

SAMPLE
RETURN TO ME



**GOD’S INVITATION
AND
PROMISE TO HIS CHURCH**

*“Return to me, and I will return to you,
says the Lord of Armies.”*

— Malachi 3:7

Claude V. King

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WEEK 1

“RETURN TO ME”

Overview of Week 1

Day 1: Prepare the Bride

Day 2: Return to the Lord

Day 3: Return to God’s Design

Day 4: Bow the Knee

Day 5: Demonstrate Your Changed Life

Verse to Memorize

Malachi 3:7— “‘Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD of Armies.”

Optional Video Clip

The Bride of Christ

God’s Design for Your Returning to Him

Over time, God’s people tend to drift and depart from intimate fellowship with Him. As they grow farther and farther away, they turn to substitutes for God; and their behaviors bring discredit to His great and holy name. Churches lose their vitality. They cease to be the salt and light God has intended them to be for their society and culture. Wonderfully, God yearns for our restoration. He gives a special invitation, “Return to me;” and He makes a significant promise, “I will return to you.” In Scripture God has revealed His design for His people. He is worthy and deserves a full surrender to His will, His plan. Then He gives His people a heart to know Him and His Holy Spirit to enable their obedience. Help and encourage one another as you labor together to return to Him. Rejoice and celebrate when He returns to you!

Why This Week Will Be Meaningful to You

You will demonstrate your commitment to seeking the Lord and returning to Him by doing such things as:

- Preparing yourself and helping your church prepare to be a pure, holy, and righteous bride for our heavenly bridegroom Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God.
- Making a choice of your will to turn from your self-centered ways and return to an intimate fellowship with your heavenly Father, Savior, and Lord.
- Studying Scripture in the coming weeks to understand God’s design for His people and then adjusting to live according to His design for your life and His church.
- Spiritually bowing in full surrender to Jesus Christ so He can mold, shape, and use you for His divine purposes.
- Repenting of sins and changing your ways to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Revival Led to Spiritual Harvest

I received a call early in 1995 from a pastor in rural West Texas. He asked me to pray for his church and if God told me anything to call him back. I'd never had a request like that before, so I asked about his church.

His church averaged about 250 on Sundays. Something had happened over the past three years, and the church was different. Unity and love were present. People wanted to meet the needs of others. They wanted to obey the Lord, and they had a burden to pray. Even the deacons loved their pastor! He had never pastored a church like this before.

He explained that they had studied *Experiencing God*, a discipleship course I had written with Henry Blackaby. People were experiencing a love relationship with their heavenly Father. They wanted to be involved with Him in His kingdom work. They also had studied *Fresh Encounter: God's Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening*. Members had repented of sin and reconciled relationships with one another.

They believed they had experienced revival as a church, but they were not seeing the fruit of a spiritual harvest (lost people coming to faith in Christ). The other concern they shared was a need to become a people of prayer. The pastor wanted some direction from the Lord and asked me to pray for their church.

I headed to the walking track in my neighborhood and began talking to the Lord about this church. A flood of ideas came quickly. I called the pastor back with two pages of notes and suggestions to share.

The leaders decided to lead the church to focus on two topics: prayer and a spiritual harvest. They cleared their church calendar from any activities that might distract them. They started a six-week study on prayer using a book I had written with T. W. Hunt now titled *Pray in Faith*¹. Every Sunday School class from sixth grade through the senior adults used the book. Every Sunday morning, they had prayer meetings in their classes to practice what they were learning during the week.

Following Good Friday, they started a 50-day season of prayer leading up to Pentecost Sunday. Each day families gathered for family prayer. They read an assigned Scripture, discussed what God was saying to them through the passage, made a list of lost people (those who didn't have a saving faith in Jesus Christ), and began praying for them by name. One couple in their 70s

reported that this was the first time they had prayed together in their 50+ year marriage. Other families were developing a family altar for the first time, too.

Following an idea from *The Prayer Life* by Andrew Murray, they embarked on ten days of corporate prayer meetings called Pentecost Prayer Meetings. One night they prayed with churches from several denominations in the county. Another night they prayed with the churches from their own denomination. One night they commissioned a team headed to Russia on an evangelistic mission. Another evening was given to prayer meetings in homes, and still another was used for prayer-walking in town and prayer-driving around the county.

