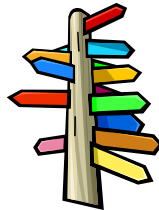


Streamers

CHAPTER ONE



What Really Matters?

Lesson 1A: What Really Matters? Introduction

Lesson 1B: What I Do Matters: Ministry of Believers

Essential Questions:

1. How can this study help us pay attention to what is most important in life?
2. What setting of people, time and place led to Stone-Campbell beginnings?
3. In what essential belief were, and are, all *Stone-Campbell* Christians united?
4. How is the "ministry of believers" the *action part* of following Christ?



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CHAPTER 1 What Really Matters?

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

-Jesus, in Matthew 6:33 NIV

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

-Paul, in Philippians 4:8 NIV

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

-Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

-Jesus, in Matthew 7: 12 NIV

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

-Jim Elliott, Missionary

Of all the commandments, which is the most important? The most important one, answered Jesus, is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

-Jesus, in Mark 12:29 NIV

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the storms rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash.

-Jesus, in Matthew 7:24-27 NIV

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourself treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

-Jesus, in Matthew 6: 19-21 NIV

AS YOU COME TO HIM, THE LIVING STONE—
REJECTED BY MEN BUT CHOSEN BY GOD
AND PRECIOUS TO HIM
YOU ALSO, LIKE LIVING STONES,
ARE BEING BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE
TO BE A HOLY PRIESTHOOD,
OFFERING SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES
ACCEPTABLE TO GOD
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

1 Peter 2:4-5 NIV

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

-Jesus, in Luke 10: 41-42 NIV

He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

-Micah 6:8 TNIV

Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right.

-Proverbs 20:11 NKJV

You give a tenth of your spices. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

-Jesus, in Matthew 23:23-24 NIV

In essentials,
UNITY;
In opinions,
LIBERTY;
In all things,
LOVE.

-early Christian slogan adopted by Stone-Campbell churches.



Lesson 1A: What Really Matters?

Suppose you see an unconscious person who needs your help. You must act quickly! First aid experts say to remember the ABCs: first check the *airway*, then *breathing* and *circulation*. Unless we remove the food blocking the airway, artificial respiration won't help a bit. Memory cues like this one save lives. Why? Because in crisis, emotions and actions tend to fly in all directions at once. Stress makes it tough to focus on what we need to be doing, the essentials—*what really matters*.



Life is a constant stream of stress for many people, sometimes seeming like one crisis piling on top of another. If we aren't careful, every little thing may take on a life-or-death type priority—while life hurries on ahead, unslowing. It may be years before we stop to look back. Then we may find, much to our sorrow, that we have let some things that really mattered pass by, while we were fussing over things that really didn't make that much difference in the long run. Have you ever felt this way? The worst thing is that once we recognize the mistake, it is too late to go back and change things.



Our *Streamers* study can help. Instead of looking at *first aid* essentials, here we will look at other essentials—ones focusing on *God's directions* for our lives, and on *Jesus' call to us about what matters most*.

In today's world, sometimes people say, "*Does Christianity even matter anymore?*" or "*Isn't God and all that Christian stuff outdated?*" How we look at the answers to these questions has to do with priorities. A key question to ask is: Is God a *preference* or a *presence*?

Every day we make choices. *What to wear? What to eat? What show to watch? Ballet or basketball? Mets or Yankees? Paper or plastic? Plain or peanut? Church or sleep in?* So many choices. Sometimes we forget: *God is not a choice. God exists.* Regardless of our choices, *God is in the world and in our lives.*

True, some people choose to wear the name "*Christian*" out of *preference*—it fits the image of themselves they like to wear. For them, religion may center on their preferences—a little like choosing which ball cap to wear when going out with friends, or deciding on which shoes to buy. These folks may go to the church's worship service, but come away feeling cheated if the worship that day didn't serve them.

Yet for others, *God's presence* is so life-changing that they have given, or stand willing to give, their very lives because of it. For them, listening to and following God is **an active way of life**, not a passive belief. As with giving first aid, in following God we must try to ignore distractions as we determinedly keep our focus concentrated upon *what really matters*.

