



Introduction

Welcome to *Sonship*, a training tool to encourage you to greater faith, repentance, and love. The course is designed to promote ongoing renewal in your life, relationships, and ministry. Our prayer is that Christ will greatly bless and encourage you as you take this course. By way of introduction, we will summarize the course in four points. These four points are foundational themes to the material, and you will find the course often returning to them:

1 Cheer up!

The gospel is far greater than you can imagine!

The gospel is the best news we could ever hear. The gospel is about Jesus Christ and his power to transform our lives and relationships, communities, and ultimately, the nations. Through this gospel, we are freely given a new identity—an identity not based on race, social class, gender, a theological system, or a system of rules and regulations. Rather it is a new and perfect identity based solely on faith in Christ, an identity that defines every aspect of our lives. We are now forgiven, righteous, adopted, accepted, free, and heirs to everything that belongs to Christ. So even our sin, weakness, and failures do not define who we are. Because of this good news, we no longer have to hide from our sin and imagine that we have it all together, for God knows and loves us as we are, not as we pretend to be.

Receiving and resting in the truths of the gospel translates into a Christian life of joy, peace, freedom, and love. So the gospel also gives us a new way to live and relate to other people. It frees us from sin's stranglehold on our lives, liberates our conscience, and releases us from living according to the principles of this world. Since our new identity and new way to live is based solely on faith, the gospel excludes all manner of boasting and arrogance. Everything that we have has been given to us—thus it is called the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20: 24). Moreover, this gospel has continual and daily applicability. It is not only relevant to us when we first believe, but continues to work in us and through us as we continue to believe. This continual life of faith visibly expresses itself in love (Gal 5:6).

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2 Cheer up!

You are worse than you think!

One of the great hindrances to Christian growth, healthy relationships, and strong communities is a life of pretence—pretending that we don't struggle with a multitude of sins, such as self-righteous attitudes, foul tempers, nagging anxieties, lustful looks, controlling and critical hearts, and a general belief that we are better than other people. Part of the good news of the gospel is that it can change our selfish desires to be right, look good, be in control, and gratify ourselves. Faith in the gospel transforms even good desires that have started to rule our lives and thus have gone out of bounds. One chief prayer that speaks to our need is found in Psalm 139: 23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Because our sin is a block to intimacy with God and others, we need God's Spirit to show us our many fears and offensive ways. One way to promote this is to invite the insights of others and encourage them to speak into our lives. The goal is that we repent and be led in the way of Jesus, and grow in our intimacy with him. Our goal is to live a life of repentant faith, recognizing that when we live by unbelief, we are doing nothing less than trusting in something or someone other than Christ for life, happiness, security, respect, love, identity, fulfillment, and significance. Belief in the gospel tears down these false trusts in our lives, whether we are putting our faith in a system of rules or laws (legalism) or in something like food or sex (licentiousness).

Points 1 and 2 above work together in a cyclical fashion. On the one hand, none of us wants to look at our sin without having a firm foundation in the gospel, so it is essential to constantly saturate ourselves with the gospel, and grow in knowing its great riches. On the other hand, we *will* have a small view of the gospel if we do not continually see the depths of our sin. The gospel cannot soak deeply into us unless it is addressing our *ongoing* need for it.

3 Cheer up!

God's Spirit works in your weakness!

In addition to our new identity, we have been given the Spirit, who is more than sufficient to lead, guide, and empower us in our new life. Often, we think that the great problem in our lives is that there is not enough power available to change our lives and relationships. There is, however, more than enough power available, for the power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us (Eph 1:19-20). Nevertheless, this power does not work automatically, for it is at work in those

who believe. So the Spirit works through repentant faith. To live by faith is to live by the Spirit, who brings about the obedience God is looking for.

Furthermore, this power of the Spirit is made manifest in our lives through weakness (2 Cor 12:9; 13:4). We take the weak position when we have let go of our righteousness and strength, our claims to health and happiness, and our overarching claim to lordship over our lives. Thus, those who hold on to their righteousness and strength will find little power in their lives. Of course, this is further good news. God delights to use the weak and inadequate things of this world to accomplish his great plan for the world. With Paul, we can delight in weakness, for then we are strong, and God is glorified. The result is a wonderful freedom to forget about ourselves and stop wondering whether we have enough abilities, knowing that God uses and empowers the weak.