I had the privilege of meeting with them Pentecost weekend. I met a church and a people who had learned to pray. I was so encouraged to hear them pray so thoroughly about their requests. One teacher told me about her sixth-grade boys praying prayers of praise, worship, and thanksgiving for 30 minutes one of the Sundays of their study on prayer. She was amazed.

Knowing the biblical history of Pentecost when 3,000 were converted, this church met on Sunday with great anticipation. After all, they had prayed for 50 days for people who needed to come to faith in Christ. Many shared testimonies during the worship service. Their service was on local access cable television.

When the testimonies were finished, I didn't have time to preach. I shared a Scripture, made some comments, and extended an invitation. One young boy came forward to make public a decision to follow Christ he had made that week. That was all. People were noticeably deflated, but we had a feast waiting. During the meal, a woman who had heard the service on television came and talked with the pastor. She wanted what those people had. She and the little boy were the only first fruits.

Three months later I called to get an update. The Russian missions team had led over 400 to faith in Christ. Their prison ministry saw more than 300 inmates come to faith in Christ. And of the people they had prayed for in their little town, twenty-five had come to faith! People said, "Pastor, we can't go back to the old way of doing things."

I saw a church that returned to the Lord, and they experienced His manifest presence as He returned to them bringing new life, vitality, and joy.

Day 1

Prepare the Bride

God's Design

Revelation 19:5-9— “Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, reigns! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself. She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure.”

For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints.

Then he said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb!’” (CSB)

Opening Prayer

Lord God Almighty, I praise You because You do reign over the entire universe. I thank You for adding me to the body of Christ—the church. I have great joy to know that I'll be part of the future bride of Christ. Help me and my church to prepare ourselves to be a pure, clean, and righteous bride. Your Son deserves such a bride. Help us daily to live in that condition of readiness for His glory. I ask in the name of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

🕒 **Begin today's lesson by reading God's Design in the margin. Talk to the Lord about His desires for the bride of Christ (the church). You may use the Opening Prayer or pray your own.**



➡ **1. Based upon Revelation 19:5-9, what will be the condition of the bride of Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb? Check one.**

- a. She will be caught off guard, unprepared, unclean and poorly dressed.
- b. She will be ready, pure, and dressed in fine linen representing the righteous acts of the saints.

She will be ready, pure, and dressed in righteousness (b)! Sadly, that does not sound like a description of most of the churches I know.

➡ **2. If Jesus were to return today to take His bride to heaven, do you think you and your church would be ready? Yes or No**

Under the Holy Spirit's leadership, T. W. Hunt developed a significant message for the body of Christ titled *The Mind of Christ*². As he was learning and developing this message, his wife Laverne was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. She had to undergo extensive surgery and chemotherapy. T. W. was devastated over his wife's condition. When he could bear it no longer, he locked the door to his office, fell to the floor, and emotionally shattered.

As T. W. wept over his wife's condition, the Lord came to him and said, “T. W., you are broken and devastated over the condition of your bride. I, too, have a bride; and she is very, very sick. You teach about the mind of Christ. But there is something about My mind that you do not know. I knew you couldn't possibly understand how grieved I am over the condition of My bride without my bringing you through this experience.”

T. W. described this experience with a group of prayer leaders in the summer of 1989. He had just told us of his sense that the Lord's return was near, although he did not believe he would live to see it. He then explained how God had used this experience to call him to help get the bride of Christ ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb. That morning a revival broke out among those prayer leaders as we wept over the condition of the church and began confessing and repenting of our sin. Ever since that day, I've had a burden to help the bride of Christ get ready.

➡ **3. Read Ephesians 5:25-27 in the margin on the next page and underline words that describe what Jesus wants the church to be. I've underlined one for you.**

Jesus gave Himself for the church and cleanses her with His Word to

Ephesians 5:25-27

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.” (CSB)

John 10:10

“I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.” (CSB)

The Lord’s Appeal

“Return, unfaithful Israel... I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in my love” (Jer. 3:12, CSB).

“Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you” (Jer. 3:14, KJV).

“Return, you faithless children. I will heal your unfaithfulness” (Jer. 3:22, CSB).

“If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me” (Jer. 4:1, KJV)

make her holy, blameless, without spot or wrinkle, and full of splendor. That is the kind of bride He is preparing for His marriage in heaven. That is the kind of bride the Father desires for His Son.

