



CHARACTER PRINCIPLE LESSONS

Self-Government



Hope Christian Fellowship

Making Disciples Who Live & Love Like Jesus.

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How to use these Lessons

These lessons are great for small groups, one-on-one (person-to person) gatherings, and mentoring, or even at home with your own family.

We would like to suggest that you use the following format:

LOOK BACK

Take some time to find out how the group or person you are meeting with is doing in their life. If you are meeting regularly, ask questions like, “How have you applied what you learned last time we met?” “Did you get to share your story or the gospel with anyone this week?”

Other questions to consider:

- Did you accomplish your goals from last time we met?
- What have been your greatest challenges? How did you deal with those challenges?
- What do you believe is working well in your life?

LOOK UP

Do the lesson you have planned for this time together. Instruct your members to ask God to teach you what He wants you to learn from it. Ask questions like, “What did you like about this lesson?” “What did you find difficult to understand?” “Does anything from this lesson stand out to you?” “Is anything hitting your heart from this lesson?”

LOOK FORWARD

Take a bit of time to ponder and pray. Pray that God will enlighten you and those you are meeting. Encourage them to write down what impressions they are receiving from the Holy Spirit, and to consider those things as their “assignment” for the coming week.

Ask them to share their “assignment.”

Other questions to consider:

- What are your highest priorities for this week/month?
- What are your plans to help you grow in Christ?

How can we help you this week/month?

MOTIVES

“Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight.” Proverbs 18:17

No chance . . . there is no substitute for God, nor can we compete against Him. He knows what is right, what is best, and what will work. The sooner we accept Him as the final authority and begin to structure our lives, business, and country after His laws and principles, the better off we'll be. Life is not meant to be difficult—we make it difficult by operating on defiled motives. Motive means the reason or motivation for how and why we do things. Some lie, cheat and manipulate in order to get a deal, and then call it “being shrewd.” This does not lead us to a good life, but to moral decay. Webster says shrewd is “worldly-wise, clever or near to the truth.” So it is important that we always seek the truth. Manipulating the truth or being clever or shrewd will eventually destroy us.

Jesus said there is a broad way that leads to destruction, but also a narrow one that leads to life, or we could say “*The truth will make us free.*” He designed life to make us grow. A child needs to eat to live and grow; likewise, our minds and spirits need to learn (eat) in order to grow. But we have to live on truth, or we'll become shrewd. If a child stops eating, he dies; in the same way, if we quit learning truth, we die spiritually, mentally and eventually physically. It's like riding a bike—when we stop, we fall. When an apple is green, it is growing; but when it stops growing, it rots. So life is a process, and if we want the good life, we must continue to strive for these three things:

1. To become morally correct.
2. To understand people and situations.
3. To grow in the knowledge of God, His laws, and the principles He designed for humanity.

The good life starts when our motives are pure and we follow good principles, taking responsibility for who and what we are. We are like a product: our quality and value is based on the principles of which we are made. When we are honest and our motives are pure, we become open and free with no hidden agendas. People will sense the freedom and will not defend themselves against us. They will respect us and will want to do business with us. We cannot trust in our own smarts or shrewdness; if we do, we will be exposed when we get under pressure. Yes, we must be well advised, but we must see truth and God as our best resource and advisor. This will teach us common sense and practical ways that will work in every area of our lives. Sometimes we educate ourselves until we consider ourselves shrewd and wise. Then we start trusting in our own abilities rather than in God's good advice and become fools without God. We cannot function properly without the truth. It will keep our motives pure. To reject God and His ideas is like cutting off the hand that feeds us, for God and Truth are synonymous.

Today, America has more attorneys per capita than any other country in the world. We have more lawsuits than the rest of the world combined. We write thousands of laws to interpret the ten commandments. Some try to outwit each other by their shrewdness. Or they get ahead by some million-dollar lawsuit. We have forgotten the simplicity of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Let's not kid ourselves. God knows all about our doings, and sooner or later He will set the record straight in spite of how shrewd or well-advised we may think we

are. It is important to be well-advised, but let's make sure our motives are pure and use God's good advice as a part of our dealings and decision-making. Let's be wise and listen to what God has to say. Then, we will not be known for being smart or shrewd—but wise.