Well then, how do we do this? What are the ABCs to focus upon in times of crisis, and in everyday life? Luckily, we don't have to re-create the-wheel here. In fact, about 200 years ago in the young United States of America, some leaders came together over these very questions. **Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott** were four people who devoted their lives to teaching people and churches the answer, and they even formed a Christian movement focused on these essentials. In the *Streamers* study, we will learn more about the leaders' ideas, but for now, we will look at the two key essentials they taught:

- (1) Know and follow Jesus as Christ, using the Bible as your best guide.**
- (2) Stay united with each other in love.**

Using these essentials, the Stone-Campbell Movement was born. Some call the movement the **Restoration movement** in addition to, or instead of the **Stone-Campbell movement** because it called for **restoring** the essentials of following Christ and of knowing and living the gospel—the *good news* of Christ, as early Christians did. This called for looking closely at Christ's teachings about such things. This way of following Christ changed the lives of tens of thousands of people on the American frontier, and influenced the growth of every aspect of the young United States. Today, the movement still grows, with millions of active members around the world in streams of churches begun in the Stone-Campbell Movement.

One problem that Stone-Campbell churches have had over the years is the same one that individuals, families, and other churches and organizations share in common: we are human. And the human element has sometimes drawn Stone-Campbell churches from their original focus over things that may or may not have mattered that much in the long run. Even the very first Christians had this problem, letting far less important issues come to center stage, while what really mattered to Christ slipped away.

When we find ourselves starting to get distracted by our busy lives and strong individual opinions, we must quickly get our minds to remembering the essentials:

- (1) Know and follow Jesus as Christ, using the Bible as your best guide.*
- (2) Stay united with each other in love.*

Streamers is a study for individuals, but also for congregations as together we are called to work as one in Christ. Join us now as we take a closer look, hearing our leaders call back across the years to remind us,

***In essentials, unity,
in non-essentials liberty,
and in all things love.***



Lesson 1A: Questions for Thought and Reflection

1. Do you, or anyone you know, ever wish you could go back and spend more time on what really mattered? If so, what changes would be made?
2. What statement does your daily routine make about what really matters to you?
3. What kind of things do you think cause people to lose track of *what really matters* in life? Does this apply to you, too? What clues can people look for to suggest that their priorities may be getting out of order?
4. Why do you think that some people — who care a great deal about God — sometimes make a smaller place for God than they make for daily choices that are far less significant? Is this ever a problem you have?
5. Which best describes your relationship with God, and the way you would like it to be? Does it make a difference?
 - a) I work to juggle God in, along with everything else in life.
 - b) God is the foundation I stand upon while I work to juggle everything else in life.
6. Who is responsible for seeing to it that God is given the proper place and priority in your life?
 - a) God
 - b) the leaders of my church or congregation
 - c) a family member or friend
 - d) that would be me
7. Is time with God a daily essential of your everyday life? As you begin this study, what place do you think you *would like to give* to the essentials that Jesus taught?
 - a. Think about this along a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is “no time or thought” and 10 is the amount of time you feel would be ideal for you. Put a big circle ☉ (like a target) over your “ideal.”
 - b. On the same scale below, put an “x” over where you see yourself *now*.
 - c. What thoughts do you have about getting from your x to your ideal?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MEDITATION & PRAYER:

- Close your eyes and think about giving attention to what really matters in following Christ.
How is what you are doing working for you? Does it matter?
- What does your life look like **without**, and **with** a focus on Christ? How would you illustrate each?
- Is it easier for you to keep focused on Christ in your *personal life* or in your *relationship with others*? Why?
- Does your leadership style *draw people away from* or *draw people toward* the essentials of serving Christ?
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life to focus on *what really matters to God, and Christ*?
- Speak in your mind to God, using your own language to tell God what is in your mind, and on your heart.

Close this time with the thought that *we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*



➔ Priesthood of the believers

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. What does "priesthood of believers" mean?
2. What jobs of Old Testament priests do you and I do now?
3. How is Christ our "high priest" to God?
4. How is the priesthood of believers **the action part** of being a Christian?

