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BIBLE STUDIES

**TESTED BIBLE STUDIES
FOR SMALL GROUPS**

VOLUME II

by Rev. John Matson

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible study lessons provided on *The SAGE Digital Library Vol. I*, have been designed with the small group in mind. They were developed over a period of several years and tested in a number of small groups.

The following characteristics mark these lessons: they emphasize a personal relationship with God and caring for others; they are all Bible oriented; they are typically non-denominational in content. They are distributed with a liberal license for personal or small group use (i.e., you may alter them and/or make as many copies as you need for your ministry).

Lesson E - 1 A Faith That Really Works

1. Describe a time when you had a faith that worked. it may have been a special event like a life threatening encounter in which you were rescued or a parking place on a rainy afternoon. Tell us about what you did to put faith to work:
 - How faith worked for you:

 - What you did to put faith to work:
2. See if you can as a group come up with some words and phrases that describe and define faith. How does it relate to:
 - John 15:15

 - John 14:18

 - John 13:1
3. Read Mark 11:20-24. How many times is “saying” or “speaking” referred to in verses 23 & 24? What is the role of actually speaking out the things we expect from God so far as putting faith to work is concerned?
4. Read Romans 4:13-17 in at least two versions. The Living Paraphrase renders the second half of verse 17 with: “...God will accept all people in every nation who trust God as Abraham did.

And this promise is from God himself, who makes the dead live again and speaks of future events with as much certainty as though they were already past.”

- How does the Lord Himself deal with the issue of faith? Does He speak in an uncertain or doubting way about the things he wants us to have faith in, or does he speak with full assurance? Why?
5. Read John 20:26-29. How important is the role of having confidence in an as yet unseen thing to the presence of a faith that works? In other words, must we “see something that is not in order to have genuine faith?
6. What kinds of things should we expect to receive by faith if we actually say we trust [believe, have faith] in God for?
- Philippians 4:13
 - Ephesians 3:20
 - I Peter 2:21
7. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

OBSERVATION: Most of us feel that we have very weak faith. But Jesus said that even the smallest portion of the right faith is enough to unlock the door to the promises of God! The **RIGHT** faith? We might call genuine faith as “Say-it” faith; speaking of the promises of God as

if they were actually true for us personally, and then relying on that promise.

FOCUS: With your group, talk about some of the different kinds of faith you experienced. do you have “say-it” faith? If you have the freedom to do so, share one area in which you are seeking to exercise genuine faith.

Lesson E-2 PEACE WITH GOD

1. The Bible shines with many examples of a very special kind of peace that God says He can and will provide. In Luke 2:13,14 we read: “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”
What was the event that encouraged this proclamation?:

- According to this passage, what was the basis for a person claiming the peace that comes from God?

2. Share with the group some of the things that characterize peace; when you have had real peace, what was it like?

3. According to the following passages, what are some of the basic sources of peace? If we were to seek peace, where might we find it?:

- Psalms 119:165
- Isaiah 48:18
- John 16:33

- Galatians 5:22
4. Is peace something automatic that one receives from God on a permanent, once-and-for-all basis or does it come and go? Must we go after it and then must we maintain it once it has arrived?:
- Isaiah 27:5

 - Psalms 34:14

 - Colossians 3:15

 - I Peter 3:10-12
5. Read Isaiah 53:5, and Colossians 1:20 and respond to the following questions about peace:
- **Who** obtained our peace with God and **how** was it done?

 - What did it **cost**? What price had to be paid to acquire our peace?

 - What would it take for a person to acquire that peace for themselves?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Strangely, during certain times of year (especially during the year end holidays) peace can be easily lost by us humans. Doctors, counselors and psychologists will tell you that some of the most heart breaking and painful spiritual and psychological needs become evident during these times.

Why? If we do not maintain our focus on the Lord for our peace – expecting man or a particular experience to provide it – we are relying on something that will inevitably fail us.

With your group, share some things that might get in the way of your peace this season, and, if you can, turn those hindrances over to the Lord. Seek His peace together.

Lesson E-3 A GOD WHO DESERVES OUR PRAISE

1. All of us have done some deed or had an experience that deserved some honest praise from friends, family or the public. Although most of us get at least a little embarrassed by the expressions of deserved praise – we may blush or even cry, we all have some strong reactions and feelings about it. Describe some of the things that happen within you when you receive appropriate praise. What are some of the good things that proper praise does in your life?

2. When God receives praise from His creation, what kinds of thoughts and feelings do you think He might have concerning it? What do you think is His inner response to praise?
 - What might be His feelings about a particular portion of His creation that did not praise Him? How might He respond? What might He do to it?

3. Read I Peter 2:9. In this passage are listed five reasons to praise God. Identify each of the five and see if you can define them in your own words:
 - Reason #1

 - Reason #2

- Reason #3
- Reason #4
- Reason #5
- Summary: Why is it proper to praise God for the items listed above? Why should God alone receive praise for them?

4. In the following passages are listed some of the ways and means for praising God. In your group, identify as many of them as you can:

- Psalm 9:11
- Psalm 33:2
- Psalm 52:9
- Isaiah 42:10-12
- Hebrews 13:15
- Luke 19:37

5. Reviewing the passages mentioned in the previous question, suggest answers to the following:

- What is the **most common means** of praising God actually used by believers today?
- What is the **least common means** used?

6. What method of praise do you think God prefers? Why?

- Given the various ways that God can be praised, what type or types need to be increased in this day and age?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Literally dozens of times we are commanded to “Praise the Lord!” (sometimes rendered “Hallelujah!”) in the scriptures – especially in the Psalms. The reason for this is not stated specifically, but only given by way of example: it is good for God, it is right, and it is good for us.

Regarding its impact on us, the example of the Scriptures is that we are strengthened and are given greater advantage over evil when we practice praise.

With your group, talk about some of your strengths and weaknesses in the matter of praise. See if you can identify one method of praise which you might improve upon.

