



Personal Devotions

Topic 3: Giving First

Lesson 1: Giving Others Acceptance

Personal Devotion ✱

“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).

Acceptance can be defined as receiving another person willingly and unconditionally, especially when the other person might be “different,” irritating or even offensive; being willing to love another in spite of their faults.

How has God “given first” to our need for acceptance? Jesus met our ultimate need for acceptance in that *“while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). He looked beyond our faults and met our needs. During His earthly ministry, Jesus accepted people regardless of background, race, or condition: the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-27); the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), the Gentile Centurion (Luke 7:1-12) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). He helped people overcome failures (Peter’s denial, John 21:15-19); He loved all people unconditionally and forgave freely, even from the cross (Luke 23:34). Becoming a good friend who “gives first” by accepting others, will prepare you for healthy, God-honoring relationships.

Pause and reflect on these ideas for giving others acceptance:

- I go out of my way to welcome people, who may look, believe, live, or act differently than I do.
- When I’m in a group of people, I try to spot anyone who may feel uneasy or alone, and I initiate conversation and try to make him or her feel welcome.
- I generally “look beyond people’s faults” and minister to their needs.

- I accept people, not just when they’re “up” but also when they’re “down.”
- When someone “blows it,” “messes up,” or offends me, I’m quick to forgive them.

Reflection Questions

1. Read the personal devotion for Romans 15:7. This note lists several of the ways that Jesus accepted people during His time on earth. Which one do you most admire or which one most surprises you?
2. The personal devotion for Romans 15:7 tells about a great pay off for those who learn to give acceptance. What is this pay off? Are you on your way to receiving it?
3. The personal devotion for Romans 15:7 gives a quick assessment for giving others acceptance. Which ones are true for you?



Lesson 2: Giving Others Appreciation

Personal Devotion ✱

“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2).

The need for appreciation is met through expressing thanks, praise or commendation, particularly recognizing someone’s accomplishments or efforts. During His earthly ministry, Jesus frequently voiced appreciation to individuals: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28), Mary of Bethany (Mark 14:6), a centurion (Luke 7:9), and John the Baptist (Luke 7:28). God has also promised to appreciate those who are faithful (Luke 6:35; 2 Ephesians 6:8, 2 Timothy 4:8).

The Corinthian church was full of problems. They were split with factions (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3). They tolerated immorality in their midst and were proud of it (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). They were prosecuting lawsuits against each other in pagan courts (1 Corinthians 6:1-11). Yet, in the midst of writing to admonish and correct them, the apostle Paul found specific things they were doing well for which to commend them. (1 Corinthians 11:2).

The Holy Spirit knew that they needed some appreciation in the midst of all the correction! Seeing something good in others’ lives, and then appreciating them for it, is a powerful way to live and love as Jesus did!

Pause and reflect on these ideas for giving others appreciation:

- I commend others for doing well or putting forth effort.
- I write notes or send messages thanking others for what they do for me.

- I notice special times in people’s lives when they should be commended (athletic accomplishments, godly choices, big projects completed, etc.)
- I focus on what people do that’s right, rather than on what they do that’s wrong.
- I’ve learned how others close to me prefer to receive appreciation: public vs. private, written vs. verbal, and I make giving to them a priority.

Reflection Questions

1. Read the personal devotion for 1 Corinthians 11:2. It talks about a Jesus who voiced appreciation for those around Him. Would you like to hear words of appreciation from Jesus? What would you most like to hear?
2. The personal devotion for 1 Corinthians 11:2 tells about a powerful way to live and love like Jesus did. What is it? In the midst of all the evaluations and assessments in your life, would you like more of what the personal devotion describes?
3. The personal devotion for 1 Corinthians 11:2 lists several ideas for how to give others appreciation. Which of these ideas are easy for you? Which ones are more difficult?



Lesson 3: Giving Others Attention and Care

Personal Devotion ✱

“... That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25).

The need for attention is met by conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care for another person. We meet people's need for attention when we take thought of them, particularly when we enter into their “world.” Just as Christ left heaven to enter our world, so also we give first to others in our care for them.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus didn't just spend time with the masses but gave individual attention to people such as Zacchaeus, (Luke 19:1-10), Nicodemus, (John 3:1-16), the Samaritan woman, (John 4:7-30), and the disciples. How does God meet our need for attention? Jesus met our need for attention by leaving His world (heaven) and entering into our world. He became like us so that we could know Him and have a personal relationship with Him (Philippians 2:5-11).

God continues to give us attention as we pray; in that, we receive His individual, undivided, and unlimited attention. Furthermore, He knew us in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13); He knows our thoughts (Psalm 139:2), counts the number of hairs on our head (Luke 12:7), and promises to provide for our every need (Matthew 6:25-34).

Pause and reflect on these ideas for giving others attention:

- I spend time finding out about another's struggles, joys and dreams.
- I try to enter into another's physical world; I try to visit their activities, school and home.

- I try to enter into another's emotional world. When I come in contact with people, I try to discern their emotional state, gain understanding, and then show care to them.
- I'm a good listener, giving good eye contact, appropriate feedback, and seeking to hear fully before I respond.
- I enjoy spending time with people, doing what they enjoy doing.

Reflection Questions

1. Read the personal devotion for 1 Corinthians 12:25. It explains how Jesus left His world and became like us. What was His motive for leaving heaven? How do you feel about a Jesus who has that kind of motive?
2. The personal devotion for 1 Corinthians 12:25 gives more than five different ways that God continues to give us attention. What are they? Which one means the most to you at this time of your life?
3. The personal devotion for 1 Corinthians 12:25 gives several ideas for giving others attention. Which of these ideas are easiest for you? Which of these ideas are hardest?