As you come to him, the Living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- 1 Peter 2:4-5

Especially in churches, we sometimes hear talk of the "priesthood of the believers," "ministry of believers," or "mutual ministry." At first, this may sound a little odd or scary, but it is actually a pretty cool thing. This value, explained by Jesus, began *calling to action* Christians in New Testament days about 2000 years ago. Essential to Stone-Campbell founders as well, this value continues to direct Christians today. Let's take a closer look.

What it Means

Simply put, the *priesthood of believers* is about religious freedom and responsibility. **What we do, matters!**

- We don't wait for someone else to tell us what to do and think in our relationship with God. We don't wait for another person to decide that we are "good enough" to follow and serve Christ. *Instead, we move as God speaks to us in our own lives.*
- We don't wait for other people to feed the hungry, visit the sick or stand up for what's right, all while we sit on the sidelines and cheer or complain. Being a Christian doesn't mean that we are intended to be the 'spectators' of Christianity. Instead, our priesthood means that we are already out there on the playing field ourselves, and *had better be ready to step up and step out as the need continues to come up.*
- We don't rely on others to tell us what the Bible says. Our congregation's clergy and elders are not our congregation's *main* source of inspiration—God is. Each person, young and old, must read and study scripture for himself or herself, praying for God's insight and wisdom. God's voice revealed to a disciple through scripture can be more powerful than any human voice could ever be. Although leaders are critically important to help connect, direct, and guide people as they learn to read and study the Bible, *each person—and no one else—must take charge for reading what God's word has to say in the context of his or her own life.*
- Each of us has a unique ministry that none other can do. People all around us are starving for the love that God yearns to give them. **We** are to be Christ's hands, feet, eyes, ears and voice in the world. No one is too young, old, slow, smart, weak, strong, shy, busy, sick or tired to serve. Ministry means doing. *All of us, as believers, are expected to minister daily to those that God sends our way.*

Priests Then

In *Old Testament* times when Moses was leading the Israelites in the desert, God gave detailed directions for a temple to be built. This temple, called a *tabernacle*, was a portable and made of tent material. The scripture says that God chose Moses' brother Aaron as the first priest, followed by Aaron's sons and descendents. Members of Aaron's tribe, the Levites, were expected to tend to and carry the tabernacle.

What were the jobs of priests in that day? Priests oversaw the temple, presided over peoples' sacrifices of animals and grain to God, offered prayers and burned incense to God on behalf of themselves and the people, and carried out worship rituals and praise ceremonies.

The most sacred duty a priest could have was serving as *high priest*. Once a year, the priest chosen as high priest went through special ritual cleansing, then entered a special area called *The Most Holy Place*. The Most Holy Place was separated from the rest of the temple (the *Holy Place*) by a special curtain. The Most Holy Place held the *ark of the covenant* and other most sacred articles. While in *The Most Holy Place*, the high priest followed sacred rituals to connect him with God—burning incense, worshiping, praying, and listening for God's voice to learn what God wanted the people to know and do. In this way, the high priest was the **go-between** for God and the people.

However, when Jesus came, he shook up this order. A new way of priesthood and offering sacrifices was offered to future generations. Look at these scriptures:

- *Hebrews 9:11-15*, about Christ as our "high priest."
- *Mark 15:37-38*, for an especially symbolic event.
- *Hebrews 7:24-25*, for how Christ connects us to God.

Does This Mean We Don't Need Leaders?

Does the *priesthood of believers* mean we don't need church leaders, such as Elders and preachers? Of course not. Certainly we need them. The guidance, expertise, oversight, modeling, and teaching of such leaders helps equip us for what we do. *We are all one partnership, all on the same team.*

Non-clergy ("laity" or "lay people") in Stone-Campbell churches don't just sit in the pews as though they have gone to a movie. They take part in worship in a number of ways, such as reading scripture, offering prayers, and serving at the Lord's Table. Everyone, not just church leaders, is responsible for praise, thanks and worship to God—both within and without the church building. Priesthood of believers is where the **action part** of being a Christian, where beliefs turn into the actions in of every part of life. Working *together* as the body of Christ, we serve as a *holy priesthood to our world.*