Lesson E-4 To Forgive Is Really Divine

1. Think of a time when you didn't get what you deserved in the way of a punishment. Out of an act of charity or compassion, someone took pity on you and kept you from getting a traffic ticket, a bad grade, a “poor work slip”, prevented you from getting fired or (you fill in the blank). In your group, discuss the following questions (please read both questions first before you respond):
 - What was your overall emotional reaction to the compassion offered you? What kind of response did you have inwardly?
 - How did you feel about the person who offered the forgiveness; how did you respond to them?

2. Defining FORGIVENESS: Because hurt is inevitable in a fallen world – everyone will fail or hurt someone else eventually, God offers us forgiveness so that no deed done could ever have to hinder our communion with Him or with each other. Various dictionaries and lexicons define forgiveness in various ways: “1) A benevolent act of superior generosity, 2) a sacrificial act of one-way absorbing of the other's debt, 3) an obedient act of unconditional acceptance.”

Match the following passages with the definition that comes closest to explaining the aspect of forgiveness revealed (this will not be an easy assignment but it will show us important things to consider when we offer forgiveness):

a. Acts 7:60

b. II Samuel 12:13

c. Luke 7:45-47

d. Ephesians 4:32

3. Which do you think brings the greater joy: seeing the results of **forgiveness given** in the life of the one to whom you gave it or experiencing **forgiveness received** from another for something you have done? Why?
4. Read Psalm 103:8-18. List the characteristics in this passage that describe, confirm or illustrate the fact that God is forgiving:
5. Read Matthew 6:12-15, Romans 12:14 and Colossians 3:13. How important is the concept of forgiveness toward others in the life of the believer? List some of the things that can happen to the person that uses it, that does NOT use it:
6. For our time of prayer and sharing...

Is there someone who has hurt you recently that you have not offered forgiveness toward? Is your heart cold toward them? Do you wish them a blessing – or a curse?

There are few truths more significant than this as proclaimed by the Lord Jesus on the pages of Scripture: forgiveness is vital for spiritual health and fulfillment.

Take time to pray for at least one person that falls into that category. You need not mention their name, but see if you can appropriate some of God's forgiveness to use to release the hurt you have by praying for them.

*The Title is taken from a line attributed to Alexander Pope, *An Essay On Criticism* (1711): "To err is human, to forgive is divine"

Lesson E-5 What God Really Wants In The Way Of A Gift

1. The holiday seasons bring with them the temptation to be somewhat extravagant – given all the things in this world that we can give to one another. A common complaint from the typical family is “we spent too much!” Perhaps the problem is not how much we spent but rather what we chose to give. Value often is not connected with price.

Looking back over special gifts you received over the years, what has been one or two that have been the most precious and meaningful to you? What was it about those gifts that gave them so much value?

2. Do you think God looks forward to receiving gifts from us the way we like to receive gifts from each other – or does the fact that He “has everything and therefore needs nothing” mean that He has little concern about receiving gifts? Discuss this in your group:
3. In the Bible are various records of occasions where gifts were offered to God either directly or indirectly. List the gift offered and describe (if the passage comments on it) how God felt about the gift:
 - Isaiah 56:7
 - Philippians 4:18
 - Hebrews 13:16

- Proverbs 15:8

 - Isaiah 1:11-15

 - Jeremiah 6:19,20
4. Read Romans 12:1,2 and discuss the following questions as they are dealt with in this passage:
- According to Paul, what is an important gift that God desires to have from us today? Putting it another way, what is on God's "wish list"?

 - In what form or in what kind of condition does God want this gift to come to Him?

 - What are some of the reasons why He wants this gift from us?

 - What kind of changes or impact should we expect IN OUR LIVES if God gets the gift mentioned in this passage from us?
5. We have studied what God wants in the way of a gift from us. How (as implied by the verses we have studied) are we to deliver the gift He has asked for, i.e., how do we send it to Him? How will we know He has it?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The Bible gives us important clues as to the technique for giving gifts: It is the care and the heart behind the gift that is the really memorable part of our gift exchanges. Preparing or purchasing a gift that suits the one we wish to honor is also very important. It is appropriate to ask: "What do they need and want, and how can I really demonstrate my caring for them?"

In the same way, the Bible says that there are some things that God has on His "wish list" and one thing in particular heads that list. Have you given that gift to Him this year? Does He still have it – or did you find yourself taking it back?

With your group, talk about the things on God's list and about your response to it.

Lesson E-6 Helping Someone Take A Step With Jesus

1. Swimming or scuba diving alone: they say that it's a dangerous thing to do. Why? If you get into trouble, who will be there to help you? There are many activities or events that we should not try to do by ourselves. Take a few moments to list some situations in which it is impossible to proceed alone:
 - a. Describe some of the things that happen to us – inwardly – when we take a fall and find ourselves alone?

 - b. Read Hebrews 10:24,25. Does God want us to voluntarily avoid people when we are having spiritual challenges in our life?

2. What are some of the things we can do to help another person deal with a spiritual challenge in their life? (The following are just a very brief sampling of many such passages):
 - a. Romans 15:1-6

 - b. I Thessalonians 5:11

 - c. Acts 12:5

 - d. Ephesians 6:18-20

3. Read Romans 10:1. In the last passage mentioned above, we are told to pray for the church. But, does the Bible have anything to say about praying for hurting people that are not part of the church?

4. Read I Timothy 2:1-8. In this passage Paul teaches us important things we can do to help those around us take another step for Jesus. He also tells us something about the Lord's purpose and role in these steps:
- a. What are some of the important things Paul exhorts us to pray for according to this passage?

 - b. What will be the practical result of the prayers offered for those in our community – especially the leaders (see verse 2b)?