Lesson 4: Giving Others Comfort

Personal Devotion ✱

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

The need for comfort is met by responding to a hurting person with appropriate words, feelings, and physical touch. Comfort involves feeling and expressing sadness for another person’s grief and pain. We are admonished to *“weep with those who weep”* (Romans 12:15); and we are assured, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matthew 5:4).

Jesus comforted people throughout His earthly ministry, often identifying with the hurt in others, so much that He wept with them (John 11:35) or for them (Luke 19:41). Even on the eve of His death, He comforted His disciples as He sensed their sorrow and anxiety (John 14:1,18; 16:33).

How does God meet our need for comfort? We can be assured that God will comfort us in our distress because He is *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”* (2 Corinthians 1:3). He sends the Holy Spirit to comfort us. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the “Comforter” or “Helper” (John 14:16,26; 15:26, 16:7). In the New Testament, the Greek word for comfort (and the word used to describe the Holy Spirit’s ministry to us) is *parakaleo* which means, “to come to one’s side, to one’s aid.”

Pause and reflect on these ideas for giving others comfort:

I am sensitive to notice when people are hurting, anxious, frustrated or emotionally down.

I have developed an appropriate “comforting vocabulary” and communicate my care and concern for hurting people.

I have learned how to sense God’s compassion for others and enter into their emotional pain.

I know how to respond to hurting people with a gentle touch and affirming words.

When people are hurting, instead of giving them advice, or exhortation, I express my feelings of sadness and hurt for them.

Reflection Questions

1. Read the personal devotion for 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. It tells us that Jesus identifies with the hurts in other people... and gives an amazing response! What’s His response? And how do you feel toward a God like that?
2. Read the personal devotion for 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. It tells us why we can count on God to give us comfort when we are in distress. Check out the reasons. How do you feel towards a God that doesn’t leave us stranded and alone?
3. The personal devotion for 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 gives five ideas for giving comfort to others. Which one is easiest for you? Which one is the most difficult?



Lesson 5: Giving Others Encouragement

Personal Devotion ✱

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24).

The need for encouragement can be met by urging other people to persist and persevere toward a goal and by stimulating them toward love and good deeds. During His earthly ministry Jesus continually encouraged His disciples and those who were downcast and discouraged (John 16:33). The Pharisees even criticized Jesus because He regularly met with those who were spiritually and emotionally struggling (Matthew 9:12-13).

How does God meet our need for encouragement? We're encouraged by the promise of abundant life through Jesus (John 10:10), and by His promising us that He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He also continually encourages us through the ministry of His word (Romans 15:4). For example, He encourages us, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9). He also encourages us with the presence of His Spirit and through answered prayer.

Pause and reflect on these ideas for giving others encouragement:

- I try to anticipate times and situations in which people may be discouraged so that I can encourage them.
- I often go out of my way to call, write, text or visit someone who is discouraged, disappointed or struggling.
- I encourage others towards positive vision and realistic goals and then help support them in their journey.

- I faithfully pray for people, both privately and together with them.
- I encourage others by expressing sincere confidence and belief in God's work in and through them.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel towards a God who doesn't leave you hanging? He says: Nothing's impossible with Me; My grace is enough to get you through; I've got what you need - just ask; I hear you and I will be with you? What does it do to your heart to consider a God like that?
2. What words of encouragement would you like to hear from God or from others around you? I would really like to hear God or someone say...
3. Who could benefit from your words of encouragement? Who might need to know that you believe in them? Who might need a reason to hope? Who might need to persevere in the pursuit of their dream?



Lesson 6: Listening for Others' Needs

Personal Devotion ✱

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

Imagine our "need-meeting" God (Philippians 4:19) giving to each of His followers a many sided diamond called, "grace" and each side represents a relational need He has met in our life. One side is called acceptance, one is called appreciation, attention, comfort and encouragement. These are five of the relational needs God has met in your life, and He challenges you to share with others. It's important to become a person who "gives first" to others needs.

What constitutes a valid need? What is the difference between a genuine need and a personal "want"? A valid need is something that God has specifically met in our lives and then encourages us to give to others. The fact that God has met a particular need means that it must be all right to need it! For instance, Romans 15:7 says, *"Receive one another, just as Christ also received us."* The fact that Christ has accepted us (and instructs us to accept others) means it's all right to need acceptance. He comforts us (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) and encourages us to comfort others; that indicates that comfort is a legitimate human need.

People sometimes express needs through what they say. If we are familiar with these needs, we can "listen" for needs being expressed. Below are some phrases you might hear from others. Write down the relational need that possibly is being expressed.

Five possible needs are: acceptance, appreciation, attention, comfort and encouragement

"You're always so busy." _____

"Look what I did!" _____

"I just can't do this." _____

"I've had a really bad day." _____

"I wish my feet weren't so big." _____

Focus on "giving" to those around you, as Christ has given to you! (Matthew 9:17).

Reflection Questions

1. Read the personal devotion for 1 Peter 4:10. It describes how God has given us His grace and how that grace is like a multi-sided diamond. What dimension of God's grace do you need the most right now?
2. The personal devotion for 1 Peter 4:10 tells how to distinguish between what a person needs and what they want: A valid need is anything that God specifically meets in our lives. How do you feel toward a God who provides for all our needs?
3. The personal devotion for 1 Peter 4:10 helps you identify the relational needs of others by "listening" to what they say. How skilled are you at matching words and needs?



