RESTORED

A 6-Week Bible Study on Coming Back to God

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The Preacher's Pen

preacherspen.org

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Introduction

Some of us have drifted. Some of us never really got started. Some of us sit in a pew every Sunday and still feel a long way from God. Wherever you are right now, I am glad you picked up this study.

One of the greatest needs today is restoration and renewal. That is true out in the world, and it is true inside the church. Even people who are seeking God's heart need to be restored. David was called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), yet 2 Samuel 11 and 12 tell the story of how far he fell and how God brought him back. If David needed restoring, none of us should be too proud to admit that we might need it too.

This study comes from a series of lessons I taught called Restored. Each lesson builds on the one before it, so it works best if you take them in order:

1. **Do You Need to Be Restored?** We start by getting honest about sin and what it does to us.
2. **Seek God.** Restoration is not possible without God, and He wants to be found.
3. **Finding Forgiveness.** We look at the blood of Christ and how a person comes in contact with it.
4. **Renewed Strength.** We find where real strength comes from and the commitments that keep us standing.
5. **Restoring Zeal.** We learn how to get the fire back: remember, repent, and do the first works.
6. **Deciding to Live in Christ.** We choose life and walk forward in the new life God gives.

How to Use This Study

Every lesson has four parts. The Teaching Reading walks through the main points of the lesson with the Scriptures behind them. The Scripture Reading List gives you the passages to read for yourself. The Discussion Questions help you think it through, alone or with others. This Week gives you one practical step to put the lesson into practice before the next one.

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. Please do not take my word for anything. Be like the Bereans, who "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Keep your Bible open the whole way through.

On Your Own

Take one lesson a week. Read the Teaching Reading with your Bible open and look up every verse, not just the ones that are printed out. Work through the Scripture Reading List over the

next few days. Write your answers to the questions in a notebook so you can look back and see where God has been working on you. Then do the This Week step. Do not skip that part. It is where the study stops being information and starts being restoration.

In a Wednesday Night Class

The teacher can use the Teaching Reading as lesson notes and the main headings as the outline for the board or the screen. Read the key passages aloud as a class. You probably will not get to every question, so pick the ones that fit your group best. Close by reading the This Week step together and asking about it at the start of the next class.

In a Small Group

Ask everyone to read the lesson before you meet, so your time together can go to the Scriptures and the questions. Begin and end with prayer. Give people room to talk, and give them room to pass. When you meet the next week, start by asking how the This Week step went.

My prayer is that by the end of these six weeks you will know that you have been restored, and that you will help someone else come back too.

Just some thoughts.

Leader and Small Group Guide

If you are leading a class or a group through Restored, thank you. Here are a few things that will help.

Before You Meet

Read the lesson at least twice and look up every passage. Pray for the people in your group by name. Think about who might be hurting, who might be drifting, and who might be visiting for the first time.

Set the Tone

This study talks honestly about sin, guilt, and coming back to God. That can be hard for people. Make your group a safe place. Nobody should feel put on the spot, and anyone can pass on a question. Share from your own life when it helps, and keep what others share inside the group.

Keep the Bible at the Center

When a question or a disagreement comes up, go back to the text and ask, “What does the passage say?” The goal is not to win an argument. The goal is for every person to hear what God says and respond to it.

Be Ready for Lessons 3 and 5

Lesson 3 teaches how a person comes in contact with the blood of Christ: by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Lesson 5 teaches how a Christian who has fallen away comes back: by repenting and praying to God (Acts 8:22), trusting that the blood of Jesus keeps cleansing those who walk in the light (1 John 1:7). Some in your group may realize they have never obeyed the gospel. Others may realize they have drifted. Be ready to talk privately, open the Bible with them, and have a preacher or an elder available to help. Do not rush anyone, and do not leave anyone hanging.

Follow Up

Start each meeting by asking about last week’s This Week step. Check in with anyone who misses. Restoration happens in a church family that encourages one another and does not forsake assembling together (Hebrews 10:24-25).

LESSON 1

Do You Need to Be Restored?

Key Texts: *Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:7; Acts 22:16*

Teaching Reading

One of the greatest needs today is restoration and renewal. We live in a world that is broken by sin, and if we are honest, a lot of us are carrying some of that brokenness around inside. Before anyone can be restored, though, they have to see that they need it. That is where this study begins.