 - c. If Christians have the opportunity to live a peaceful and godly life, what will be one of the significant impacts on the community of people around them (see verse 4)?
5. Based on our study, does God want us to pray for non-Christians? What can we expect will be the result of our prayer? Will everyone we pray for become a Christian?:

6. For our time of prayer and sharing:

There are many people that we come into contact with each day that need to take another step with Jesus. We can begin that process by taking the time to pray for them.

With your group, see if you can identify three people (each) as the special target for your sincere salvation prayer. (Write them down please.)

Because it is the Lord's great desire that men and women be saved (I Timothy 2:4), we know that he will respond to this prayer with action that only can perform.

May God richly bless you as you engage in this important work.

Lesson E-7 WHEN GOD SEEMS FAR AWAY

1. There are many differing opinions as to the way a person becomes a true follower of God. Some say it is this way and some say it is that. One thing is usually consistent and generally agreed upon: the result of one becoming a true follower of God is intimacy with God; true believers experience a closeness with God. In your group, describe some of the methods that various religious groups use to become closer to God. [Note: please, we need not mention names of the groups or religions who have the practices you will use as illustrations.]:

2. What does the Bible say needs to happen for a person to become a Christian and have intimacy (the Bible uses the word “fellowship”) with God?:
 - Revelation 3:20
 - Galatians 2:20
 - Ephesians 3:14,16•19

3. What do you think: If a person becomes a true believer in Jesus Christ and has fellowship – intimacy – with God, is it possible to lose that intimacy? How? Why?

4. According to the following passages, what does the Bible say is the reason we lose our intimacy with God?
 - Isaiah 59:2
 - Ezekiel 14:5
 - II Peter 2:15
 - Isaiah 59:2

5. When we feel as if we are far from God, the Bible describes some of the means by which we can again draw close to Him. In the following passages, identify the means by which we can draw close to God:

- Hebrews 7:18,19,25
- Hebrews 10:22
- James 4:8

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The lesson this week is quite simple, so simple we can over look it with considerable ease: we drift quietly and silently away from God – like a boat adrift on the sea – when we sin and do not clear it up with God.

And how do we clear it up with God? That too is so simple we can very easily over look it too: “If we confess our sins... He will forgive us and cleanse us...” I John 1:9

It must be distressing to God to see those He loves drift from Him when the remedy is so near at hand. With your group, read the passage in James 5:16 and apply it in a way that seems appropriate to you. And, may God bless you as you as you seek His fellowship.

Lesson F-1 GOD'S SECRET TO CONFIDENT LIVING

1. Humility. It is a wonderful characteristic which is praised by many both of the past and of the present. But it is not something they teach in school and – while growing up – it did not always seem to be a good thing to practice. When you think of the way people generally look at humility, what words come to mind?:

2. While reading the following scriptures – scriptures which demonstrate humility – try to define what the Bible means by this term: I Kings 3:7 (Solomon is speaking); Matthew 8:8; Psalm 131:1.

3. Sometimes it is helpful to understand a concept, idea or problem by looking at its opposite and, of course, the opposite of humility is pride. As we look at the following examples of pride, describe the aspect of pride that is revealed:
 - Exodus 5:2
 - II Chronicles 32:25
 - Isaiah 14:13,14

4. Read Daniel 5:18-24,30. In this passage is the story of two men who learned something about pride and humility:
 - Who was the first man and what lesson did he learn?

 - Who was the second man and what lesson did he fail to learn?

5. Read the following passages and identify what either pride or humility brings to the one who practices them:

- Proverbs 11:2

Pride:

Humility:

- Proverbs 13:10

Pride:

Humility:

- Habakkuk 2:4

Pride:

Humility:

- Matthew 23:12

Pride:

Humility:

5. In your group, discuss the following: To what extent are we able to make a choice between humility and pride? Are we doomed to having pride dominate or are we able to actually choose to be humble? If so, how do we go about making that choice?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

Pride is the desire to take the seat of a God, to decide one's own laws and to be indifferent to the value of others, especially those we don't care for. Humility is a loving and caring attitude that says: "All of God's creation is worthy of my respect." It also says: "The Lord rules; what He decides is my law."

With your group, talk about an example of pride that you might have experienced. Are you that example? Have you said yes to humility? Could you say yes to humility before God?

Talk about it, and see where the Lord leads...

Lesson F-2 Meekness: Putting The Spirit To Work

1. It's the annual family picnic. All the relatives are there and everyone is poised for a good time. The weather is great and the food is abundant. At game time, the annual softball game has commenced when, rather unexpectedly, a dispute about a foul ball breaks out. There are some harsh words exchanged. Uncle Fred packs up the family and goes home. It was a long time before they again saw him or his family at the annual picnic.
 - Using your sanctified imagination, describe the response of the rest of the relatives at the moment Uncle Fred left the picnic:
 - Based on the information you have been provided in this story, do you think Uncle Fred did the right thing?
 - What is it about us humans that makes us “take up our things and go home” like Uncle Fred?
2. Read I Peter 3:8-17. How do you think Jesus would have acted if He had been in Uncle Fred's place? How would He have wanted *us* to act in a similar spot?
3. The word “meek” appears a number of times in the Bible (31 in the KJV) and is always regarded as very positive thing. Using the context of the following passages as a guide, give what seems to be the meaning of “meek”:
 - II Corinthians 10:1-3
 - Zepheniah 3:11-13
 - I Peter 3:15 [KJV; *gentle* , NASB]

- Numbers 12:1-3 [KJV]

4. Read Galatians 5:22,23. In verse 23, one of the items mentioned is *gentleness* [i.e. “meekness”].

- What is this list? How does one acquire the characteristics mentioned?
- Are the items mentioned automatically received or must they continually be sought?

5. Read Psalm 37:8-15. Jesus said: “Blessed are the *meek* for they shall inherit the earth.” In this He was quoting Psalm 37:11 which says essentially the same thing. But in that Old Testament passage is a wonderful promise, a promise with a blessing and a curse. What is the blessing? What is the curse?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

Meekness is not a popular concept because it usually is thought of as a liability rather than something good and beneficial. In the face of tension and hostility, the Lord teaches us that there is great blessing to everyone that would seek to take meekness and apply it, to stand before the enemy and say: “I refuse to quarrel with you and fight your fight. As far as it depends on me, I will be at peace with all men.”