DISCUSSION:

How have you been affected by someone who takes the time to understand you?

What do you think motivates people?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMB LINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 2 being lowest).

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

Many people will close their eyes to advice, but most people will open their eyes to example.

MORALITY

“The good influence of godly citizens causes a city to prosper, but the moral decay of the wicked drives it downhill.” Proverbs 11:11

Morality: What is it? Webster defines it as principles, standards, or habits with respect to right or wrong conduct. The Proverb relates it to godliness, meaning God-designed standards. It should be understood that God created man and beast with a purpose in mind. Each species was created after its kind, which means that each one was created with some fixed attributes. Man, however, was given a special gift—the gift of reasoning. No animal can reason itself out of its created intent. A robin cannot decide its values or redesign its lifestyle. It functions according to its code and design. Likewise, man was created after his kind. However, he has two codes to live by—a conscience (a sense of right and wrong for his kind) and commandments.

We know by nature that it is wrong to kill, steal or destroy that which belongs to others—that is conscience. That’s why people do bad things in the dark or when no one is watching.

Since man was given the gift of reason, he also needs commandments. These commandments become codes for proper functioning (moral codes). We need them because with our gift of reasoning we can reason ourselves away from our created conscience.

Many rights and wrongs must be taught—these are the commandments. But some rights and wrongs are part of our created human nature—this is our conscience. When we harden our hearts and sear our God-given conscience, we become selfish, greedy and self-willed. This leads us away from our natural morals. Our conscience is not a true guide unless it is governed by the commandments.

God made man and beast as male and female for reproductive purposes. It is only the human that practices homosexuality. Only humans become addicted to drugs and alcohol and plan abortions. It may be legal or politically correct, but these things are still morally wrong. A business deal may be legal but still violate moral principles. Morality deals with justice for both parties and is under a code of right and wrong given by the Designer. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is not a suggestion but rather it is a functional principle.

There are three ways to check your conscience:

1. Do you have a problem looking at certain people in the eye or being transparent?
2. Are you afraid to openly discuss certain issues?
3. Do you feel uncomfortable talking about God or what is right?

We are responsible before God and mankind to follow a moral code of ethics based upon truth from God and creation. The commandments were given as the guideline for human behavior. They teach respect for God and our fellow man. If we love God and our neighbors as ourselves, we will act *morally correct*. These laws and principles were not given just so we can please God, but they were designed and given with us in mind. We are the beneficiaries.

We will do ourselves a favor by living and structuring ourselves and our societies upon them.

Our forefathers understood this. That's why our constitution and system of laws are structured around God's commandments. It was to create a moral society. Most moral values are plain common sense. Just because we have been given the ability to reason and choose does not license us to break the moral standards for which we were created.

Morality is simply a rule of conduct that is right—right for you and right for me, according to the Designer. We might need to ask the man in the mirror if he knows what is right.

DISCUSSION:

Do you think we, as a nation, have digressed in morality?

What side effect will we have if we lose our morality?

What causes a person or a nation to digress in morality?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

When Wealth is lost - Nothing is lost.

When Health is lost - Something is lost.

When Character is lost - All is lost.

ATTITUDE

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8

Attitude—Webster describes it as a posture, one’s mental state of mind, or one’s disposition. We hear much about a positive mental attitude. Attitude is one’s disposition, good or bad. So when we meet someone, we can easily determine what state of mind they are in by their attitude. The above quotation, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” is saying that blessed, or happy, are the people who are in the right frame of mind—sound, stable, rational and positive. The end result of this is—they will see God. But, how do we get into such a positive mental attitude and the right state of mind?

First, *we must take charge of our minds*. We must discipline it and feed it on a diet of healthy mind food. We must develop it into a predetermined code or creed of what we want to become. The mind is similar to a muscle, which can be developed by exercise. It can be trained and disciplined to function according to our will.