➔ **4. Which of the following do you believe are the most significant blemishes in churches you know? Check up to 5 or write your own.**

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> anger | <input type="checkbox"/> addictions | <input type="checkbox"/> apathy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bitterness | <input type="checkbox"/> covetousness | <input type="checkbox"/> dishonesty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disobedience | <input type="checkbox"/> divisions | <input type="checkbox"/> drunkenness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lack of faith | <input type="checkbox"/> foul language | <input type="checkbox"/> gossip/slander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gluttony | <input type="checkbox"/> greed | <input type="checkbox"/> hypocrisy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> impatience | <input type="checkbox"/> insensitivity to need | <input type="checkbox"/> jealousy/envy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> judgmental spirit | <input type="checkbox"/> laziness | <input type="checkbox"/> pornography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> prayerlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> pride | <input type="checkbox"/> racism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> rudeness | <input type="checkbox"/> selfish ambition | <input type="checkbox"/> self-centeredness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> self-righteousness | <input type="checkbox"/> sexual immorality | <input type="checkbox"/> stinginess |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unforgiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> controlling behavior | <input type="checkbox"/> unholiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unloving spirit | <input type="checkbox"/> unconverted members | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: |

Did you check any blemishes? Think with me for a moment. Christ left the glory of heaven and came to earth to purchase us for God. He demonstrated the kind of life God created us to live. He came to give us an *abundant life* (**John 10:10**). He gave His life on the cross so we could be forgiven and made right with God. He is preparing us through His Word to be a holy, pure, spotless, blameless bride. Can you identify with the grief He must feel over the current condition of His future bride?

In Jeremiah 3 God describes Israel as a wife, and He is the Husband. She left Him in unfaithfulness and instead became a prostitute. Imagine His heartbreak. Yet again and again He makes the appeal to return to Him.

➔ **5. Read the verses under “The Lord’s Appeal” in the margin. Circle the words *return* and *turn* each time they appear.**

Even today, the Lord invites us to return to Him. He loves us. Jesus loves the church for which He gave His life. He’s begging us to return to Him.

And we need to get the bride ready, now! We don’t know the time of the Lord’s return. But if we don’t live in a state of readiness, we will not be ready when that time comes. God desires that daily (1) we experience an abundant life Jesus came to give and (2) we are faithful and fruitful witnesses who are filled with His Holy Spirit’s power.

🕯 **Pray and ask God what He wants you to do to help the bride of Christ become the pure, holy, spotless, and blameless bride He will receive in all her splendor at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Write a note in the margin or in a journal about any action steps He desires from you and your church.**

Day 2

God's Design

Malachi 3:7— “ ‘Since the days of your fathers, you have turned from my statutes; you have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD of Armies.” (CSB)

Opening Prayer

Lord God, I confess I have not fully kept Your statutes or obeyed Your commands as You desire. I have drifted from You, but I want to come back. Thank You for this invitation and promise. Enable me over the coming weeks to return to You fully. I beg You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jeremiah 2:11-13

“My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols.

Be appalled at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly desolated! This is the LORD'S declaration.

For my people have committed a double evil:

They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves—

cracked cisterns that cannot hold water.” (CSB)

Return to the Lord

🕒 **Begin today's lesson by reading God's Design in the margin. Talk to the Lord about His desire for His people to return to obedience and to Him. You may use the Opening Prayer or pray your own.**



An Invitation and a Promise

When God's people have departed from Him, He calls them to *return* to Him. For generations prior to Malachi's time God's people had turned from obeying the Lord. But because of His faithful love, God extended an invitation and gave a promise in this verse. The invitation and promise are just as valid for us today. If we will return to Him in love and obedience, He will return to us and restore vitality and His abundant life in us individually and corporately (as a church).

➔ **1. Malachi 3:7— “‘Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD of Armies” is your Scripture memory verse for this week. Read it several times and begin to hide God's Word in your heart. Meditate on this verse, and let's return to Him!**

A Departure from God

In Jeremiah God describes His heartbreak over the way Israel had forsaken Him. He remembered how Israel once was devoted and in love with Him like a bride. She was holy to the Lord (Jer. 2:2-3). But she had departed far from the Lord. No one, not even a priest, was asking: “Where is the Lord?” They didn't miss Him, and they didn't care. They didn't even know the Lord any longer. (Jer. 2:5-8). So, God brought charges against His people.