Even Those Seeking God's Heart Need Restoration

It is easy to think restoration is only for "those people," the ones whose lives have obviously fallen apart. Scripture will not let us think that way. God described David as "a man after My own heart, who will do all My will" (Acts 13:22). Yet in 2 Samuel 11 we read about his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. In 2 Samuel 12 God sent Nathan to confront him, and David said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). If a man after God's own heart needed to be restored, then so can we.

What Is Restoration?

Three words help us here.

- Restoration means repairing, renewing, or rebuilding.
- Renewal means bringing something back to its original state of newness.
- Revival means bringing back spiritual life in individuals or groups.

All three describe what God wants to do with us. He wants to repair what sin has broken, bring us back to the newness He intended, and breathe spiritual life back into hearts that have gone cold.

Why Do You Need to Be Restored?

Separation From God

Separation from God began in the garden. God gave Adam a clear command (Genesis 2:16-17), and when that command was broken, everything changed. Paul writes, "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Isaiah put it plainly to Israel:

> *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."*
>
> **Isaiah 59:2**

That separation is serious. It is deserving of punishment. Paul describes those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel this way: "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Sin as a Disease

Think of sin as a disease. Physical diseases harm the body, but sin brings spiritual death. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Everyone dies physically. Spiritual death is something worse. It is separation from God, and Jesus said it ends in "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46).

Who Caused the Separation?

God did not walk away from us. Our choices separate us from God (Isaiah 59:2). John defines sin for us: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Sin is not bad luck. It is choosing our way over God's way.

How Were You Separated?

Ignoring or forgetting God's guidelines leads to spiritual infection (1 John 3:4). The Psalmist knew the cure for that kind of forgetting: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). When we stop reading, stop listening, and stop remembering, the infection has room to spread.

Ignorance and inactivity are no excuse. Paul says that since the creation of the world God's "invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). The church at Ephesus was busy and sound, but Jesus still said, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). You can drift away from God without ever making one big dramatic decision. You just stop moving toward Him.

Where Is the Cure?

The Cure Is Christ

Here is the good news. The disease is deadly, but there is a cure, and the cure is Christ. Paul delivered this "first of all": "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). Isaiah saw it coming centuries before (Isaiah 53:10). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

His blood cleanses us. “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). When Saul of Tarsus was told what to do, the instruction was simple: “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). We will spend all of Lesson 3 on how a person comes in contact with that cleansing blood.

The Knowledge of the Cure

Knowing about the cure is not the same as taking it. Knowing the cure should lead to healing and action. Felix heard Paul reason “about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,” and he was afraid, but he told Paul, “Go away for now” (Acts 24:25). King Agrippa listened to Paul’s defense and said, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Both men heard the truth. Neither acted on it, as far as Scripture tells us.

Final Thoughts

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That includes the preacher writing this and every person reading it. The first step to restoration is recognizing your need for it. You cannot be restored while you are pretending you are fine.

So let me ask you the same two questions I asked when I first taught this lesson. Where do you see your need for spiritual restoration today? What steps can you take to begin the journey?

Scripture Reading List

- Isaiah 59:1-2
- Genesis 2:15-17 and Romans 5:12
- 2 Samuel 11-12 and Acts 13:22
- Romans 6:23 and Matthew 25:46
- 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9
- 1 John 3:4 and Psalm 119:9-11, 105
- Romans 1:18-21 and Revelation 2:1-7
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Isaiah 53:4-10, and John 3:16
- 1 John 1:5-7 and Acts 22:16
- Acts 24:22-25 and Acts 26:24-29
- Romans 3:23

Discussion Questions

1. The lesson defines restoration, renewal, and revival. Which of those three words best describes what you need right now, and why?
2. David was “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22), yet he fell hard. What does his story in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 teach us about how anyone can drift?

3. Isaiah 59:2 says our iniquities have separated us from God. How have you seen sin put distance between a person and God?
4. In what ways is sin like a disease? How does it spread, and what does it do if it is left untreated?
5. Read Psalm 119:11 and 105. How does keeping God's word in our hearts protect us from spiritual infection?
6. Why are ignorance and inactivity no excuse before God (Romans 1:20; Revelation 2:4-5)?
7. Felix and Agrippa both heard the truth but did not act. What keeps people today from acting on what they know?
8. Where do you see your need for spiritual restoration today, and what steps can you take to begin the journey?

