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BIBLE STUDIES

**TESTED BIBLE STUDIES
FOR SMALL GROUPS**

VOLUME III

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. 2*, 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). The Lesson format assumes that the group either closes in prayer with several individuals praying or the group divides into small groups or in pairs for one-to-one praying. Please adapt the material to suit your situation or needs,

Please note that the lessons now come in a simpler format to accommodate copying and pasting to the widest possible number of text editing software packages.

Lesson 1 Coming To Terms With Testings

KEY VERSE: “...know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance...” James 1:3

To begin our lessons we clarify some terms used. Understanding their meaning will greatly enhance appreciation of what the Lord has said about the testings of this life:

TRIALS*: An event in life in which a person is given two or more options, at least one of which has the approval of God. The other options - the ones which God does not approve of - lead to consequences both painful and shameful which are the result of God’s judgment and wrath. That God should use our selection of these other options in a positive way is only the result of His mercy. [*When used other than in the legal sense.]

TESTS: These are the divinely appointed events - often difficult and usually associated with some pain - which God uses to purify, refine and perfect His children. They always have a good and lasting result. They may happen at the same time as the TRIAL but usually occur as a result of taking the right path during the TRIAL phase. Although TESTS seem to indicate indifference to our pain on God’s part, they are far from this; they reveal His love and surgical skill in dealing with the removal of those things in our lives that will hinder our purpose and task both now and in eternity.

*It is to be noted that Bible translations are not always consistent in the way they translate these two terms, resulting in some confusion for the reader.

1. Your back in school. It’s math class and the teacher is handing out a midterm exam. He has a pleasant smile on his face and is introducing the exam by explaining its positive benefits. Share with the group some of the “positive” things he might say:

- Most of us have heard a teacher make remarks about their exams with the purpose of encouraging a positive attitude on the student's part. Did you believe them; were they ever serious when they said these things? Why or why not

2. When we become adults (and sometimes even before) we start to experience "exams" but they did not come so formally and were rarely on paper. In fact sometimes it seems life in general is just one big "exam". Share with the group examples of some of life's most memorable or significant "exams".

- What do you think: Do these "exams of life" come randomly and on the basis of chance, or are they presented in a meaningful way to help and improve us? Is God responsible for them?

3. In the following passages are discussions about tests and trials. See if you can identify the nature of the particular test or trial, and what the probable result:

Scripture	The Nature Of The Test	Trial	The Probable Outcome
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Galatians 4:13-15

II Corinth. 12:7-10

Deuteronomy 13:3

Hebrews 11:8

4. In the following passages Tests and Trials are discussed (although the actual words may not appear). From the passage, glean the principle which the author is conveying:

- Luke 6:48

- I Peter 4:12,13

- I Corinthians 10:13 (NOTE: the word for TEMPT in this passage is the very same word as TRIAL in James 1:2.)

5. Read Deuteronomy 8:5 and Proverbs 3:11,12. What does the testing of the Lord tell us about the way God looks at us and how He feels about us?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

It is so “natural” to complain about trials and tests. Yet, where would we be without them? How would we develop the godly character we need so desperately?

As you spend time in prayer with your prayer partners, consider the trial you are currently going through and see if you can come to the place where you can thank the Lord for what He is doing in you through it. God bless you as you do.

One final thought...

“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity... “In the whole land,” declares the LORD, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’” Zechariah 13:1, 8,9

Lesson 2 The Wisdom For The Trials & Tests Of Life

KEY VERSE: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God...” James 1:5

1. **WISDOM.** When someone speaks the word many of us conjure up the image of a Middle East sultan, dressed in robes and a turban, seated before a group of people making wise and discerning judgments among his people. Let’s see if we can enlarge this picture a little:

a. Give the names or briefly describe some contemporary individuals who demonstrate **WISDOM** in the way they handle their affairs and themselves. (Let’s stick to individuals now living; death is not a criteria for being considered wise!)

b. As they come to mind, share with us some of the reasons you consider the persons mentioned above as **WISE**:

c. What might have been some of the forces or influences that nurtured **WISDOM** in your selections?

2. Read I Corinthians 2:6-16

- What are the two types of **WISDOM** mentioned in this passage? (Briefly describe them as indicated by Paul.)

- Where does the worldly **WISDOM** come from?

- As implied by Paul, how does one go about acquiring the other (the second) kind of wisdom mentioned in this passage?