... YOU ALSO, LIKE LIVING STONES, ARE BEING BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE TO BE A HOLY PRIESTHOOD, OFFERING SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES ACCEPTABLE TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.
-1 PETER 2:5

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT & REFLECTION:

Read over the following examples of ministry:

A. When college student Max shows up one morning to church, he sees a lone figure in the main parking lot: 86-year old Mr. Blevins, stooping with broom and dustpan as he sweeps up shards of broken glass from beer bottles thrown there the night before. Max goes over to help and they strike up a friendly conversation. Later, when Mr. Blevins is confined to a nursing home, Max makes a point of checking the parking lot each Sunday for glass and other debris. He also goes to visit Mr. Blevins as often as he can.

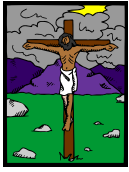
B. A new family in town shows up to a church for the first time. As they stand outside the sanctuary ready to go in, the 13-year old son stands to the back, obviously uncomfortable as all the nice older women and men come and talk and try to make him feel welcome. Then Marco, a 14-year old in the church who notices the new guy, goes up to him, extends his hand, saying, "Hey, man! 'Sup? I'm Marco. A bunch of us always sit up front during church. Ya' wanna come sit with us? Ask your folks if that'd be okay. I'll introduce you around...."

C. Cynthia overhears a crowd of kids at school making fun of Tania, a large girl who wears the same clothes almost every day and doesn't smell so great. Cynthia sees that Tania looks as though she doesn't know whether to cry or strike out. Even though she has always been especially shy, Cynthia gets up her courage, then steps through the crowd.

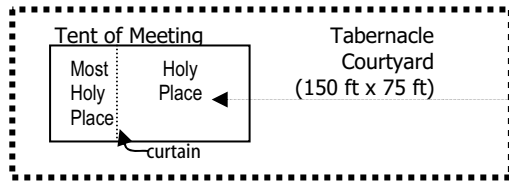
As Cynthia smiles and looks warmly at Tania, she takes Tania by the hand, pulls her along with her away from the group, calling back, "Me and my friend Tania need some time together. AND you need to remember that God made Tania—and (*pointing*) you, and you, and you, and you—in his image."

D. Mother Teresa often spoke of how her best ministers to those dying in her shelters were those who, although dying themselves and in great pain, would find little ways to help another: holding a hand, singing a song, listening to, crying with, and being there as another faced his or her final moments.

1. Think on how Mr. Blevins's ministry may have continued beyond his years. Where do you think it started? How many places might it have gone?
2. What possible influences equipped the 'ministers' for the ways they reached out to someone who needed them?
3. Can you think of key individuals who ministered to you when you were the one needing it? What influence did this have on the way you now minister to others? Can you describe an instance where you learned a lesson in ministry—either bad or good—from watching someone else?
4. How do the examples show people able to minister in a way that others, even if nearby, could not have done as well? What may have been running through each one's mind when deciding whether or not to reach out? What do you think made them go ahead and reach out anyway?
5. Imagine a dying person in one of Mother Teresa's shelters, feeling alone and in great pain. What might change in that person's mind by holding the hand of a fellow patient as that other patient breathed his or her last breath?
6. Do you think a 3-year old child can be a 'minister'? If so, how does the child learn how to minister to others?
7. What can we learn from this lesson for equipping someone for the *ministry of believers*?
8. How can we help others prepare for the unique ministries only they can do?
9. Think of people you come across during a normal day (friends, students, customers, teammates, co-workers, patients, neighbors, friends, family, and so on.) What little ministry needs do they have that perhaps you could meet? What small actions, over time, could end up making a big difference?



1C: It's Up To Me: Actions Matter



AND WHEN JESUS HAD CRIED OUT AGAIN IN A LOUD VOICE, HE GAVE UP HIS SPIRIT. AT THAT MOMENT THE CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO FROM TOP TO BOTTOM.
-MATTHEW 27:50 (NIV)

BECAUSE JESUS LIVES FOREVER, HE HAS A PERMANENT PRIESTHOOD. THEREFORE HE IS ABLE TO SAVE COMPLETELY THOSE WHO COME TO GOD THROUGH HIM BECAUSE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO INTERCEDE FOR THEM.
-HEBREWS 7:24-25 (NIV)

The sketch shows how the tabernacle (tent temple) was set up in the days of Moses.