That takes courage and faith. That takes trusting in the Lord for His protection. It is not pacifism. It is a bold step into the fight to end it.

With your group, ask the Lord to show you where you can apply meekness in a fresh way in your life.

Lesson F-3 Thirst & Hunger: It Will Meet A Real Need

1. Take a few minutes and describe some of the outward and inward sensations that accompany real hunger and genuine thirst. How does the body react? What kind of thoughts go through our minds?

2. We generally have the idea that going without food and/or water is a bad thing and injurious to our health; the very experience of hunger and thirst is to be avoided by regular intake of food and water. But hunger and thirst are not always a thing to be avoided. Describe some examples of times when going without food and water – keeping ones appetite – could be a good thing:

3. Jesus tells us that there are some things that we should seek after with at least as much zeal than we might use to seek after the physical things such as food and water. In the following verses, identify the item we are to apply our appetite to:
 - Matthew 5:6
 - Colossians 1:9
 - Ephesians 5:18
 - Psalms 63:1
 - Psalms 73:25

4. By contrast, there are many things which do not satisfy when we go after them with our appetites. In the following passages, identify the objects of these vain efforts:
 - Ecclesiastes 1:8
 - Ecclesiastes 5:10

- John 4:13,14

- Ecclesiastes 6:7

5. Read Luke 15:13-21. In this story of the wandering son, the father generously gives to the son what he might squander and then lets him go. The son spends his wealth on his appetites...

- What did the son spend his wealth on?

- What was the result of his spend spree? • What caused him to give up his old ways and go home?

- What did the son long for when thought about home? More wealth?

- What do you think the son did with his appetites once he returned home? What did he focus on when he got back?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

There are many things that we humans are attracted to when the moment comes to spend our resources, whether that resource be time or money. The Bible says that the blessing will come if our focus is on the Master, on Jesus, one the Father who loves us. He is the one that satisfies each time we have a need.

Take a little inventory: what do you use to satisfy your needs and desires? Is it “stuff” or “power” or “prestige”?

With your group, spend a few moments exploring the centrality of Jesus as far as your desires and appetites are concerned. Is He in the center? If not, will you place Him there – soon?

Lesson F-4 The Blessings Of A Pure Heart

1. FAN. While today the word has a rather positive meaning, this has not always been the case. FAN comes from “fanatic”, which, in turn, comes from a Latin word meaning “temple”. It seems that many of the ancient worshippers of the pagan gods were vigorous to the point of extremes in their worship practices. Describe some of the characteristics of a modern FAN:

2. One modern dictionary calls a FAN “an enthusiastic admirer or supporter”. If a person claimed to be true FAN of the Lord Jesus Christ, what might they be found doing? What might they be like?

3. Jesus tells us that we are to be “pure in heart” [see Matthew 5:8] and by this He seems to mean that He wants us to be FANS of God. In the following passages, see if you can identify the characteristics of a person with a “pure heart”, that is, a FAN of God:
 - Psalms 26:6

 - Psalms 24:3,4

 - I Timothy 1:5

 - IPeter 1:22

 - Hebrews 11:27

4. What are some of the benefits of a pure, loyal and devoted heart toward God? In the following passages identify some of the blessings that came to God's FANs:
 - Job 11:15

 - IPeter 1:22

 - Matthew 5:8

 - John 16:15

 - John 14:19

5. Read Psalm 32. In this brief Psalm we discover some of the things that cut short the blessings of a FAN of God. We also discover some of the best methods to restore the single minded devotion which Jesus seeks:
 - According to this Psalm, what is a main factor hindering the pure in heart from maintaining their relationship with God? (vs. 1,2)

 - When caught in the cords of sin, what is the typical response that must be avoided? (vs. 3,4)

 - What effective action did the Psalmist take regarding his problem and how did the Lord respond? (vs. 5)

- What instruction does he give in light of his encounter with a forgiving God?

- What does he say will happen if we do not respond as a FAN would respond?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

Are you a “fan” of Jesus Christ? We are not speaking of extremes, but the quality of loyal and enthusiastic support of His cause and His reputation. Is there anything that might be standing in the way of your being that kind of member of His kingdom?

Take a few minutes to talk with your group about the questions just mentioned. If you feel free to do so, please talk to God about what you have learned about your devotion to Him. He would love to hear from you.

Lesson F-5 Making Peace With Everyone

1. When we consider the word PEACE, we must face the fact that in this world there are many different ideas as to what PEACE is and where it can be found. *Where* do people seek for PEACE in our times? Describe several methods used for attempting to achieve it:
2. Read Romans 12:18 and 14:19. According to these two passages, describe the importance of the priority of peace in the church:
3. The following passages tell us about the importance and source of peace; describe briefly what each verse says about obtaining it:
 - Galatians 1:3
 - James 3:17
 - Romans 14:16-19
 - Proverbs 3:13-17
 - Psalm 119:165
4. It has been said that: “When a man finds no peace within himself, it is useless to look elsewhere for it.” What do you think, is this true?:
5. Is there a difference between social peace, political peace and spiritual peace?:
6. Read Ephesians 2:8-18. In this passage, Paul describes the method that God used to bring people together and to bring people together with God. Using the following questions, see if you can discern

how Jesus becomes the means for solving the problems people have with their relationships – both with and without.:

- What is one of the basic reasons God has created us? (vs. 8-10)

- What barrier formerly stood between peoples that hindered effective and lasting peace? (vs. 11,12)

- What did God do to remove the barrier to peace? (vs. 13-15a)

- Once God solved mankind's peace problem, what did he do to help us take advantage of that solution ? (vs.17,18)

7. Focus on care and prayer...

“Peace is the deliberate adjustment of my life to the will of God.” That statement tells us much about the practical application of peace. God's provision is that we have harmony with him, harmony with each other, and harmony within. His provision makes it possible to have any one of these at any time, but His desire is that we have each of them all the time.