Second, *we must choose our destiny*; that is, we must choose to become something, such as a positive, happy and successful person. A mind cannot be positive without a direction or track to run on. It will focus on something; if we don’t give it direction, it will go to the path of least resistance. In order to be happy, things need to happen. In order to be successful, we need a goal. And in order to be positive, we need to be focused on “I can” and “I will,” while we are on our mission to connect with our preset destiny.

Third, *we must see beyond the present*. Along the way in pursuit of happiness or success, we will run into situations. Within every situation, we must see the future which will take us one step closer to our goal. This brings hope, and hope stimulates and motivates us into action to overcome the situations. Whenever we have discouraging thoughts, we must refocus on our goal and the rewards of overcoming.

Fourth, we must have the right foundation. It’s one thing to believe, but another thing to have *the right to believe*. Your positive confession must be based on truth in order to have positive results. Just because you decide to not believe in gravity does not mean that it has lost its effect. With every goal, there must be the right reason; with every dream, there must be a right purpose; and for success, there must be right principles.

Success is guarded by problems. To get the gold medal we must solve the problems. To solve the problems, we need courage and persistence. Therefore, it is a learning experience to get to the gold. In the end, what we learn in getting the medal is more valuable than the gold itself. As the Lord said, “Blessed (or happy) are the pure in heart (right state of mind).” They shall see God, or get the gold medal. And happy are the people who have developed the right state of mind, for they shall see God or discover God behind every situation and problem. Once we get to this state of mind, our attitude will be positive because we won’t be afraid of the problems, for we know what is behind them. It’s like a treasure hunt, always looking beyond the situation. In fact, we can become dangerously positive, where we become so fearless that we could do stupid things by getting out of touch with reality.

A positive attitude will give us a great future. A negative attitude will keep us close to the present, with very little progress. They both cause a measure of stress. Negative people worry

and fear, while positive people push to conquer. But happy are the pure in heart for they shall see God in everything and get the King's gold ring of prosperity.

DISCUSSION:

Why is it so important to experience achievement?

Are you negative or positive?

Which of the four things do you lack the most?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

If we do what we know we should, all the odds should be in our favor.

EMOTIONS

“He that rules his spirit is greater than he that takes a city.” Proverbs 16:32

Ruling our spirit is managing our behavior or emotions. Behavior is directly affected by our emotions. We are spirit, soul, and body. The body reacts to the emotions or disturbances of our soul. That is why the Proverb says, “He that rules his spirit...”, meaning that we can rule it. Ruling our spirit is not always easy, because it is “what we really are”. Everything that we hear, see, smell, taste or touch is entered into our mind, and it analyzes the situations and recommends a response. We (our spirit) then decide to react or respond, affecting our emotions (soul) and in the end our behavior (body). “He that ruleth his spirit” means “he who decides to discipline or manage his response.” Someone said that it is just as bad to think something as to do it. This is not true, because thoughts alone do not affect other people. It is the action that causes the damage. We all have emotions; we can all get upset about things. But it is extremely important that we learn to calm and manage those feelings, or they will destroy us.

Cars are built with motors, brakes, transmissions, and steering wheels. They are designed to be used for going places. But if they are not managed or steered properly, they become dangerous. Then, that which was meant to be a blessing turns out to be for our own harm. God has made us similarly. He gave us hands to work, feet to walk, eyes to see, and brains to manage all of the body members. Our behavior is to be managed and ruled by our spirit, meaning we can and are responsible for what we do.

The value of a person is based on his ability to control and manage his temper, his habits and all of his emotions. We must understand that we communicate largely by our behavior. People judge us by our behavior because that’s what they see. Uncontrolled emotions can ruin our reputation by slamming a door or giving a “mean look” without ever saying a word. Words are important, but the emotion we use to express them is even more important. At least 55% of our communications and impressions that we leave on people are nonverbal. The way we dress, walk and behave tells people if we are in charge of our emotions. The non-verbal body language we use says as much about our character as our words. When you are tempted to get defensive or argumentative, three ways of controlling your emotions are:

1. Stop and take a deep breath before you speak.
2. Consciously be aware of your body tension and posture.
3. Think of something humorous to say.