This Week

> Take an honest inventory. Read Isaiah 59:1-2 and Romans 3:23 at the start of each day. Before the week is over, write down one area of your life where you see your need for restoration and one step you will take to begin the journey. Then pray about it by name.

LESSON 2

Seek God

Key Texts: *Acts 17:26-27; Matthew 5:6; Psalm 42:1; Hebrews 11:6*

Teaching Reading

Last week we got honest about our need. This week we ask a simple question: if I need to be restored, where do I go? The answer is not a program or a feeling. The answer is God. Our spiritual restoration is not possible without God.

God Has Provided Blessings

Before we talk about seeking God, remember how much He has already given.

- The blessing of His Son. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).
- The blessing of life. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).
- The blessing of instruction. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

God has not hidden from us. He sent His Son, He gave us life, and He put His instructions in writing. The question is not whether God has done His part. The question is whether we will do ours.

Do We Actively Seek God?

Here is where it gets personal. Do we actively seek God, or do we passively seek Him? Passive seeking sounds like, "If God wants me, He knows where I am." Active seeking gets up and goes looking. One waits. The other moves.

It Takes a Thirst

Jesus said:

> *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."*
>
> **Matthew 5:6**

The Psalmist said the same thing in a picture:

> *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God."*
>
> **Psalm 42:1**

Nobody has to convince a thirsty person to look for water. Thirst does the convincing. When we really want God, we go after Him.

Why Thirst for God?

There are good reasons to be thirsty for God.

Jesus, the Son of God, provides living water. He told the woman at the well, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). He went on, "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (John 4:14).

Someone who cares can fill the emptiness inside a person. Peter tells us to be "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). God is not a distant idea. He cares about you.

God will provide your needs. In Matthew 6:19-34 Jesus tells us not to lay up treasure on earth and not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Do You Thirst?

That is the real question. A lot of us are thirsty, but we are drinking from the wrong wells. Paul reminds us that "the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). John warns that all that is in the world, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," "is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). If our thirst is being spent on the things of this world, we will not have much left for God.

It Takes Action

Thirst is where it starts, but thirst has to turn into action. Listen to Paul in Athens:

> *"He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us."*
>
> **Acts 17:26-27**

God put you in this time and this place for a reason: that you would seek Him. He is not far away. He is close enough to find.

Are You Willing to Seek?

"They should seek the Lord" (Acts 17:27). Notice three things.

- Seeking God involves looking (Acts 17:27). You do not find what you are not looking for.

- Seeking the narrow way involves action. “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14). Nobody drifts onto the narrow way. You have to choose it and walk it.
- Seeking takes faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

I love that last phrase. God rewards those who seek Him. He is not playing hide and seek with us. He has promised to be found by people who really look.

How Do You Seek God?

Let me close with four questions, and I want you to answer them honestly.

- Do you actively seek God?
- Do you wait on God to find you?
- Do you move closer to God?
- Do you even move?

Restoration does not happen by standing still. God has already moved toward us in His Son. Now it is our turn to move toward Him.

Scripture Reading List

- Ephesians 1:3-14
- James 1:16-18
- 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- Matthew 5:1-12
- Psalm 42
- John 4:7-15
- 1 Peter 5:6-7
- Matthew 6:19-34
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and 1 John 2:15-17
- Acts 17:22-31
- Matthew 7:13-14 and Hebrews 11:6

Discussion Questions

1. Ephesians 1:3, James 1:17, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 describe blessings God has already given. Which of these do you most often take for granted?
2. What is the difference between actively seeking God and passively seeking Him? What does each look like in everyday life?

3. Read Psalm 42:1 and Matthew 5:6. What makes a person truly thirsty for God? What dulls that thirst?
4. Jesus offered the woman at the well "living water" (John 4:10-14). What was she trying to fill her life with, and what do people try to fill their lives with today?
5. How does Matthew 6:33 change the way we handle worry about our needs?
6. According to 2 Corinthians 4:18 and 1 John 2:16, what are some "wrong wells" that keep us from thirsting for God?
7. Acts 17:27 says God "is not far from each one of us." How should that encourage someone who feels far from God?
8. Look at the four closing questions. Which one hits closest to home for you, and why?

