and by using the prayer outline above, pray through prayers of repentance, and renounce any dark power.

*rejection • abuse • self-hatred/unworthiness • depression • pride
unforgiveness • greed • guilt/shame • lust/sexual impurity
control • anger • fear*

The specific example of worthlessness is used to show the application the following prayers.

- 1. Confess:** Healing starts with admitting we were wrong. We must first acknowledge that we have believed something that is not true and have agreed with the lies of the enemy.

Father, I confess that I have believed the lie that I am worthless and unlovable. Please forgive me for not trusting that what Your Word says about me is true.

- 2. Repent:** To repent means to change direction. When we repent, we choose to turn around and go the opposite way of our previous path. Stop your agreement with the enemy in its tracks and set your mind on a new course of thinking. If anyone has hurt you by reinforcing these lies in your life, forgive them and release them to the Lord.

I repent and come out of agreement with the lies of the enemy regarding my worth. I recognize that I am greatly valued and loved by God. Father, I choose to believe Your Word and what You say about me. I choose to forgive _____ for any way in which they have led me to believe that I am worthless, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

It is important to note that when we confess our sins and reject the enemy's lies, we realign ourselves with God's truth. Armed with confidence in His Word, we can take authority over the enemy and remove the effects of his lies from our lives.

3. Cast off: We must refuse to allow the enemy to continue to use destructive words or events against us. With the authority of the Name of Jesus, command the enemy to leave.

I cast off the lie that I am worthless, and I renounce the spirit of unworthiness. In the Name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, I break the curse of unworthiness and all its effects in my life. I declare that the spirit of unworthiness has no place in my life.

4. Bless: Once the enemy has been removed, fill the place that he held with truth and promises found in Scripture. Speak life over yourself by declaring an accurate view of how God sees you.

I declare and choose to believe what the Word of God says in Ephesians 2:10, that I am "God's masterpiece, created anew in Christ Jesus." I release the blessing of value and purpose in my life and declare that I am of great worth to God.

Pray for the Holy Spirit's discernment and guidance. He desires for you to be free!

A LIFE OF HONOR

God created you to be a vessel of honor. This role will require you to fight the enemy and reorder your life. Though it can be challenging and messy at times, the rewards are immeasurable. Obedience brings blessing to your life (Deuteronomy 11:27). In addition, God will use you as a catalyst for peace in your family, joy in your community, and change in your school and place of business.

Though the process of becoming a vessel of honor may seem a bit overwhelming on the whole, you will make great progress by being faithful in the small, day-to-day things. Intentionally set aside time to spend with God every day, and apply Tree of Life perspective to every decision you make. In this way, you will begin to shine a light before men that drives away darkness and fills a lost, broken, and lonely world with great hope.

Journal: *Below is a space for you to write what you're learning, thoughts on this week's topic, or what you feel God is leading you to do.*