3. Read Job 28:23; Ecclesiastes 2:26a; Proverbs 2:1-8. How is WISDOM acquired?

4. As our study thus far indicates, there is more than one way to understand WISDOM. Drawing from the following verses, try to construct (in the space indicated below) a working definition of WISDOM as used in the Bible:

Proverbs 28:26

Proverbs 3:7

Proverbs 15:31

Proverbs 16:21-23

Proverbs 19:20

Proverbs 21:30

NOTE: The Hebrews defined WISDOM as simply...

“The application of divine truth to human experience.”

- Your working definition of WISDOM:

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Here are two questions to consider in your prayer and share time - or you may want to spend time on them with your whole group: “Do you have the feeling or belief that you are wise?” “What do you think it will take to bring you to the point where you would feel WISE would be an appropriate description of YOU?”

Here are some action items that might help get you started on the next step toward being wise - having the gift that God wants to offer, namely WISDOM.

1. How about reading the whole book of Proverbs?
2. Done that? How about reading it backwards, verse by verse (that will sure make a person think!).
3. Select one Proverb from our lesson and commit it to memory.
4. Make a point of asking the Lord for wisdom (since it is His gift) and do that, say, at each meal time pray this week (as an easy way of remembering to ask for it).
5. See if you can find an example of a wise statement on the part of one of your co-workers, or fellow church members, and compliment them on their wisdom. (Recognition is a great way to promote it in our lives and the lives of others.)

important but vague and hard to believe, things you would like someone to clear up for you some day (this can be about any topic):

2. In the following passages are examples of doubting, although the word DOUBT is not usually used. Who is doing the doubting and what kind of doubt (skepticism, honest questioning or confused wavering) is demonstrated in each case?

Genesis 15:8

John 20:25

Acts 12:14,15

John 11:38-40

Matthew 11:2,3

John 2:18

3. The two following passages both contain the same word for DOUBT. [This word for DOUBT means “to stand in two ways” or “wavering as to which path to take.” - virtually the same idea expressed by the word used in our first definition.]

a. Matthew 28:16,17. After Jesus began to appear in His resurrection body, there were certain of His followers who gathered to hear His last words - but some of them doubted. Putting yourself in their shoes,

speculate as to why the DOUBTS were there - especially after all they had seen and heard about Jesus:

b. Now read Matthew 14:27-31. See if your group can answer the question Jesus asks Peter at the end of verse 31:

4. Read James 1:6-8:

a. What can happen - or not happen as the case may be - when we pray DOUBTING?

b. In light of our study, what might be some of the things we could do to help overcome the temptation to DOUBT?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Someday, when the Lord returns and restores all things to Himself, there will be no doubting. In fact, the “need” to doubt will itself be gone. But in the meantime, we have to deal with its appearance.

It begins as a temptation, a crossroads, an option. It can latch on to us and get a grip through the very weaknesses faith helps us to overcome.

Peter lost his footing on the water because he took his eyes - and heart - off of the Master. The same thing can happen to us. Here is a couple of ideas to keep DOUBT at bay:

1. Printed passages of scriptures in some conspicuous place to remind us of the goodness and promises of God.

2. Time out to count blessings as see the good things He has done.
3. Keeping a list of promises particularly meaningful to you as you read the Bible through.

Have some fresh ideas? Share them with your prayer partner...

Lesson 4 Acquiring The Proper Attitude Toward Acquisitions

KEY VERSE: "... The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position...the one who is rich should take pride in his low position," Jms 1:9,10

1. **WEALTH & POVERTY.** In the following questions we'll reflect on some of the ways we look at money issues in our society:

a. The artist Picasso, despairing over what he had lost when he became wealthy, once wrote: "I'd like to live like a poor man - with lots of money." What do you think he lost by becoming wealthy?

b. G.K. Chesterton, the English author and noted follower of Jesus, once observed: "The golden age [i.e., the ideal society] only comes to men when they have forgotten gold." Is he right? Must money be "forgotten" [i.e., placed on a low priority] in order for their to be real and meaningful social prosperity? Why?

c. The playwright Henrik Ibsen once wrote "Money can buy the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It can buy food, but not an appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintances, but not friends; servants, but not faithfulness [loyalty]; days of happiness, but not peace and joy. If money cannot acquire these things, what can?"