➔ **2. Read Jeremiah 2:11-13 in the margin. What “double evil” (two sins) had God's people committed? Write them below.**

First, they _____

Second, they _____

God's people had exchanged Him (their Glory) for worthless idols. Their double evil was that (1) they abandoned God, the fountain of living water; and (2) they dug broken, cracked, and dry cisterns as substitutes for God Himself. How appalling and unbelievable that was! Who, in his right mind, would exchange a fountain of free-flowing pure fresh water for a dry hole in the ground? When they turned to lifeless idols as a substitute for God, they committed an unbelievable departure from God.

Any departure we make from God is just as serious and unbelievable. Have you and your church departed from your purity, love, and devotion to God? Are you spiritually dry and thirsty? Have you fallen in love with “idols of the heart” that have become substitutes for your relationship

with the living Lord? Are you no longer obeying His commands? If so, God's charges against you and your church are just the same as His charges against Israel. But God wants you back!

God's Provision

In a future lesson we will study the connection between love and obedience. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep [obey] my commands" (John 14:15, CSB). When we cease to obey the Lord, we give evidence that we have drifted from our love for Him. In order to return to Him, our return will start with a return to our love for Him. Then we will obey Him. God's got good news for us: He can fix that!

↪ **3. Read this promise He made in Jeremiah 24:7. Underline what He gives us to help us return to Him.**

"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God because they will return to me with all their heart" (Jer. 24:7, CSB).

God wants us to return, and He will give us what we need to accomplish the return. We must make a conscious choice to renounce our self-will, receive this new heart to know God by experience, and return to a love relationship with our Creator and Heavenly Father.

↪ **4. Are you interested in a new heart to know Him? Yes No**

If your answer is No, that's probably an indicator of one of two conditions. Either you are right with the Lord and walking in obedience to Him, or you are satisfied with your departure from the Lord. If you've departed, don't stay there. Return to Him.

In Zechariah 9:11-12, God describes a rescue He has planned. He plans to rescue prisoners from a **waterless cistern**. Israel had departed from the Lord and settled for a waterless cistern as a substitute for God. (See Jer. 2:13.) They had become prisoners of their substitute for God.

↪ **5. Read Zechariah 9:11-12 in the margin and underline the reason God plans to release the prisoners.**

God entered a covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai. The only blood of the covenant Zechariah would have known would have been animal blood. God is a covenant-keeping God, and we have an even better blood—the blood of Jesus Christ. If we have departed from the Lord, God doesn't want to leave us there. Because of the blood of the New Covenant, God will rescue and release us from our waterless cistern. But we must return to Him, our Stronghold, our Fortress. When we return to Him, He WILL return to us!

🗨 **Quote, write out, or read your Scripture memory verse. Ask God what He wants you to do in response to Him to apply what you have studied today. Write a note in the margin or in a journal about any action step He desires from you or your church.**

Zechariah 9:11-12

"As for you,
because of the blood of your
covenant,
I will release your prisoners
from the waterless cistern.
Return to a stronghold [your
Stronghold],
you prisoners who have
hope;
today I declare that I will
restore double to you."
(CSB)

Day 3

Return to God's Design³

God's Design

Amos 7:7-8— “He showed me this: The Lord was standing there by a vertical wall with a plumb line in his hand. The LORD asked me, ‘What do you see, Amos?’

“I replied, ‘A plumb line.’

“Then the Lord said, ‘I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will no longer spare them.’” (CSB)

2 Timothy 3:16-17— “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (CSB)

Opening Prayer

Lord God, I want to be a person who is righteous and complete. I want to be equipped for EVERY good work. I ask You to reveal Your will to me through Your Word and by Your Holy Spirit. Show me the ways and the distances I've departed from You. Call me back to You. Show me how to return to You, so You will return to me. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

🕒 Begin today's lesson by reading God's Design in the margin.

Since Scripture can serve as God's written plumb line for us, talk to the Lord about His desire for us to measure up to His standards. You may use the Opening Prayer or pray your own.