Sometimes our manners and actions speak so loudly that it becomes difficult to hear what we are saying. As someone said, “Let everyone know what you believe, and if necessary use words.”

Emotions are like gasoline—they can be dangerous and destructive, but very valuable when controlled or channeled properly. The emotions in us are energy. If that energy is harnessed, it becomes a valuable asset within us. How many times have we heard someone say, “That guy could be valuable if he would get his act (emotions) together.” Remember that people will judge us by how we control our emotions, not just by what we say. The bottom line is—if we

learn to calm our spirit, we will be in control of situations, rather than situations controlling us.

DISCUSSION:

How do you view emotions and their value?

How do you usually communicate what you are feeling?

Who's in charge of our behavior or emotion?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

It can be very embarrassing to be wrong at the top of your voice.

PROPER THINKING

“For as he thinks, so he is in his heart.” Proverbs 23:7

“As a man thinks...” means the processing of thoughts. Our mind is an amazing gift from God, and no one fully understands it. But we do know two things it does: it reasons, and it imagines. Reasoning is more like calculating, which leads us to concepts, opinions or considerations, while imagination leads us to ideas or possibilities. Although they both work within our mind (processor), most of us operate more predominantly in one of the two. While we may reason well and be full of logic and common sense, we may be weak in creative possibility thinking. This might be because of a bad experience or a failure.

Some people are dreamers; they are never satisfied with things as they are. This is good if they are a part of a team, but may be dangerous if they function as an individual. Because they focus on what can be, they may forget to practice common sense and sound reasoning in the now. So, as the Proverb above says, “As a man thinks, so is he,” which means we may determine our future by being aware of our thinking. What we think about today is what we will become tomorrow.

Thoughts always precede actions. A person *is* really what he thinks about, not always what he does. Our courts judge us by what we do or have done, but God knows that we will eventually do what we think. So, He warns us in advance to be careful of our thoughts. Jesus said, “The law says, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery,’ but I say that if you look on a woman and lust after her, you have already committed adultery in your heart.” God wants to protect us from committing the act by convicting us while it is still in our thought stage. The law also says, “Thou shalt not kill,” but Jesus said don’t hate. Again, He knew that hatred leads to killing. The point is, we should be aware of our thoughts because they will grow and eventually become actions.

Knowing this, should we be surprised at the violence in our kids or the lack of morals in our country? Guess what. We have created it by our media and our programming. The outcome of a child or a society is the product of an environment we have created by our philosophies. We must remember this pattern:

**Knowledge creates thoughts.
Thoughts will produce actions.
Actions will form habits.**

Habits will form our destiny. If we want a positive future, we must control our thought patterns. The question is, how can we control our thoughts? First, we must want to do it, and if so, we can renew our minds or thoughts by controlling the input (Romans 12:2). We must select good things to read, watch good T.V. programs, and carefully choose our associates. We must consider the outcome of everything we put into our minds. What fruit will it bear? We must remember that our minds are like computers that can be programmed to our choice, and it will bear fruit accordingly. Our thoughts will be conformed to the values we choose to follow. We are not destined to live out a certain or specific lifestyle. It is a matter of choice.

God has given us free will. Our destiny is within our control. If we don’t like where we are or where we are going, we can change it by taking charge of our thoughts. There is a law of

attraction; we attract what we give attention to.

DISCUSSION:

Are you satisfied with where you are? If not what can you do to change it?

How can we protect ourselves from getting involved in immoral acts?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

A mind once expanded by an idea will never return to its original dimension.

PARAMETERS (BOUNDARIES)

“A king rejoices in servants who know what they are doing; he is angry with those who cause trouble.” Proverbs 14:35

Trespassing . . . is to go beyond the limits of what is morally correct, or to transgress, or intrude beyond the pre-established parameters. Interestingly enough, Jesus said that we should pray, “Father, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Matthew 6:14). Since trespassing means going beyond the limits, then there must be parameters or boundaries to live by. If the boundaries are not clearly marked, we may trespass and not know it. So, as this Proverb states, “A king rejoices in his servants who know what they are doing.” This means that the king had a purpose and job description with parameters for his servants, so they knew what to do to please him.