This Week

> Move one step closer to God every day this week. Set a time each day to read one passage from this lesson's Scripture Reading List and pray about it. At the end of the week, answer this in writing: "Did I actively seek God this week, or did I wait for Him to find me?"

LESSON 3

Finding Forgiveness

Key Texts: *Isaiah 1:18; Hebrews 9:22; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 22:16*

Teaching Reading

What is the best gift you have ever been given? Think about it for a minute. Some gifts we remember because they were expensive. Some we remember because of who gave them. The best gift any of us could ever receive is forgiveness from God, and this lesson is about how we find it.

This is the heart of the whole study. If we get this lesson right, everything else in Restored has a foundation to stand on.

Why Do We Need Forgiveness?

We Are Stained

God invited Israel to come and talk it over with Him:

> *"Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*
>
> **Isaiah 1:18**

Scarlet and crimson were deep, lasting dyes. That is what sin does to us. It stains, and we cannot scrub it out on our own.

Sin Is Reality, but God Offers the Way

We do not have to pretend sin is not real. It is. The good news is that God offers the way out. Jesus is the cure for sin (John 3:16). "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly… but God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8).

Our sins may stain us, but God offers cleansing and forgiveness. David prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). In heaven John saw a great multitude who "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). Notice what does the washing in that verse. It is blood.

The First Blood Shed

After Adam and Eve sinned, they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves (Genesis 3:7). Then "for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). God replaced their fig leaves with a covering He made Himself.

The Bible does not say in so many words that an animal died that day, so we need to be careful. It is a fair inference, though. Tunics of skin came from animals, and that suggests the first blood shed in Scripture came right after the first sin, as God covered the people who had sinned. Whether or not we read Genesis 3:21 that way, the rest of the Bible says plainly that blood has always been necessary for forgiveness:

> *"According to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."*
>
> **Hebrews 9:22**

That word "remission" means forgiveness, the sending away of sins.

Continual Blood Shed

From there the theme keeps going. Abel brought "the firstborn of his flock," and the LORD respected Abel and his offering (Genesis 4:4-5). Abel shows us the necessity of sacrifice. Later, the Old Testament law required blood offerings to cover sin (Leviticus 4-6). Sin offerings and guilt offerings were made again and again, year after year. The writer of Hebrews explains why they never stopped: "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Those sacrifices pointed forward to something better.

Christ as the Perfect Lamb

That something better is Someone. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29; see also 1:36).

His blood brings eternal redemption. "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). At the Lord's Supper He said, "this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

Christ was perfect, without spot or blemish. He was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). We were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). Only a perfect sacrifice could do what all those animal sacrifices never could.

How Do We Come in Contact With Jesus' Blood?

This is the question that matters most. Jesus shed His blood on the cross long ago. How does that blood reach me today? Scripture answers it clearly: we come in contact with His blood by being "in Christ," and we get into Christ through baptism. Walk through these verses slowly.

The blood is found in Christ:

> *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*
>
> **Ephesians 2:13**

Redemption and forgiveness are found in Christ:

> *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."*
>
> **Colossians 1:13-14**

We get into Christ by being baptized into Him:

> *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*
>
> **Galatians 3:27**

In baptism we are united with His death, the very place His blood was shed:

> *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*
>
> **Romans 6:3-4**

Baptism is where sins are washed away:

> *"Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*
>
> **Acts 22:16**

On the day the church began, people who were "cut to the heart" asked what to do, and Peter told them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37-38). Put those passages side by side, and the picture is clear. Forgiveness is in the blood. The blood is in Christ. We are baptized into Christ. That is where a penitent believer meets the cleansing blood of Jesus.

This is not a work we do to earn anything. Baptism is a burial into Christ's death, trusting what He did on the cross. The power is in His blood. Baptism is where God tells us we come in contact with it.

The Blood Keeps Cleansing

Here is more good news. Christ's blood justifies us and continues to cleanse us. We are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). We have "now been justified by His blood" (Romans 5:9). John writes to Christians, "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). That word "cleanses" keeps going. The blood that washed us in baptism keeps cleansing us as we walk with Him.