Is any one of these faces of peace missing in your life? Are the three in balance? If not, do you see what might be missing? If you are able, Share your perspective with your group, and may God bless you as you share.

Lesson F-6 On Being A Light In A Dark Place

1. Many of us, while still very young, experienced a certain amount of fear about the dark. What might have been some of the reasons for this fear?
 - Often our parents provided us with a night light, which, though very small, seemed to help diminish our fears about the dark. What was it about such a tiny light that helped conquer what was some times an awesome fear?:
2. Read John 3:19-21. We know and experience the physical darkness that rules the night. Is there a spiritual darkness that rules this world? If so, how do we know that it does exist?
3. Read Ephesians 6:11,12. Is there something in that spiritual darkness that we ought to have some serious concern about? If so, what is it?:
4. In the following passages identify the character of spiritual darkness (what is it like) and how we end up in the middle of it (describe the way it snares us):
 - Proverbs 4:19
 - Proverbs 2:12-15 (NIV)
 - I John 1:6
 - Deuteronomy 28:15; 28,29

- II Corinthians 6:14-16

5. Read Acts 26: 15-18 and Ephesians 5:8-14a. If we find that we are in the middle of some spiritual darkness, what can we do to get out from the middle of it? What does God give us as a means of escape?:

6. Based on our study thus far, what are some of the ways that a person can stay in the light and out of the darkness?:

7. Read Matthew 5:14-16, John 8:12, and I John 1:5. Strictly according to these passages, who provides the light that the world needs in order to be able to see the truth?:

8. Focus on care and prayer...

It is very important that we be sure to realize who the real enemy is when we are dealing with matters of spiritual darkness. Often we are tempted to look on people as the enemy rather than seeing them as victims of the enemy. We are told in scripture to love and bless our enemies – not judge or condemn them. Being a light in a dark place means shedding light on this fact.

It also means wrestling with the powers of darkness with regard to evil in this world, particularly as it takes the form of temptation or moral evils.

Are your “spiritual lights” burning brightly? Share with your group the need to be a shining light and areas the Lord might be speaking to you about: turn up the lights together!

Lesson F-7 God's Ways Are Higher – Much Higher

1. The unexpected. Sometimes things don't turn out quite the way we figured they would. "Yes," we might add, "they turn out worse." There is a modern proverb that has been identified with a man named Murphy: "If it can go wrong, it will go wrong." But life is not always like that. Describe some a personal event that turned out much better than we could have hoped for, something that might have appeared to be a disaster but turned out for the good:

2. Read Romans 8:28,36-39. Does God have in mind to injure and destroy His children? Does He have good intentions for them and the outcome of events concerning them?

3. Read II Corinthians 4:15-18. Though some things seem to be going wrong, and some things seem to be worn out, what does this present tribulation really mean?:

4. In the following passages are specific difficult situations being experienced by people who cry out to God. They seem to be facing the impossible but God has a different idea. In each of the situations, pretend you are the one facing the difficulty. From that perspective, try to answer the questions that follow:
 - a. Read Exodus 14:10-12; 23-28:
 - What is their difficulty?

 - What were they afraid was going to happen?

- What actually did happen?
- Did they experience any difficulty or pain?
- Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?

b. Read Acts 28:1-6

- What is their difficulty?
- What were they afraid was going to happen?
- What actually did happen?
- Did they experience any difficulty or pain?
- Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?

c. Read Acts 12:5-17

- What is their difficulty?
- What were they afraid was going to happen?

- What actually did happen?
- Did they experience any difficulty or pain?
- Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?

5. In light of these various events, would it be reasonable to expect that God would respond to a situation or a predicament in a way and on a schedule completely different than our own?:

6. Read Isaiah 55:9,10 and briefly summarize the thought given therein:

7. Focus on care and prayer...

Many times we evaluate the value of an event based on initial information and first conclusions, but, as it turns out, the meaning after all the data is in is usually quite different. We are in danger if we jump to conclusions about what God is doing with us!

Do you trust the Lord to do well in events you do not understand? Do you have the faith that the final outcome will be in your best interests? As you share in prayer with your group, see if you can open your heart to being willing to accept and trust in His outcome.

Lesson F-8 Laws That Help Not Hinder

1. You have just gone to the checkout counter with a gallon of milk at a store you frequent, and you are in a hurry. “Just put the change in the sack,” you tell the clerk as you hand him a \$5 bill. You’re back at home and you sort through the change as you pour a glass milk for yourself. You discover that instead of change for a \$5, you were given change for a \$10. Which law applies: “Finders keepers, losers weepers” or “You shall not steal.” How would you apply the rule you select?
 - What would you do if there were no rules concern keeping or returning the money?

2. Read II Timothy 2:1-7. Why is it so important for a person to abide by the rules when in a struggle – especially if that struggle is on behalf of God and against sin?

3. Read Matthew 17:24-27. What was Jesus’ attitude toward the various religious laws in His day? Did he – as a rule – keep them , even if they seemed inappropriate or even unfair?:

4. According to the following passages, why did God make laws for us to follow?

- Romans 3:20

 - Romans 7:7

 - What actually did happen?

 - Did they experience any difficulty or pain?

 - Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?
5. Read Romans 8:1- 4 and Romans 5:20,21. What are at least two major weaknesses of the law as described in the Bible

 6. Read Isaiah 55:9,10 and briefly summarize the thought given therein:

 7. Focus on care and prayer...

Many times we evaluate the value of an event based on initial information and first conclusions, but, as it turns out, the meaning after all the data is in is usually quite different. We are in danger if we jump to conclusions about what God is doing with us!