Without knowing the king’s will or purpose, it cannot become our will or purpose. If the king or the company does not give us specific company policies with clear job descriptions and goals, employees cannot measure their performance. We can only measure that which is expected. A king rejoices when servants “*know what they are doing.*” Servants can only please the king if the king is clear with his expectations. So before we can have expectations, we must set clear goals with parameters for the game. This will give us a clear vision of what to do, and the freedom to work within these pre-structured parameters.

If we expect people to treat us fairly, we must first be fair ourselves. To do this, we must have proper parameters and boundaries established for those around us. Our kids will enjoy obeying us only if they know and understand our rules and our purpose. This makes them a part of the game. We cannot discipline anyone based on what we think they should have known, or they’ll feel like slaves. No one can enjoy performing without knowing what to expect, or what is expected. When performance is measured by expectations and both parties understand the purpose of the goal, work turns into a game. It will be “us” rather than “them”; it will be a company employee team. There are certain areas of our lives that may appear gray, but for the most part, people should have no doubt what we stand for and what we expect. This makes us predictable, and the game of guessing and uncertainty is over. God is clear in His expectations of His sons and daughters, and He has great rewards for our performance.

The second part of the Proverb states that the king “...is angry with those who cause trouble.” We will find that most employees will respect their leaders if company goals and purpose are communicated clearly. They may not always agree with us, but will still respect us. There are, however, a few rebels who oppose everything and everyone. They have no idea what is fair. Fortunately, they are a small percentage of our society, but they do make the king angry—and they do have to be dealt with accordingly. So if our families or employees are angry with us, we should ask ourselves:

- 1) Are my expectations too high or unrealistic?
- 2) Are my parameters broad enough to allow freedom?
- 3) Is my attitude right in administering them?

If these are all done correctly, there should be very little trespassing. But then we may have a

few “rebels” that not only trespass but transgress, and they “...do make the king angry.”

But let’s do our part by setting clear expectations and parameters, or people may claim we are unfair.

DISCUSSION:

Are people hurting you unknowingly? Why?

Do you have a problem keeping friends?

Why is setting parameters an important aspect of governing yourself?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

Parameters are like musical notes, if followed there is great harmony..

PATIENCE

“Be patient and you will finally win, for a soft tongue can break hard bones.” Proverbs 25:15

Good leaders are patient. In this generation of instant food, instant access, and instant information, we have forgotten a great virtue—patience. It is not a quantity virtue, but rather a quality virtue. Patience is not procrastination or slothfulness; it is waiting for the appropriate moment and working with time and seasons. If we want corn, we must wait for spring in order to plant; then we must wait again for autumn to harvest. Likewise, there are problems that cannot be solved right away. Sometimes they must mature. Without waiting for the right time, we may add to the problem. Mature leaders recognize seasons in their lives and businesses and allow time for change. They know change is a process, and they practice patience during the process. They also know that without patience they might force things too much and could cause costly immature reactions.

It is important to sense the moods of an employee or team before we give correction. There is a right time and a wrong time for dealing with a situation. Patient people receive three honors:

1. They are honored as people in control of themselves because they watch how they react to difficult situations.
2. They are honored as people of understanding because they listen to make sure they understand before they react. They won't take high risks in a situation.
3. They are honored as being wise because they choose to hold their peace and calm the fears of others involved by giving good counsel.

When we are angry, we should wait (be patient) until we cool off. We should recognize the old proverb, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” Quick responses from unprepared hearts only complicate the situation, and in the end, we all lose. But as the Proverb states, “Be patient, and you'll finally win.” With patience, everyone can win. Patience, if practiced rightly, will give all those involved peace and security.