So what is the best gift you have ever been given? If you are in Christ, you already know the answer. If you are not, why are you waiting (Acts 22:16)?

Scripture Reading List

- Isaiah 1:16-20
- John 3:16 and Romans 5:6-11
- Psalm 51 and Revelation 7:13-17
- Genesis 3:6-21 and Genesis 4:1-5
- Leviticus 4:1-6:7
- Hebrews 9:11-28 and Hebrews 10:1-4
- John 1:29-36 and Matthew 26:26-29
- Hebrews 4:14-16 and 1 Peter 1:17-21
- Ephesians 2:11-13 and Colossians 1:13-14
- Galatians 3:26-27 and Romans 6:1-11
- Acts 2:36-41 and Acts 22:6-16
- Romans 3:21-26 and 1 John 1:5-10

Discussion Questions

1. What is the best gift you have ever been given? Why does forgiveness from God outrank it?
2. Isaiah 1:18 compares sin to scarlet and crimson dye. Why is that a good picture of what sin does to us?
3. Hebrews 9:22 says "without shedding of blood there is no remission." Why do you think God made blood necessary for forgiveness?
4. How do Abel's offering and the Old Testament sacrifices point forward to Jesus? Why could they never take sins away completely (Hebrews 10:4)?
5. John called Jesus "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). What does that title tell us about who He is and what He came to do?
6. Read Ephesians 2:13, Galatians 3:27, and Romans 6:3-4 together. According to these verses, where is the blood of Christ found, and how does a person get there?

7. In Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16, what did people do to have their sins forgiven and washed away? Why do you think some people today resist what these verses say?
8. 1 John 1:7 says the blood of Jesus "cleanses us from all sin." How should that promise affect a Christian who still struggles with sin?

This Week

> If you have never been baptized into Christ, do not wait. This week, read Acts 2:36-41 and Acts 22:16 with a preacher, an elder, or a Christian friend, and ask them to help you obey the gospel. If you have been baptized into Christ, read Romans 6:1-11 every day this week, thank God by name for the blood that keeps cleansing you, and invite one person to study these verses with you.

LESSON 4

Renewed Strength

Key Texts: *2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Matthew 6:19-34; Joshua 24:15; Hebrews 10:25*

Teaching Reading

Where Have We Been?

Before we move ahead, look back at the road we have traveled.

- We saw the need for restoration. Sin separates us from God, and the cure is Christ.
- We learned to seek God. Restoration is not possible without Him, and He rewards those who seek Him.
- We found and realized forgiveness. Forgiveness is in the blood of Christ, and we come in contact with that blood by being baptized into Him.

Now comes a practical question. Once a person has been restored, how do they stay strong? A lot of people come back to God with real tears and real commitment, and then a few months later they are drifting again. This lesson is about renewed strength, the kind that lasts.

The Source of Strength

True strength and joy come from God, not from material things. Jesus taught that in the Sermon on the Mount:

> *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*
>
> **Matthew 6:19-21**

Read the rest of that chapter (Matthew 6:19-34) and you will see Jesus telling us not to worry, because our Father knows what we need. Strength does not come from having more stuff. It comes from trusting the One who provides it.

Paul knew what it was to be worn down. His body was beaten, his travels were hard, and his life was in danger more than once (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Listen to where he found his strength:

> *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*
>
> **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

"Renewed day by day." That is the kind of strength God offers. It is not a one-time boost. It is a daily renewal for people who keep their eyes on what is eternal.

Commitments That Restore

Strength that lasts is built on commitment. I want to look at three commitments that restore us and keep us restored.

Commitment to God

Joshua stood before Israel near the end of his life and drew a line in the sand: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). He did not wait to see what everyone else would do. He decided.

Solomon, after trying everything life under the sun had to offer, came to this conclusion: "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). He adds that "God will bring every work into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Commitment to God is not a side project. It is the whole of life.

Commitment to Jesus

Paul's example shows us what commitment to Christ looks like. He gave up everything to know Christ. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8).

Jesus called us to abide in Him. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). A branch does not have to work up its own strength. It stays connected to the vine.

When we are committed to Jesus, people will notice. When the rulers saw the boldness of Peter and John, "they realized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Others should be able to see that we have been with Jesus too.

Commitment to the Body

You cannot be restored and stay strong all by yourself. God did not design it that way. The church is one body with many members. “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12; see also Romans 12:4-5).