Do you trust the Lord to do well in events you do not understand? Do you have the faith that the final outcome will be in your best interests? As you share in prayer with your group, see if you can open your heart to being willing to accept and trust in His outcome.

Lesson F-9 Love* Prevents All Sorts Of Trouble

[Before your group begins sharing this lesson together, please read from the “Meaning of God’s Love” at the end of this lesson.]

1. We often think of love as the starting place for relationships with the people that become special to us. “Isn’t true love wonderful!” we say to ourselves and to others. But love also keeps difficult situations from becoming worse and can even turn bad situations around. Can you recall an example from your life or from history where love kept people from hurting each other?:
2. Read I Peter 4:8. [See also Proverbs 10:12 & 17:9]. The phrase “covers over” means “to build a bridge over” or to “obscure with a covering.” Suggest what specific things might be “covered over” by love as indicated by these verses. Try to think of things from everyday life:
3. Read Colossians 3:14 and I John 4:16. When the Bible says we are to love others, it usually uses the word “agape” which means love that has no conditions, no limits, no deadlines. It is a love that does not quit. In your own words, describe the importance of the role this love can play in our every day relationships:
4. Read I John 4:19 and I Thessalonians 3:12. Where do the Apostles John and Paul expect the ability to love – love in the face of antagonism and hatred – to come from?:

5. What are some of the blessings that come to those who practice sincere, genuine love of those around them – even those that might be called enemies?

- I John 2:10

- I Corinthians 8:1

- Romans 13:8

- Mark 9:41

6. Read I John 2:9. [See also John 3:15 and 4:20.] According to the Bible, is it possible to walk with God and not love our brother? If we hate someone, what is true of our love?

7. After examining the various passages that speak of the priority of love, do you think love is strong enough to overcome hate?

Can it prevent evil?

Can this type of love stop people from harming each other?

8. Focus on care and prayer...

When we have a fever, we reach for the aspirin (or its substitute); when we are thirsty we reach for a glass of refreshing beverage; when we have a cut on our hand, we look for a bandage. If we have an outbreak of hate or contention, should we not look for love?

Is there someone within your world that could and should be receiving your love – but is not? If you have the freedom, share the situation with your group and ask the Lord for that extra measure of love here. If you are not short of love this week, then thank Him for the love you have and consider asking Him to make your love to abound even more freely to others.

The Meaning Of God's Love

God's Love Is...

...without any conditions
print" in it

...eager to build godly character
pleasure

...confident and assured
confirmed

...seeks to spread joy

...not "touchy"

...experienced as satisfaction
satisfaction

...gives regularly

The World's Love is...

...always has some "fine

...eager to experience

...always needs to be

...seeks to receive joy

...often is very sensitive

...is constantly in need of

...regularly takes

Lesson F-10 Sincere Love Wins In The End – And Sometimes Earlier!

1. Love does not always win at the start. In fact it usually takes time for love to have its full impact. Tell about a time when love finally won in a situation in which you were involved. [It will be difficult (we understand!) but you will need to be brief]:

2. Read I Peter 1:22 (NIV). Take a few minutes to analyze this important passage and answer the following questions:
 - What activity, mentioned at the start of the verse, must take place if genuine love (godly love, agape) is to have a chance to spring forth and grow?

 - What “truth” do you think Peter is speaking of when he refers to the practice of “obeying the truth”?

 - What is the initial involuntary result of “obeying the truth” ? That is, what does God do in the heart of the person who believes what God has said about people, about love, and about His love?

 - The word translated “earnestly” or “deeply” or “fervently” which appears near the end of this verse comes from two Greek words having the meaning “out” and “stretch.” Putting them together we come up with the word’s literal meaning “to make

a thing last as long as possible.” What is to be “stretched out” and how might we help keep it that way?

3. Read John 15:12. List some of the ways, or approaches to love that Jesus used to express His love and commitment to His disciples. [Please be careful on this one, the tendency is to miss some of the obvious things that Jesus did.]

4. According to the following passages, what are some of the important things love from God is able to do? Or, putting it another way, when we love the way God loves, what kind of characteristics do we see expressed?
 - Romans 12:9a

 - Hebrews 13:1

 - Colossians 3:14

6. Read I Corinthians 16:13 and Galatians 5:6b. Can you think of someone in the Bible that actually practiced “love by faith”?

7. Focus on care and prayer...

So much gets said about love that at times we wonder what it is and what it is for. Lost in the plea for love is the meaning and source of genuine love. God demonstrated in the life and work of Jesus Christ both the character and the source of genuine love.

To love God's way is to ask Him to give us the love we and those around us so desperately need. Our prayer might go something like this: "Lord, I know that needs to be loved today. Lord I don't feel much like loving them today, but I know that we can love abundantly – even more than we might ask or think – because of Jesus' love for us. So, thank you for your love for me and the promises you have made. Please help me to love today, and by your grace and in your name I will love them. Amen."

May God grant your request as you pray today.

The Meaning Of God's Love (a review):

God's Love Is...

...without any conditions
in it

...eager to build godly character

...confident and assured

...seeks to spread joy

...not "touchy"

...experienced as satisfaction
satisfaction

...gives regularly

The World's Love is...