A plumb line is a tool a carpenter uses to make sure a wall is perpendicular to the ground (as it should be). In the days of Amos God's people had departed from Him and repeatedly refused to return. God set a spiritual plumb line alongside Israel so they could see how far they had departed. This time God was planning to execute His judgment on the nation. The time for repentance and return had past. God just wanted Israel to understand they deserved all that was about to happen to them.

God's Word is His instruction book for us. He reveals Himself and His guidelines for a healthy and abundant life. The Scriptures serve as a written plumb line for us. By them we can examine ourselves to see how far we are from God's desires.

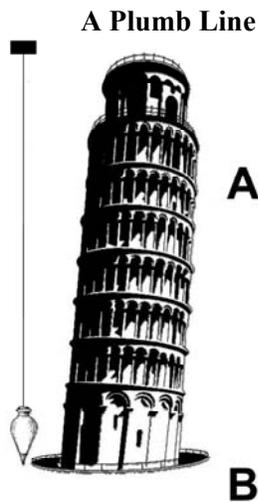
As you read and study *Return to Me*, I'll be sharing Scriptures to serve as a plumb line for us. God reveals what He desires from us. His Holy Spirit can take the Word of God and convict us of our departure from His expectations. When we respond to His corrections, He restores us to a right relationship and fellowship with Him. We must keep in mind; however, that there are consequences for refusing to respond to His corrections.

Responding to God's Plumb Line

Notice the plumb line beside the picture of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in the opposite margin. This tower in Pisa, Italy, has departed from the vertical position intended for buildings.

- **1. Where is the problem with this tower? Is the problem with the crooked walls at A or in the foundation at B?** A B
- **2. Suppose I could use a huge crane and pull the tower back into plumb. Then I release the pressure without doing anything else. What do you think would happen to the tower? Check one.**
 - It would be fixed and stay in its rightful place.
 - It would fall back to its original crooked position.
 - It would fall and probably keep right on falling to the ground.

The problem with the Leaning Tower is not in the crooked walls. The problem is in the foundation (B). If I don't fix the foundation, all my effort to fix the crooked walls will be a temporary fix. This physical illustration has a spiritual application. In Deuteronomy 30:1-16 God made wonderful promises to His people Israel. But in verse 17 He issued a serious warning.



➤ **3. Read verse 17 below. Circle the words that describe the source of the problem for a people who turn away from the Lord. Then underline two sins that result from a departure from the Lord.**

“If your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them...”
(Deut. 30:17, NIV)

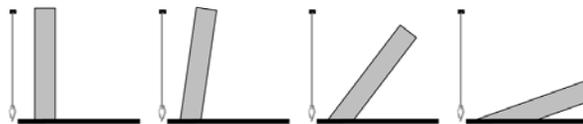
A departure from God begins with a shift of your heart where you don’t love God as much as you are supposed to love Him. You are commanded to “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Jesus quoted that verse and said it was the first and greatest commandment. (See Mark 12:29-30.)

When your heart turns away, you will begin to demonstrate your departure through your sinful behavior. Two sinful symptoms of a departed heart are (1) a lack of obedience or disobedience to God’s commands and (2) a turning away to worship other gods.

Most Christians would not see themselves as idolaters because they do not have a religious idol in their home. We can, however, begin to love something, someone, or some activity so much that it distracts us from our first love for Christ. I’ll be asking you to examine in more detail your first love for Christ and identify possible idols of the heart in future lessons. For today, let’s look at your “spiritual tower” measured alongside God’s plumb line.

➤ **4. Take some time to pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you the current status of your life alongside His plumb line. Are you perpendicular to the ground? or somewhere at an angle? Any departure would be reflected in lack of obedience or disobedience to God’s commands or recognizing you love something so much it distracts you from your wholehearted love for Christ.**

Draw an image of your “spiritual tower” on the foundation in the margin beside the plumb line. It might look like one of these:



If your spiritual tower is leaning, returning to the Lord starts with work on the foundation. If you only work on symptoms, you will achieve only a temporary fix. Return to a wholehearted love for Christ. Remove any idols of the heart that hinder that love. Then the Lord will help you begin to make the other corrections to restore your life to alignment with Him.