In that body we support and encourage one another. “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Paul says that when a man is “overtaken in any trespass,” those who are spiritual should “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness” (Galatians 6:1). There is that word again: restore. The early church lived this out. They were together, they shared what they had, and the Lord added to their number day by day (Acts 2:44-47).

When we are committed to God, to Christ, and to the church, we are moved to serve. Jesus “has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), and those who follow Him join that work. We “exhort one another daily” so that none of us is “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

Faithful service matters, even when it goes unnoticed. Nobody may see you visit the shut-in, send the card, or sit with the grieving family. God sees. “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).

It Takes Action

So how do we put renewed strength into practice? Here are four simple habits.

Head in the Book

Study God’s word. The Bereans “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). All Scripture is “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16). If you are trying to stay strong without reading your Bible, you are trying to run on an empty tank.

Eyes on Jesus

Focus on Christ. Hebrews says “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:9). We run the race “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Whatever has your attention will eventually have your heart.

Knees on the Floor

Pray continually. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is where we bring our weakness to God and leave with His strength.

Feet With the Brethren

Stay connected in fellowship. We are told not to be “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some,” but to keep “exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Drifting almost always starts with missing. Staying strong almost always starts with showing up.

Head in the Book. Eyes on Jesus. Knees on the floor. Feet with the brethren. That is how a restored Christian stays restored.

Scripture Reading List

- 2 Corinthians 4:7-18
- Matthew 6:19-34
- Joshua 24:14-15
- Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13-14
- Philippians 3:7-11
- John 15:1-5 and Acts 4:13
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 and Romans 12:4-5
- Romans 15:1-2, Galatians 6:1-2, and Acts 2:42-47
- Luke 19:10, Hebrews 3:12-13, and Colossians 3:16-17
- Hebrews 6:10
- Acts 17:10-12 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Hebrews 2:9 and Hebrews 12:1-2
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Hebrews 10:24-25

Discussion Questions

1. Looking back over Lessons 1 through 3, which truth has meant the most to you so far, and why?
2. Why do you think so many people come back to God and then drift away again a few months later?
3. According to Matthew 6:19-34 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, where does real strength come from? What does it look like for your “inward man” to be “renewed day by day”?
4. Joshua said, “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” What would it take for you to make that same declaration in your home?

5. Paul counted all things loss compared to knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8). What are some things people hold onto that keep them from that kind of commitment?
6. Acts 4:13 says people "realized that they had been with Jesus." What should others be able to see in us?
7. Why is commitment to the church so important to staying restored? How can our congregation do better at bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1-2)?
8. Of the four habits (Head in the Book, Eyes on Jesus, Knees on the Floor, Feet with the Brethren), which one do you most need to strengthen right now?

This Week

> Pick the one habit from "It Takes Action" that you most need, and practice it every day this week. Then do one act of faithful service that nobody will notice, like a card, a phone call, or a visit, and do it simply because God sees.

LESSON 5

Restoring Zeal

Key Texts: *Isaiah 6:6-8; Revelation 2:4-5; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:22*

Teaching Reading

We are going to begin and end this lesson in the same place, with a prophet who found his zeal in the presence of God. Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne and cried out that he was "a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). Then this happened:

> *"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar."*
>
> **Isaiah 6:6**

The seraph touched his mouth and told him, "Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged" (Isaiah 6:7). Hold on to that picture. We will come back to what Isaiah said next.

Do We Have Zeal?

Zeal is passionate enthusiasm, rooted in love for God and others. It is not just being loud or busy. It is a heart on fire for the Lord and for people.

Many of us remember a time when we had that fire. We could not wait to worship. We talked about Jesus to anybody who would listen. Somewhere along the way, the fire burned low. If that is you, this lesson is for you.

Jesus said this to the church at Ephesus:

> *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works."*
>
> **Revelation 2:4-5**

In one verse Jesus gives us the whole road back. How does one regain zeal? Remember. Repent. Do the first works.

Remember

Remember What God Has Done for You

Hezekiah was sick to the point of death, and God healed him. Afterward he wrote, "You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back" (Isaiah 38:17). God did not just forgive Hezekiah's sins. He threw them behind His back where He would not look at them again.