2. What, according to the Bible, are the basic dangers that accompany wealth? [Note: Some of these passages will require you to wrestle conclusions from the text.]

Proverbs 28:20

Matthew 19:23

Mark 4:19

Psalm 62:9,10

3. The following passages lead us to some conclusions about what we can do to help build a proper attitude toward wealth. As you consider what the passage says, see if you can put together some themes and principles that would be appropriate to remember when working with wealth:

a. Ecclesiastes 2:26

b. Matthew 6:19

c. Proverbs 23:4,5

d. I Timothy 6:7

4. Read Matthew 19:28,29. In this important passage the Lord Jesus explains the attitude we should have toward wealth and how the Lord is

motivating His followers to maintain this attitude. (Notice with care the importance of the phrase “for my sake” in verse 29) What is this attitude and the motivation?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

ATTITUDE: The approach we take toward a subject, issue, or person that determines the freedom with which God can accomplish His work in us. If we accept the truth of this then we can take the next step: “if a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life.” (Billy Graham).

Anyone wishing to serve God cannot serve the Money Master. Unless wealth is our servant, it will be our master. The Master - the Lord - teaches us that all things come from Him and that when we remember that we are mere stewards, and that wealth can so easily disappear, then we are free to use our wealth in the way in which it was intended.

In your prayer time, consider your perspective on wealth and pray as the Lord leads:

1. Do you need to give Him the ownership papers to your wealth?
2. Have you been obeying Him in the area of generosity to the poor, to the needy, to the cause of Christ, to...?
3. Have you made an effort to see that your riches are “stored in heaven”?
4. Do you have a clear conscience about how you have used your wealth?

Lesson 5 Understanding & Dealing With Temptation

KEY VERSE: "... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ," Jms 1:14

1. Temptation. The English word "TEMPT" can be a little confusing for people trying to learn our language. We often use it in a negative sense, meaning some sort of invitation or enticement to do what is unwise, evil or immoral, but we also use it to mean to entice to do good: "It was a terrific book, tempting me to read page after page!"

a. Share some of the things in our culture that encourage us (i.e., entice us, tempt us with evil intent) to be foolish...

b. That encourage us to be immoral....

c. What are some of the things that tempt us to do that which is good?

2. Read Matthew 4:1-11. The Lord Jesus experienced temptation in a very direct way during His stay on Earth.

a. Concerning what items was Jesus TEMPTED? Were any of these bad or immoral in themselves?

b. What enticement did the heavenly Father offer for Jesus to do good instead of evil 1 DURING the temptation?

c. What preparation do you think was involved to enable Jesus to resist the temptation to do evil and respond to the temptation to do good? Was there anything in this story to indicate any immediate preparation that Jesus went through?

3. What level and type of preparation do you feel would be necessary for you to take God's way instead of Satan's had you been offered the things mentioned in the temptation of the Lord?

4. The Lord Jesus experienced many other temptations during His stay on Earth. What do the following passages tell us about His temptation?

Hebrews 2:18

Hebrews 4:15

Hebrews 5:1,2

Luke 22:24-31 [NOTE: The key word is TEMPT in verse 28, sometimes translated "trial."]

5. The following passages offer some more clues to dealing with temptation. See what strategies you are able to identify:

a. Romans 12:21

b. I Peter 5:8,9

c. Hebrews 12:3,4

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

PREPARATION. The key to our response to temptation is to be prepared in advance before it comes. Jesus knew that He was about to be tempted (apparently the Father told Him, or He was warned in some other way) and made Himself ready.

Are you about to face temptation? Are you ready? With your prayer partner - before you pray - share some of the things that you do to prepare for that inevitable bout of temptation before it comes. They will be helped and encouraged as you do...

Lesson 6 Experience the Fact That God Is Good

KEY VERSE: “.Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...” James 1:17

GOOD. We use this word in many ways in our language. In fact there are no less than 50 uses recorded in the Random House Unabridged Dictionary. Thus, when we hear, read or use GOOD with reference to people or God, it is a challenge to understand or communicate its precise meaning.

1. Through the questions in this sections we begin to discover, first, just why GOODNESS is so significant:

a. “Nolan Ryan is a good baseball player.” What do you think is meant by the use of GOOD in this sentence? [In your group, come up with some descriptive phrases that would parallel the use here.]

b. “Little Timmy was so good for me while you were away at the store!” What do you think it means here?

c. “Sam, you’re such a good husband; you’re so good to me.” And what do you think it means here?