🕒 **Ask God what He wants you to do in response to Him to apply what you have studied today. Write a note in the margin or in your journal about any action steps He desires from you.**

Day 4

Bow the Knee

God's Design

Philippians 2:9-11—

“For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20—

“Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.” (CSB)

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You purchased me for God by Your sacrifice on the cross. Then the Father gave me the gift of the Holy Spirit to live in me at Your request. I cannot possibly thank You enough for Your love and sacrifice for me. I confess with my tongue that You alone are my Lord and King. I'm not my own; I belong to You. So today, I ask You to teach me to spiritually bow my knee in full surrender to You and Your will. Amen.

🕒 **Begin today's lesson by reading God's Design in the margin. Talk to the Lord about His desire for your full surrender to King Jesus as your Lord. You may use the Opening Prayer or pray your own. If you are not ready to surrender all to Him, would you give Him permission to begin changing your heart to want to do so?**



Several years ago, I was studying the word *consecrate*. One Hebrew word means “to set apart for God's purposes, to make holy, to cleanse, to purify, and to put away the profane and unholy.” We do need to consecrate ourselves that way. The other term translated *consecrate* is made up of two Hebrew words. One means “open hand,” and the other means “to fill up.” Together they mean “to fill up the open hand(s).”

As I pondered the meaning of that term, I thought about a priest standing by the altar waiting for a person to bring a sacrifice to the Lord. The person would have chosen one without spot or blemish. As long as the sacrifice was in the hands of the worshiper, it belonged to him. But when he placed it in the open hands of the priest, the sacrifice was consecrated to God. All of it belonged to God, and it became holy because God is holy. However, as I read the passages that used this term for *consecrate*, they almost exclusively referred to *people* (Aaron and his sons, the priests, and the Levites) being consecrated to the Lord or some false god.

A Living Sacrifice

Immediately I was reminded of Romans 12:1 where Paul said, “brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship” (CSB). Though Paul didn't use the term *consecrate*, the meaning is the same. Because of all God has done for us, we ought to give our entire selves to Him as a living sacrifice. After all, we have been “bought at a price.” We belong to God as His servants. “He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15, CSB).

➔ **1. Based upon Paul's writings, which of the following should be true for you? Check all that apply.**

- a. I belong to God. I've been bought at a price.
- b. My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in me.
- c. I should present my body to God as a living sacrifice.
- d. I should no longer serve myself, but I should serve the Lord.

Did you check all four responses? You should have. If you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and if you have placed your faith in Him, all these statements are true for you. Did you notice, however, that the last two require a response from you? You present and serve.



Homage Ceremony⁴

The Homage Ceremony

As I studied about *consecration*, I remembered reading about a medieval ceremony that included open hands. I did some research about the homage ceremony. In this ceremony a king (or lord) would sit on his throne holding out open hands. His subject would come and kneel before him and place his hands inside the hands of his king. Then the subject would and say these words, “I am your man.” This simple pledge was significant. It meant that the subject (now a vassal) belonged to the king or lord. With it, the subject pledged his loyalty and obedience.

Christians had to pledge their loyalty and obedience to their earthly king. But they realized they have a King in heaven who deserved their loyalty and obedience far more. They developed a new posture for prayer. They would get on their knees, place their palms together, and bow their heads. They imagined they were entering the very throne room of heaven where King Jesus was on His throne. He was holding out His nail-scarred hands asking for the pledge of a living sacrifice. Their prayer probably included a pledge of time, career, finances, possessions, health, family, reputation, and even their lives to their King.

➔ 2. Would that kind of daily prayer change your prayer life?

- Yes No Not much

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One God. Notice some of God’s names or titles from Scripture:

- a Master in heaven (Col. 4:1)
- God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19)
- eternal King (Jer. 10:10)
- the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms (Dan. 4:17)
- King of glory, LORD of Armies (Ps. 24:7-10)
- King of the heavens (Dan. 4:37)
- LORD, Lord of the whole earth (Mic. 4:13)
- God of gods, Lord of kings (Dan. 2:47)

“God... is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15, CSB).

He is our Creator, Father, Master, Lord, and King. He is worthy of our worship, our love, and our obedience. But He is not interested in partial or half-hearted surrender to His will. We’ve been encouraged to pray “Your kingdom come. Your will be done” (Matt. 6:10, CSB). God desires your full surrender. During the coming weeks, daily deny your self-will and choose to obey His will.