Paul reminds us of what God did for us: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly… but God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6, 8). Zeal grows when we remember how much we have been given.

Remember Your Lost Condition

Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30). Before we came to Christ, that was us. We were on the wrong side. Now, in Christ, we can say with Paul, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Remember which side you used to be on, and you will never take for granted which side you are on now.

Remember You Were Once a Dead Man Walking

Paul does not soften it. He tells the Ephesians, “you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:1-2). Dead. Not sick. Not struggling. Dead. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-5). It is “by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:5). Read the whole chapter (Ephesians 2:1-22) and you will see a people who were far off brought near and built into God’s household.

Remember That Being “Good” Is Not What Saves

A lot of people think they will be fine because they are basically good people. Jesus described the final judgment this way: “these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). Notice that He did not say “the good people.” He said “the righteous.”

Being good by our own measure is not the same as being righteous before God. Isaiah said that “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Paul wanted to “be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). That righteousness is not just a label, either. John says, “He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7). The righteous are those who are in Christ and walk in His ways. Remembering that keeps us humble, and humble people are zealous people.

Repent

Repent Means to Change Your Heart

On the day of Pentecost the crowd was “cut to the heart” and asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter answered, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-

38). Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of life. It is not just feeling bad. It is turning around.

Repent of Your Sin

Simon of Samaria had believed and been baptized (Acts 8:13), but later he sinned by trying to buy the power of God with money. Peter did not tell him to be baptized again. He told him, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22). That is God's way back for a Christian who has fallen: repent and pray. The blood of Jesus keeps cleansing those who walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

Repent of Inactivity

Some of us are not doing anything scandalous. We are just not doing anything. James says, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Sitting still when God has given us work to do is not neutral. It is sin, and it needs repentance too.

Do the First Works

Jesus told Ephesus to "do the first works" (Revelation 2:5). Think about what those first works were. In Acts 19 the gospel came to Ephesus. People believed and were baptized. New believers came confessing their practices, and those who had practiced magic burned their books in public (Acts 19:18-19). Luke sums it up: "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

That was the church at Ephesus at the beginning: confessing, repenting, giving things up for Christ, and spreading the word. By the time of Revelation 2, they were still busy, but the first love was gone. The way back was to go back to the first works.

What were your first works? Maybe it was reading your Bible every day. Maybe it was inviting people to services. Maybe it was praying with fire. Go back and do those things again. Zeal often follows obedience. Do the first works, and the first love has room to grow back.

Here Am I! Send Me.

Now back to Isaiah. Once his sin was taken away, Isaiah "heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'" His answer was immediate: "Here am I! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

That is what restored zeal sounds like. A person who remembers what God has done, who has repented and been cleansed, will not hang back when God calls. They raise their hand. Will you?

Scripture Reading List

- Isaiah 6:1-8

- Revelation 2:1-7
- Isaiah 38:9-20
- Romans 5:6-11
- Matthew 12:30 and Romans 8:31-39
- Ephesians 2:1-22
- Matthew 25:31-46
- Isaiah 64:6, Philippians 3:7-11, and 1 John 3:7
- Acts 2:36-41
- Acts 8:9-24
- James 4:13-17
- Acts 19:1-20

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define zeal in your own words? Can you remember a time when your zeal for God was stronger than it is now?
2. Read Revelation 2:1-7. The church at Ephesus was busy and sound, yet Jesus said they had left their first love. How can a church, or a Christian, stay busy and still lose the fire?
3. Isaiah 38:17 says God cast Hezekiah's sins behind His back. What has God done for you that you need to remember more often?
4. Why does remembering that we were once "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) help restore our zeal?
5. What is the difference between being a "good person" and being righteous before God (Matthew 25:46; Philippians 3:9; 1 John 3:7)?
6. Compare Acts 2:38 and Acts 8:22. What was each person told to do, and why were the instructions different?
7. James 4:17 says that knowing the right thing and failing to do it is sin. What are some ways Christians can be guilty of the sin of inactivity?
8. What were your "first works" when you first came to Christ? Which one could you start doing again this week?

This Week

> Do one of your first works again this week. Write down what you did when your faith was new, pick one, and do it before the next lesson. If there is sin you need to bring to God, follow Acts 8:22: repent and pray, and if you need help, ask a faithful Christian to pray with you. Then pray Isaiah's words out loud: "Here am I! Send me."

