

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
2080 West Grand Blvd.
Detroit, Michigan 48208
Nathan Johnson, D.D., *Senior Pastor*

Lesson 7: Advancing in Knowledge and Holiness

Scripture: 2 Peter 3

Goal: To embrace and fulfill our covenant relationship with God and one another.

Objective: To understand meaning and significance of advancing in knowledge and holiness as a church family.

Introduction:

The church covenant tells us that we must “strive for the advancement of the church in knowledge and holiness.” The second epistle of Peter confirms our responsibility to fulfill this aspect of our covenant relationship with God and the advancement of his church. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18).” Peter closed his epistle by enjoining believers to grow in grace, grow in the unmerited favor of God, and grow in the gift of salvation. This suggests that the knowledge for which we strive is not knowledge in general. It is the kind of knowledge that forms us into what God called us to be. This growth in grace comes through knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Of all the ways a church can grow, to grow in knowledge and holiness is first in line.¹ What is the importance of striving to grow in grace, to gain a deeper knowledge of God, and to grow in holiness as a corporate body of believers? Why is this essential to the health and witness of the church? How does it help us to deepen and realize the commitment we make to each other and God as we recite the church covenant each first Sunday?

We invite you to study together using a new lesson format. The “*Dialogue Web*” will allow you as a group to dig deep into the Word of God to unpack the truths that will help us grow. Be prepared to take an active part in the lessons, to utilize your Bible as the source for your inquiry, and to use guide questions to help you gain an understanding of what God has called us to be as the body of Christ. Each month, we will use key statements from our text; provide scriptures, guiding questions for your interactive class study session, as well as a lesson summary. In addition, the deacon groups’ instructors will be provided with a teacher’s summary sheet to support the facilitation of the lesson. We invite you to duplicate the Dialogue Web for each class member. You may also duplicate the leader’s guide as well. This will allow group members an opportunity to study the lesson as a part of the group and independently at home as well.

Dialogue Web ~ an Interactive Bible Lesson

¹ Turner, W.C., (2002). *A Journey through the Church Covenant.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press. pg. 37.

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Part 1: Advancing in Knowledge

In 2 Peter 3:18, the apostle Peter exhorts the church to strive to ‘grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’ Striving suggests a sustained effort to push beyond the former boundaries. We grow in knowledge of God through intimate, personal and unfettered communion with Him, understanding the Scriptures’ testimony of a God who requires that we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him. [Micah 6:8]. The growth in grace comes through knowledge of our Lord and Savior and Jesus Christ. A church may grow numerically. But it matters little if the church is not growing in its knowledge of God, its understanding of grace, and its holiness. Increase the size of a church facility without an understanding of what God has called the church to be and members won’t know what to do with their building. And so, first and foremost, we strive for greater knowledge of God. It is the kind of knowledge that forms us into what God called us to be.²

Advancing in Knowledge	Scriptures	Class Discovery Points
<i>Guiding Questions</i>	<i>What the Word Says</i>	Application (s) to the Church
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does the Scripture teach us about the impact of growing in our knowledge of God? 2. Why is it important that we advance and increase our knowledge of God as a church family? 3. What are some ways in which we can grow in knowledge of God? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hosea 4: 6; I Cor. 8:2, I Tim 2: 4-5. 2. II Tim 3: 12-17 3. Romans 2: 10-16 4. Eph. 4: 11-14. 5. Phil 3: 8-10. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Class Summary Statement
Advancing in knowledge of God is essential because...

Part 2: Growing in Holiness

² Turner, W.C., (2002). *A Journey through the Church Covenant.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press. pg. 37.