...always has some "fine print"

...eager to experience pleasure

...always needs to be confirmed

...seeks to receive joy

...often is very sensitive

...is constantly in need of

...regularly takes

Lesson G-1 Practical Power Pointers

1. Most of us have experienced a time of intense physical activity that left us spent, unable to do much more than move. Describe some of the feelings that go with this kind of fatigue? (i.e., what would you say if someone asked you how you felt at such a time?):

2. When we experience weariness in our inner man (say, in our human spirit) would we experience the weakness in a similar way? How would they be the same? Differ?:

3. Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV). Notice that the word "power" is mentioned three times in this version (twice or four times in other versions). It is the central idea of this passage. Various words are used to express the concept of power, but the two principle thoughts are: power, the right to take action; power, the ability or the might that enables one to take the action desired. With these definitions in mind, consider the following questions:
 - From where does God draw the power that he shares with us? (vs.16)

 - If we wish to have this power from God, how do we obtain it? What must we do to share in it? Is it something we deserve or earn? (vs.16,17)

 - How do we experience the power of God? In our muscles? Our mind? Our emotions? In our spirit? (vs.17)

- What is one of the principle purpose of the power which God gives us? What activity does God want us to invest the power in? (vs.18,19)

 - According to verse 20, would it be possible to use up God's power? Could we ever think of or ask from God for something that he or we through Him would not have adequate power to accomplish?
4. According to the following passages, are some of the reasons why people experience a loss of power from God. See if you can identify what that reason is and suggest a way to prevent or overcome it.
- Joshua 7:12
 - Mark 9:18
 - John 15:5
5. Read I Thessalonians 1:5, Acts 4:33, and Acts 1:8. These three passages reflect the typical kinds of activity that God's power is used for in this life. What are these principle activities and what might happen with reference to our experiencing God's power if we decided not to become involved with these activities?
6. This week's focus on care and prayer

Feel weak and defeated at times? Yes, most of us do. But the Bible says that we have a God who enters us and will provide power if we ask. But it seems that we must ask. It is not normal, or automatic, or present with us all the time in an unending basis.

Every day things come into our lives that block the power. Sometimes the power does not come because we simply want to use it just for our own selfish purpose. Sometimes we just don't ask for it.

Think for a moment: have you asked Him for His power today? Anything getting in the way? Share as seems fitting as to your need in this area then pray together. May God richly bless you as you do.

Lesson G-2 Staying Strong When Everything Else Seems To Be Giving Way

1. Peer pressure is often very hard to resist. When the "gang" is getting off track but you've been with them for a long time, it's hard not to go with them. Tell about a time when you saw peer pressure at work. Why was it so hard to say "No!":
2. Do peer pressure situations always have to be negative? Can you think of a time when peer pressure has actually worked for the doing of good instead of evil?:
3. In I Samuel 1 and 2 is the story of a woman named Hannah who struggled with a number of problems in her society and home that very much complicated resolution of her own struggles. In the following passages are found some of the pressures facing her. Try to describe these pressures as if they were happening to someone today (i.e., in our culture and in our town):
 - I Samuel 1:6,7
 - I Samuel 1:8
 - I Samuel 3:1b
 - I Samuel 2:12,17
4. Read I Samuel 1:10. What was Hannah's approach to her problem in the face of all the peer pressure she was receiving?

5. Read I Samuel 1:11. Just how desperate had Hannah become in order to have a child? If there had been a doctor with a procedure or some kind of medical approach to her problem, do you think she would have called on the Lord in this way?

6. Read I Samuel 1:13-18; 2:19-21. Did Hannah end up with an earthly prayer partner and some positive peer pressure? Who was it? Was her prayer answered? To what degree?

7. The Bible has much to say about negative and positive peer pressure. Try to identify at least one key principle on this subject in each of the following passages:
 - Proverbs 13:20

 - I Corinthians 5:11

 - Ecclesiastes 4:9

8. This week's focus on care and prayer

Often we face problems, sometimes very personal problems, which we find difficult to bring out into the open but which beg for an answer or a solution. We may be afraid to share them for fear that others will not treat them with the same concern we have for them; we may believe they will make us feel ashamed, foolish, or inadequate.

The truth is that there is someone out there -- yes, the Lord, but someone else too -- that will walk with us, someone sent by God. That someone may make a mistake at the start or along the way, but they are God's answer to negative peer pressure. They are there to help. Eli got off on the wrong foot with Hannah, yet because she refused to judge him, she ended up receiving a blessing and help from him.

Do you have something in your life that needs some positive peer pressure and a group? Maybe you need to start small. If you can start today with that struggle, maybe you can find that group and encourager in your life and world today. God bless you as you seek Him for this now.

Lesson G-3 Staying Strong When It Seems You Just Can't Go On

1. When a boxer quits a fight, his manager throws in the towel; when a racer car driver quits a race, he pulls into the pits; when a person leaves a job, he turns in his resignation ("gives notice"); when a fiancé quits a relationship, she gives back the ring. What are some other ways of giving up on someone or something -- or yourself?:
2. Tell about a time in your life or in the life of someone you know when it was difficult to go on. This can be a particular part of life (such as a job or a relationship) or about life in general. Describe in your own words the emotional state of a person in such a situation:
3. Read II Corinthians 1:8,9. Paul had a number of trials in his life and at several points along the way he began to despair. How does Paul describe the circumstances in which he finds himself? If you had to guess, what kind of trial do you think he is going through: Rejection? Poverty? Disappointment? Illness?
4. The following passages record the emotions of several individuals who were in despair. See if you can identify the individual and perhaps the reason for their despair:
 - Acts 27:20
 - I Kings 19:4
 - Job 7:15
 - Jonah 4:3
 - Matthew 27:5

5. One of the individuals in question 4 is quite different in terms of the outcome of the despair. Which one is different and why is it so?

6. Read II Corinthians 1:8-11. How did Paul deal with his despair? What did he do? What did he count on?

7. Read II Timothy 4:6-8. What was the outcome of Paul's despair? Did his approach to his "dark time" help?

8. This week's focus on care and prayer

Do you know someone in despair right now -- even as we meet? What kind of activity on our part is appropriate under the circumstances? Would you be able to help someone if you discovered them going through a difficult time?

These questions have one answer with two parts: show them God and demonstrate His love through prayer and caring.

Perhaps you are experiencing despair in one or more areas of life. Let someone pray for you -- and love you. The saints of old used this method with great profit.

Do you know someone in such a situation. Pray for them right now. You need not mention names or you may not be ready to pray -- but let someone pray. God will surely bless you if you do.