We should be careful and recognize that it takes time to develop people. We should not expect a fourth-grade student to understand eighth-grade lessons. Good leaders know when to push and when to pull. They remember that leadership is leading people, getting people to see what they see, and teaching them how, when and why they want to get there. Our expectations should be based on our training and development of people. We should know this takes time. We should never ignore problems, but allow time and be patient, watching for the right moment to deal with them. God will usually inspire someone with a solution if we wait and pray.

Patience will season and prepare our own hearts as well as those with whom we are dealing. The next time you are hasty or pushy, stop and practice a little patience. You'll be wiser and more appreciated.

DISCUSSION:

Are you known to be patient or a procrastinator?

What is the hardest part about practicing patience?

Does it bother you when nothing happens?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping the gears.

RESTRAINT

“Self-control means controlling the tongue!
A quick retort can ruin everything.” Proverbs 13:3

Even though the tongue is a small member of our body, it creates many problems and is very difficult to control. We can use it to insult, criticize, slander, and destroy, or we can use it to bless, comfort and build others.

It is important to understand that whatever we communicate will come back to us. What goes around comes around, because words are powerful and they can cause ruin or bring solutions.

We are judged by what comes out of our mouths, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). The tongue has more to do with the law of sowing and reaping than any other member of our body.

Proverbs 21:23 tells us, “Keep your mouth closed and you’ll stay out of trouble.” That is good advice because if we don’t shut it off or control it, it will multiply our problems. When we talk too much we embarrass ourselves, and people will judge us as loose talkers or gossips. And then we will try to justify or deny it, which adds to our problem. Once we lie, trying to save ourselves, it turns into vicious arguments that have no end.

It is always good to be friendly and sociable, but we must discipline the tongue when it comes to bragging, exaggerating, or talking about others. *Not everything that comes to our mind is meant to be spoken.*

How many times have we gotten ourselves into trouble by talking too much? Gossiping and spreading rumors create all kinds of fighting that will separate us from our family members and friends. After the smoke clears, it will usually point back to those who did not control their tongue. As a business person, it is important that our words expose the control we have, and not the impulsiveness of our tongue.

There are three types of people that are careful with their tongue:

1. The wise man—He understands it is essential to hold a secret.
2. The man of integrity—He never compromises his standards with his words.
3. A smart man—He is humble enough to know that “he doesn’t know,” and doesn’t expose himself by opening his mouth. He exemplifies the Proverb that says, “It is better to say nothing and be considered a fool than to open our mouth and remove all doubt.”

If we want a good life, we must stop or control the flow. Self-control is having control over our tongue. We must use our tongue to speak good words. It is like sowing good seeds that will give a positive destiny, not only for ourselves but for others as well. God understands the power of spoken words. He spoke the world into existence. God has given us the power and ability to create good or bad by the power of our words. So be careful with your tongue, for your future will depend on it.

DISCUSSION:

In what situations is it the most difficult to control your quick retort?

What good seeds have you planted with your tongue?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

TEMPER

“It is better to be slow-tempered than famous.” Proverbs 16:32

We should take notice that it is not wrong to have a temper. Temper is the driving force in us. It is the difference between the strong and the weak. Many people ask God to take away their temper. That is wrong—our temper is a gift of strength, and we should thank God for it. Most entrepreneurs have a high temper that gives them the energy and the drive to reach their goals and purpose in life.

Temper is like gasoline—the higher the temper, the higher the octane or value. Both can be explosive and dangerous. If we are not careful and in control of the gasoline, it may burn our houses down, but, it can also be very useful and valuable. God tells us to “...be angry but sin not,” meaning we should not discard things because they are dangerous, but we should set rules of safety so that we can make good use of their value.

Likewise, our thoughts should not be to get rid of our temper but to control it. Slow it down—don't let it slip. Make rules of safety and get the value of the energy it creates. When we are angry we are stronger; we can work harder and get more things done. It not only affects the mind but energizes our entire body as well. But then, with this same energy, we may become destructive. We may hit someone or break things, or say words that will destroy relationships and lose credibility in our community.