4 Cheer up!

God's kingdom is more wonderful than you can imagine!

The kingdom of God is the new and final age that began with the coming of Jesus. His kingdom is not part of the present age—an age where the flesh reigns; where people are divided, relationships are broken, and suspicion and competition predominate; where money, sex, and power are abused; where leaders are first and servants last; where behavior is controlled by law, and identity is defined by race, gender, or social standing; and where gifts and resources are used for the advancement of oneself. Rather, the kingdom of God is the new age. It is the age of the Spirit (Matt 12:28). It is the age of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). The kingdom of God is about the renewal, restoration, and reconciliation of all things, and God has made us a part of this great story of salvation. It is about the restoration of relationships, justice, and equality; about freedom from every lord except Jesus; about reconciliation, forgiveness, and the defeat of Satan. It is about compassion for the poor and powerless, about helping those who are marginalized and rejected by society, and about using our gifts and resources for the advancement of others. It is about new communities and the transformation of society and culture, so that race, gender, and social class no longer define identity, nor are they used to control and divide. For Paul, to preach the gospel is to preach the kingdom, is to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:24-27). The gospel sums up the whole message of good news that he brought to the nations—particularly to the downtrodden and powerless. And since it is good news, our response to the message of the kingdom is to be one of repentant faith (Mark 1:15).



➤ **Using** the Sonship manual

There are three main parts to the course:

- 1 This manual
- 2 Audio or video lectures
- 3 A discipling relationship (the most important part of the course)

Each of the manual's sixteen lessons are divided into seven parts, which consistently follow the order listed below:

- 1 Lesson title
- 2 An introductory quote taken from the lecture
- 3 Lesson goals (in the right margin)
- 4 A reminder to listen to the lecture
- 5 An outline of the lecture, including any diagrams used, with space available to take comprehensive notes
- 6 Homework, consisting of:
 - ▶ A memory verse for each lesson (Note: memory verses for the entire course are included in Appendix C at the end of the manual.)
 - ▶ Approximately a dozen homework questions and various sections of teaching content (Teaching content is introduced by a large asterisk.)
 - ▶ A reading that relates to the topic of each lesson
- 7 A list of the various assignments to be checked off as you complete them

➤ **Before** the course begins

1 Recruit a prayer partner.

Prayer is essential, for God's work is not accomplished by simply taking a course, but rather by his Spirit in response to believing prayer. Commit yourself to praying, and to recruiting at least one prayer partner to pray for you throughout the course. Having a prayer partner for this course is important, and you need to choose a person who will take this commitment seriously. Pick a person with whom you can communicate openly on a regular basis. Quite a few assignments will involve your prayer partner, and you will need to update them after every lesson—letting them know how to specifically pray for you and how their prayers are being answered. As a suggestion, when you get started, ask your prayer partner to pray Psalm 139:23–24 for you throughout the course.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

*See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

2 Read through the book of Galatians in Appendix A.

Reprinted from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson, this translation of Paul's book refreshingly underscores many themes of this course.

► For small groups: what to expect

1 Expect struggle...

and don't be surprised to find that your group is a mixture of enthusiasm, hope, and honesty, along with indifference, anxiety, skepticism, guilt, and covering up. We are all people who really and truly need Jesus every day. So expect your group to be made up of people who wrestle with sin and have problems—like yourself!

2 Expect a group leader...

who desires to serve you, but who also needs Jesus as much as, and in some ways more than, you do. No leader should be on a pedestal, so expect that your group leader will have the freedom to share openly about his or her own weaknesses, struggles, and sins. Pray for your group leader regularly, and give your support and encouragement.

3 Expect the Holy Spirit...

to be the one ultimately responsible for your group's growth, and for the change in each person's life. Relax and trust him.

4 Expect your group's agenda to include...

an open, give-and-take discussion of the lecture, readings, and especially the homework questions and answers for that lesson. Also expect times of prayer at each gathering.

5 Expect confidentiality...

and be prepared to make a commitment that anything personal mentioned in your group must be kept in confidence, and not shared with others. Gossip will quickly destroy a group.

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