Lesson G-4 Staying Strong With A Faith That Just Doesn't Quit

1. Ol' Faithful. Hearing the words might make us think of a famous fountain in Yellowstone National Park, or an old car that seemed to stay around the family for years --always there when needed. Think of some other things that might qualify as faithful in your world and in your experience. (Let's limit ourselves to non-people items for this question):

2. Think back to your encounters with people that impressed you as being faithful. What were some of the attitudes and behavior patterns that qualified them as a faithful person?:

3. More than 100 times in the Bible God is described as being faithful. The following passages are just a few examples. As you read the verses, try to identify why God is seen as faithful by the writer of the passage:
 - Psalm 145:13 .
 - Deuteronomy 7:9 .
 - I Kings 8:56 .
 - Psalm 111:7,8

4. If, according to these passages, God is faithful, then what can we say about Him with respect to the following?
 - His love?

- His patience?

 - His promises?

 - His forgiveness?

 - His protection?
5. Read I Thessalonians 5:23,24. If God begins to do a good work with respect to the spiritual life in a person, what can we expect of God as to the energy for the task? The completion of the task?
6. Read Psalm 111:2-10. What ought to be the response of people to the faithfulness of God? Specifically, how is it appropriated and what should be our attitude toward it?
7. This week's focus on care and prayer

Is God faithful? Yes, of course He is. But what difference does this make to the average people -- like each of us? It means that God can be trusted, and that He consistently has mankind's best interests at stake when He acts; we can count on it!

It also means that we can entrust either loved ones or specific situations into His care and know that he will do well with them. Is there someone or something you need to turn over to him as we close with a time of prayer? Consider: what might be holding you back from giving this situation into His hands?

There are many promises in the Bible that we fail to claim -- at least in part -- because we somehow feel that God is not trustworthy. Can you identify a promise that you might have difficulty trusting God in? If you can share that at this time, it may well be the first step in being able to claim that promise and trust Him for the result! God bless you as you share.

Lesson G-5 Being Loyal In A Disloyal World

1. Patriotism requires as its basic foundation, a genuine, sincere love and loyalty toward the nation to which it is directed. Patriots are regularly honored by fellow countrymen and often given special recognition and privileges. Name a favorite patriot and describe something patriotic he did which impressed you:

2. If a person proves to be disloyal (and unpatriotic) what are some of the things he might find himself doing?:
 - Does disloyalty always involve an enemy; can a person be disloyal to his country while doing something for a friend?

3. Read Matthew 5:27,28 and Hebrews 13:5. What word does the Bible use to describe someone who is disloyal toward their spouse?:
 - What do you think: is this activity very common today? If so, is it on the increase? Can you think of some reasons why or why not?

4. According to the following passages, what can happen to someone who is disloyal to his/her spouse? How does God feel toward such disloyalty?:
 - I Corinthians 6:9
 - I Corinthians 10:6-8

- II Samuel 12:13,14 .
5. In the Bible there are many warnings about committing adultery. Most of them are described in terms of a man escaping the snares of such a sin. However, most of these passages apply equally well to a woman's escape. According to the following passages, what are the key methods a person can employ to guard against falling into adultery?
- Proverbs 23:26-28 .
 - Proverbs 2:11-18
 - Proverbs 5:3-10 ..
 - Job 31:1 .
6. Read Galatians 6:1-5. Although we might not be directly involved with adultery, should we become involved in situations where we see it going on in the lives of others? When is it "none of our business"?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer

The subject for our study has been loyalty, but a special kind, loyalty toward spouses. This is a very touchy topic but must be faced by all of us if we are to be responsible, caring, and godly Believers.

It would be inappropriate for us to ask if there was adultery in heart or deed in our lives and make that public with our prayer partners, but we can ask ourselves if our "eye gates" are vulnerable to temptations in this area.

Take a few moments to pray for the practical holiness and protection of your partner tonight. Only the Lord can protect our minds and hearts. God bless you as you pray.

Lesson G-6 Finding Faith When You're Down

1. **Morale.** The dictionary says it means "the state of a person's or a group's spirits and confidence." It is often used to focus in on an athletic teams mental readiness for a game, or an army's attitude towards its own success in a conflict. Describe an incident in history or from your own experience when the morale of a group was UP:
 - Now a time when it was DOWN .

2. There are many reasons why a person's morale might be down. List some of the conditions or situations of various types that might lead to a person feeling this way. [Try to think of a broad spectrum of things]:

3. In II Corinthians 4, Paul writes of a situation that normally would be morale threatening but his experience does not match the circumstances. Discover the approach he recommends as you examine the following passage:

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body

 - a. Paul's **MORALE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM** begins with an important first step. What important recognition leads the way?

- b. As long as what condition exists can we expect to have our positive morale challenged?

14 we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart.

- c. What understanding does Paul have about the course of life in general that helps him keep his morale up?

- d. According to Paul, what will be the eventual outcome of all of the morale challenging events we may encounter during our lifetime?

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- e. What general strategy does Paul take when trying to get a handle on facing morale deflating experiences? (i.e., what does he try to think about to keep his sense of perspective?)

4. In the last question, Paul finds his morale restored, his hope renewed when he looks at the ETERNAL. Based on what you know about this subject from the Bible, what might this eternal be like?:

5. Many people have had their hope restored and their morale renewed by their study of God's word and fixing their eyes on heaven and just keeping a glance on earth. Why do you think this procedure works so well for so many different kinds of people?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer

There are certainly many different ways to get hope back when it seems to be gone (e.g. talking to a godly friend, dealing with a sin problem when it exists, proper sleep, diet, and exercise, etc.]. But, problems of the soul do not go away with Band-Aids, oatmeal, and warm platitudes.

Truth, reality and wisdom that comes from above is the only lasting cure for spiritual morale deflators.

Is your morale flagging a bit today? It might be hard to talk about with your prayer partner, but you know the Lord is always listening. Let Him hear from you today. And, take a good look at heaven as you pray: it really works!

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