So, when we feel it coming up, we must think about what we are about to do, and what effect it will have on us and on those around us. That is managing our temper and using its energy in a positive way. Successful people usually have high tempers, *but they have learned to think before they react* That is why they become famous and are known as wise men. Controlling our temper builds character and credibility. So, how can we manage our explosive tempers? Consider the following:

1. Always be aware of its potential danger.
2. Always consider the cost of your reactions.
3. See the value of your temper, and make good use of the energy.
4. Release the excess energy through competitive sports or exercise programs. Burning up calories calms down our anger.

All good men know what it is to have a temper, but they also know how to discipline it. Even plants, trees and flowers have to have their wild growth (temper) trimmed in order to bear fruit. Anything that has value needs to be managed and controlled, otherwise, it will lose its value.

So, be thankful for your temper. Don't let it heat up too fast or you will burn those around you. S-L-O-W it down. Use the heat to warm the cold hearts around you, and you will become known as a wise man, in control of yourself.

DISCUSSION:

Has your temper ever cost you something?

What was the price?

Do you value your temper?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

Temper is a gift, only if we don't have to say "I'm sorry".

FORGIVENESS

“Iniquity is atoned for by mercy and truth.
Evil is avoided by reverence for God.” Proverbs 16:6

To atone means to pay for the iniquity, the evil, or wrong we have done. The payment (atonement) makes restitution and restores us to our former state. The end result is forgiveness. The principle of forgiveness is probably one of the most rewarding principles we can experience in life because it has a major effect on our health and well being as a person. It will also affect our business dealings, as well as our relationships with others in general.

In order to experience forgiveness, we need to understand why we should accept and receive forgiveness from God. We must first recognize that God is holy and just, and wants us to practice righteousness with each other, derived from His laws. He made rules for life and living. These rules are called Truth. They cannot be broken without penalties. They are like the law of gravity. We cannot change its rules but must learn to live by them. Likewise, God’s law is just, and punishment must follow its violation; otherwise, *God’s Word could not be trusted*. However, unlike gravity—where punishment follows immediately after violation—mercy and forgiveness are available for us while we are in the process of learning the spiritual rules of life, giving us second chances. God’s attitude is that “all people are my creation.” He loves everyone, good and bad. The difference is that the righteous have discovered what makes life work, while others have not.

God knew that we would fall short of His law of righteousness, so He provided a law of atonement. He calls this forgiveness. If we don’t understand or receive forgiveness, then we are under the penalty and punishment of God’s system of justice. Jesus did not come to destroy or take away God’s law of justice, but to teach us principles of love and mercy, tempered with justice. He offers forgiveness for those who receive Him. Law without mercy makes life hard and tough. It brings on constant guilt and anger which destroys our health and relationships. Without experiencing forgiveness we develop a bad attitude about people and life in general, putting ourselves in a negative, defensive mode toward life.

Beware of these two attitudes:

- 1) The *strict law attitude*: this creates rebellion in kids, workers or society. They feel like they can never be good enough, so why try.
- 2) The *attitude of looseness*: this leaves them with no goals or parameters to live by which creates an irresponsible attitude with kids, workers, and a society who then feel they can get away with anything.

We must remember that God made the rules. He cannot change the law of justice because His righteousness is always right. He has, however, made another law that brings relief to the pain and agony of life. If we receive and understand the principle of forgiveness we will receive atonement (payment).

Atonement is simply forgiveness for our failures, so we can get up and start again, so we can prosper and be glad and walk as children of light. Jesus is more than the way. He is also the

truth and the life. He is just but also has offered us mercy and forgiveness while we are in the process of learning to live under the just rules of His Kingdom.

DISCUSSION:

How easy is it for you to forgive others who harm you?

Can you forgive yourself for the bad mistakes in your life?

What does it mean to be atoned for?

MEASURING UP TO THE PLUMBLINE:

How well are you currently applying this principle in your life? (10 being highest, 1 being lowest)

Can you see the value of raising your rating?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

Forgiveness is a gift of high value and is common amongst the humble.

MASTERPIECES