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“In the Spirit’s work of forming the persons God is seeking to make, there is an intimate connection between knowledge and holiness. Indeed, in a very real sense, holiness is the knowledge of God taking residence and transforming persons into the image of Christ. It is knowledge taking effect. Believers are made holy through the sanctifying work of the Spirit which comes through the washing of the Word, which contains the knowledge of God. The beauty of holiness is present in the knowledge of God becoming the active ingredient in persons and communities that truly name the name of Christ. Holiness is not a matter of choice; the choice is whether the knowledge of God truly forms the life of persons and communities or whether it remains purely formal. The choice is whether the world can look at us and see Christ, or whether the world must love over us to see Christ. Personal sanctification cannot be accomplished only on Sunday morning.”³

Growing in Holiness	Scriptures	Class Discovery Points
<i>Guiding Questions</i>	<i>What the Word Says</i>	<i>Application to the Church</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does holiness reflect God’s character? How is it a manifestation of God’s grace? 2. How can we as the church be examples of holiness? 3. How does personal and corporate holiness become a reality in the church? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lev. 19: 2; 1 Peter 2: 9. 2. Romans 6: 22-23. 3. Eph. 1: 3-4. 4. Eph. 4: 23-24. 5. I Peter 1: 3-16; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Class Summary Statement

Advancing in holiness is essential because...

Lesson Summary

³ Turner, W.C., (2002). *A Journey through the Church Covenant.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press. pg. 39.

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It is significant that in our church covenant, the phrase “*advancing in knowledge and holiness*” is preceded by a verb—requiring our commitment to action. It implies that we must intentionally pursue growth in knowledge and holiness both individually and corporately. It urges us to develop and exercise habits of holiness. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, the study and meditation on God’s Word, and worship become increasingly more important as tools for our growth as a church. When we think of our covenant as a solemn oath and agreement between God and each other, it makes us more aware of the interdependence that God has woven into the Body of Christ. God’s design for the church is one in which we have a responsibility to grow individually and to help each other grow corporately. Ephesians 4: 11- 13 clearly states that God has given us what we need to advance in knowledge and holiness. “*And He gave some, apostles; and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*” This lesson clearly articulates that:

- Studying God’s Word assures growth in our knowledge and understanding of Him, and what we possess (through saving faith in Jesus) as children of a living God.
- Growing in our knowledge of God transforms us into what He’s called us to be—vessels of holiness that reflect His image.
- As we become more and more like Christ, we become a powerful witness to our community and the world. This witness of the power of God to transform ordinary human beings is a manifestation of God’s character and power to the world.

What a challenge this lessons issues to us as a church family! Are we serious about who we are in Christ or are we just going through the motions? In our church bulletin, we have an entire page of Bible study classes that are offered. I wonder what the attendance at these classes indicates about the effort we are willing to exert to strive for advancement of our church in knowledge and holiness. What does it reveal about our commitment to honor our covenant relationship with God and each other?

Going Deeper (Group Discussion/Personal Reflection)

1. What are you doing and what might you do in order to grow in your knowledge of God?
2. What are some examples of knowledge being used for evil purposes and knowledge being used for good? How might the knowledge you have in a particular area be used for good?

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3. How can churches today have more of an influence in the world? How can your church become a source of knowledge of God in its community?
4. Discuss some ways by which knowledge of God develops personal holiness? ⁴

Closing Prayer:

⁴ Turner, W.C., (2002). *A Journey through the Church Covenant.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press. pg.40.

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Where we are in the Church Covenant... *

HAVING BEEN LED, AS WE BELIEVE, BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

*We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; **to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness;** to give it a place in our affections, prayers, and services above every organization of human origin; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, towards its expenses, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. In case of difference of opinion in the church, we will strive to avoid a contentious spirit, and if we cannot unanimously agree, we will cheerfully recognize the right of the majority to govern.*

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to study diligently the word of God; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be kind and just to those in our employ, and faithful in the service we promise others; endeavoring in the purity of heart and good will towards all men to exemplify and commend our holy faith.

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other's reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other's joys, and with tender sympathy bear one another's burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and through life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we remove from this place, we engage as soon as possible to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

**New Feature: Each month we will include a copy of the Church Covenant and highlight the current lesson. It is our hope that this will give the larger context for the passage being studied.*