LESSON 6

Deciding to Live in Christ

Key Texts: *Deuteronomy 30:19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10*

Teaching Reading

We have come a long way together. We saw our need. We learned to seek God. We found forgiveness in the blood of Christ. We built renewed strength on our commitments, and we learned how to get our zeal back. Now we come to the decision that ties it all together: deciding to live in Christ.

Think About It

The Value and the Gift of Life

Life is a precious gift from God. "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). David marveled at how God formed him before he was born: "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14; see Psalm 139:13-16). You are not an accident. Your life has value because God made it.

The Choice Before Us

Scripture often puts a choice in front of us: life or death, blessing or cursing. Moses said to Israel:

> *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days."*
>
> **Deuteronomy 30:19-20**

Notice what choosing life looks like: loving the LORD, obeying His voice, and clinging to Him. God does not just hand us a life. He invites us to choose it.

Remember the Barriers

If choosing life is that simple, why do so many people hold back? Discouragement, guilt, and shame can make us feel unworthy of abundant life. It is easy to start believing that after what we have done, God could never really use us.

Listen to God instead: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). If you are in Christ, the guilt has been dealt with. You do not have to carry it anymore.

Deciding to Live in Christ

So what does deciding to live in Christ look like day to day? Here are three decisions.

Embrace God's Grace and Forgiveness

Accept that you are loved, forgiven, and given a new start. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Notice where the new creation is found: in Christ. That is why Lesson 3 matters so much. The person who has been baptized into Christ has been raised to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4), and God's grace is what makes it so. God "made us alive together with Christ," and "by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5; see 2:4-5).

Let go of the past and move forward in faith. Paul had plenty in his past he could have dwelt on, but he wrote, "one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). God has forgiven it. Stop dragging it behind you.

Walk in Purpose and Obedience

God has a purpose for your life. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). You were saved for something. There are good works with your name on them, and God wants you to find them and walk in them.

Commit to living out your faith daily by serving, loving, and sharing Christ. Paul says, "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). Living in Christ is not just a Sunday thing. It is how you talk, how you work, how you treat your family, and how you spend your time.

Cultivate Joy and Hope

Rejoice in the Lord always, regardless of circumstances. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Paul wrote that from a prison. Joy in Christ does not depend on what is happening around you. It depends on who you belong to.

Trust that God's plans for you are good and filled with hope. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). A restored Christian is a hopeful Christian.

Think About It

I want to close this study with the same two questions I closed the lesson with.

Will you choose life?

What is holding you back from fully living for God today?

Maybe you need to be baptized into Christ. Maybe you need to repent and pray, and come home to the church family that has been praying for you. Maybe you just need to get up and start doing the first works again. Whatever it is, do not let another week go by. Moses said, "choose life." God has already done everything needed to restore you. The decision is yours.

Scripture Reading List

- Genesis 1:26-31 and Psalm 139:13-16
- Deuteronomy 30:11-20
- Romans 8:1-11
- 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
- Ephesians 2:1-10
- Romans 6:1-11
- Philippians 3:12-16
- Colossians 3:12-17
- Philippians 4:4-9
- Romans 15:13

Discussion Questions

1. Genesis 1:27 and Psalm 139:13-16 say your life is a gift from God. How should that change the way you see yourself?
2. In Deuteronomy 30:19-20, what three things does Moses connect with choosing life? What does each one look like for a Christian today?
3. Discouragement, guilt, and shame are named as barriers. Which of these has held you back the most, and how does Romans 8:1 answer it?
4. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Why does it matter that the new creation is found "in Christ"?
5. What does it look like in real life to forget those things which are behind and press toward the goal (Philippians 3:13-14)?
6. Ephesians 2:10 says we were created in Christ Jesus for good works. What good works do you think God has put in front of you right now?
7. How can a Christian rejoice "always" (Philippians 4:4) when life is hard?
8. Will you choose life? What is holding you back from fully living for God today?

This Week

> Make your decision in writing. Finish this sentence: “I choose life in Christ, and this week I will…” Then name one good work from Ephesians 2:10 that you will do and one person you will tell about your decision. If your next step is baptism or coming home to God, talk with a preacher or an elder this week and take it.