🕒 If you are physically able, enter this prayer time using the “homage ceremony” posture for prayer. Pledge your loyalty and obedience to Jesus. Ask God what He wants you to do in response to Him to apply what you have studied today. Write a note in the margin or in a journal about any action step He desires from you.

Day 5

Demonstrate Your Changed Life

God's Design

Luke 3:2-9— “God's word came to John.... as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!
Every valley will be filled,
and every mountain and hill will be made low;
the crooked will become straight,
the rough ways smooth,
and everyone will see the salvation of God.

He then said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance.... every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’”

Opening Prayer

Lord, I do want to return to You at Your invitation, because I want You to return to me and to my church. Help me to prepare the way for Your return by removing the barriers, making paths straight and smooth, and demonstrating repentance through my changed life. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

🕒 **Begin today's lesson by reading God's Design in the margin. Talk to the Lord about His desire for you to demonstrate your return to Him through a changed life. You may use the Opening Prayer or pray your own.**



When Jesus was about to begin His public ministry, God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way. John called for repentance, for changed lives. Quoting from Isaiah 40:3-5, John described his job of removing barriers (filling valleys and reducing mountains). He sought to make paths straight and smooth so “everyone will see the salvation of God.”

Crowds evidently knew they deserved God's wrath, and they came running for safety. But, receiving God's forgiveness and protection required more than a request; it required repentance. John said, “produce fruit consistent with repentance.” When people asked what they should do, he gave practical ways they could demonstrate their genuine repentance:

- “The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same.”
- To tax collectors: “Don't collect any more than what you have been authorized.”
- To soldiers: “Don't take money from anyone by force or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

➡ **1. Suppose in Day 1 you had identified the sins below in people and churches. On the blank lines write what you think the “fruit consistent with repentance” would be. I've given you an example.**

1. People with addictions to pornography

Quit watching pornographic videos and movies; stop looking at and reading sexually explicit materials; begin to focus your mind on pure wholesome things

2. A person given to gossip about and slander of others

3. A person who is selfish, stingy, and greedy

4. A church that is prayerless

Did you respond with practical things that would demonstrate a changed life? A gossip needs to quit talking about others behind their backs. A selfish person may need to start giving generously—like a shirt or food. A prayerless church needs to start praying and become devoted to prayer.

When God invites (commands) you and your church to return to Him, He

will be looking for a change in your behavior. You will act differently. Your church will be different. During the coming weeks, God may reveal things in you and your church that need to change. Returning to the Lord will require you to demonstrate fruit consistent with your repentance. You've probably noticed that I'm asking you at the end of each day to talk to God about things He wants you to do in response to Him. Treat those assignments as serious business.

As you read about John the Baptist's message, did you notice the consequences for those who don't bear good fruit? John described the serious consequences. Those trees "will be cut down and thrown into the fire." For some people and churches their very lives and vitality will be dependent upon their returning to the Lord. In Revelation 2:4-5 Jesus sent a message to the church at Ephesus:

"You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand [church, Rev. 1:20] from its place, unless you repent." (CSB)

Jesus came to give us an abundant life. He wants us to experience His best. Let's produce changed lives that demonstrate our repentance! Scripture describes at least two things which can lead us to repentance, which can stir us to repent.

➤ **2. Read the two Scriptures in the margin and underline two things which can lead us to repentance. Then write them below.**

God has been so good to us even when we don't deserve it. His kindness can lead us to repent. At other times we may be overcome with grief over our guilt. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, God-given grief or sorrow can lead us to repent. Be encouraged. God not only wants you to repent, but He will help you do it. Let's return to Him.

🕒 **Ask God what He wants you to do in response to Him to apply what you have studied today. Write a note in the margin or in your journal about any action step He desires from you.**



For this week, review notes you have written at the end of each lesson or in your journal. Write an "I will..." statement in the margin indicating what you will do to return to the Lord. What action step will you take? What will the fruit of your repentance look like? Be so specific that an observer would know you have taken that step. Over the course of the coming days or weeks, you will experience God's keeping of His promise: when you sufficiently return to Him, He WILL return to you!

Romans 2:4

"Do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" (CSB)

2 Corinthians 7:9-11

"You were grieved as God willed... For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death. For consider how much diligence this very thing—this grieving as God wills—has produced in you: what a desire to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what deep longing, what zeal, what justice!" (CSB)

I will...