- Israelites could enter the courtyard for meetings and to offer special animal and grain sacrifices that would be burned to please God.
- Those considered "clean" could enter the *Holy Place* to worship and pray. (This included men and women, although women sat apart).
- The Israelite tribe of Levi was designated by God to take care of the tabernacle, including packing it up and carrying it when the tribe moved. Priests had to be males from the Levite tribe. Priests presided over worship, prayer, and sacrifices. Moses' brother Aaron was the first priest, followed by Aaron's sons and grandsons.
- Once a year one priest would be specially chosen to serve as *High Priest*. On the designated day, the High Priest would go behind the curtain, entering the *Most Holy Place*. While there he would offer incense, prayers and worship on the people's behalf; read scripture, and seek special direction God might give. This could last for days.

(For a more in-depth look at priests and their duties under the 'old covenant' (before Christ) look at the New Testament book of Hebrews, chapter 9. Original directions to Biblical priests can be found in the Old Testament books of Exodus (Ch 25-31) and Leviticus (Ch 1-9).

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the curtain being torn from top to bottom as Jesus the Christ died on the cross? (see above, and read *Mark 15:37-38*)
2. What does it mean to say that Christ is our High Priest? (read *Hebrews 9:11-15*, *Hebrews 7: 24-25*, *1 Peter 2:4-5*).
3. What are some spiritual sacrifices (*1 Peter 2:5*) we can make to God? How do these compare to the sacrifices that people brought to God in the days before Christ came?
4. In what way does Christ serve as our 'go-between' -in praying to God on our behalf? -in showing us which sacrifices to give and how to go about it? -in learning and knowing God's word, and in knowing how to serve others?

Jesus told the story of a man who was traveling on the road to Jericho, a trip which had a bad reputation for rough and dangerous travel: robbers hung out along the way, just ready to jump and rob a lone person coming through. That's what happened to the traveler, who was jumped, robbed, beaten badly, and left for dead. A priest came along and saw the injured man. Perhaps not knowing if the victim was dead or alive, the priest quickly crossed to the other side of the road and went on by. The same was true of a Levite—a member of the tribe charged with taking care of the holy temple.

Finally, a Samaritan came along. (As Jesus was telling this story, his listeners probably took their breath in—Samaritans were put down and seen by many of the listeners as 'low class'). The Samaritan had compassion for the beaten man, stopped, knelt down, and took care of the man's wounds. The guy was still pretty bad off, so the Samaritan lifted him onto his transportation (a donkey in those days) and took him into town, where he even paid someone to take care of the man. Jesus ends the telling of this parable, 'Which do you think was the better neighbor?'

-retelling, from Luke 10: 25-37

5. Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan (paraphrased left) Christ told this to a group who had asked about who their "neighbor" included.
6. The odd thing about this story is that the ones we expect to stop and help—the priests and Levites who are supposed to be most connected to God and do the Holy stuff—are not the ones who actually stop to help. And the one who helps is the one *don't expect* to stop. Why do you think the others passed on by? -had to get to the church? -too busy? -didn't want to get involved? (after all, if the man was dead, in touching him the priest would become "unclean" for a while by Jewish law.)
7. How did the Samaritan "minister" in a way the others wouldn't or couldn't? What does the story tell you about qualifications for ministry? What qualifications do you have for ministry?
8. How would this story be told if it were in your community today? Who would play each role?

Up Next: CHAPTER 2:
The Book Matters

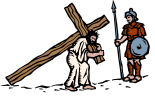


INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION SHEET

Lesson 1A: What Really Matters? **Date:**

Chapter 1 Connections: Setting the Stage **Date:**

Lesson 1B-C: Priesthood of Believers **Date:**



Streamers

CHAPTER 1
What Really Matters?



Chapter 1 Notes: What Really Matters?