2. The Bible reveals that God is GOOD. But what does this mean? In the following passages are helpful insights into the goodness of God. If possible, identify the contribution made by each:

Nahum 1:7 God is GOOD because:

Psalm 25:7,8 God is GOOD because:

Psalm 119:68 God is GOOD because:

Genesis 1:3,4 God is GOOD because:

3. Read Matthew 19:16,17 and Romans 3:10-12. The Bible tells us that God is GOOD but it also gives us some understanding of just how good God really is. In your group summarize the message of these two passages:

4. As result of the goodness of God, certain things take place - or ought to take place - in this world. From the following verses, identify the results of God's goodness:

James 1:17

Psalm 107:8,9

Micah 6:8

5. If God is the only one who is really GOOD, and yet He asks man to be GOOD and to even imitate Himself (Ephesians 5:1) how does mankind learn to become GOOD like God?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

A.W. Tozer in his famous essay on God, *The Knowledge Of The Holy*, defines the goodness of God this way: “The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and His unfailing attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank, and friendly. By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people... The goodness of God is the drive behind all blessings He daily bestows upon us. God created us because He felt good in His heart and he redeemed us for the same reason.”

With your prayer partner (s), read over the above definition and extract at least one thought that is new and attractive to you and ask the Lord to help you move ahead in embracing it for your very own...

Lesson 7 Lessons On Anger

KEY VERSE: “.man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” James 1:20

[There are basically two kinds of anger in the human experience and both of these are described and demonstrated in the Bible. One is THUMOS, or the hot flaming reactive anger. It flashes up and is soon gone. The other is ORGAY, the more settled and determined anger, sometimes called “wrath.” This kind of anger usually comes on slowly and leaves slowly. Our discussion focuses on the control of “wrath.”]

1. Most will agree that that losing one’s temper - letting it get out of control - is not a wise thing to do. How does the loss of one’s temper effect the world around us? The next few questions prepare us for studying some things God says about lost temper:

a. Take a few moments and share a memorable experience in which you saw someone lose their temper. [CAUTION: Please avoid personal references unless the individual displayed their temper in public.]

b. How did the witnesses to this temper loss respond? Did the responses vary depending on the individual witness?

c. How did the temper loss effect you personally?

2. **WHAT DO YOU THINK:** Is it possible to lose your temper and not injure the person toward whom it is directed?

3. In the Bible we read that God becomes angry - wrathful. In the following passages are examples of God's anger as He expresses it. From the evidence bellow, try to determine 1) the reason for His anger, 2) the way he expresses His anger, and 3) if God ever loses His temper in these situations:

Numbers 32:7-14:

Deuteronomy 32:21-29:

II Kings 22:13:

Ezekiel 5:13-15:

Romans 1:18-19:

Revelation 19:14-16:

4. Drawing from the verses and your responses in the previous question, give some indication as to why you think God gets angry:

- In the course of our day to day events, we all experience personal anger. Do we do so for the same kind of reasons that God gets angry?

5. In an effort to help people keep their anger under control, the Lord gives some spiritual handles by which we can "reign it in". In your group, see if you can draw some spiritual helps from the following passages:

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Proverbs 22:24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, 25 or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

Psalms 39:1... I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." 2 But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. 3 My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue: 4 "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life....7 "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. 8 Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

7. Describe the experience of having your spirit and emotions under control when you are involved in a difficult, pressured situation. Do you sense that God is there with you?

8. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

It is very difficult for humans to admit that they are angry and that they are sinning as they get angry. There is just so much justifying of anger in these days: there are many who try to excuse their expressions of anger as “normal” or “healthy.” But they are just rationalizations. Many people internalize their anger and so destroy themselves with this powerful emotion.

What’s the answer? More than can be said here, but one direction the scriptures point is to the fact that God knows how to get angry in just the right way and He is the only one with enough accurate information - and the correct motive - to carry out anger in a just and righteous manner. It seems we should leave more in His hands than we now do. With your prayer partner, take a few moments to turn the objects of your anger into His hands...

Lesson 8 What About Widows & Orphans

KEY VERSE: "...look after orphans and widows in their distress ."

James 1:27b

What is a widow? A woman whose husband has died (or disappeared) and who has a family unable or unwilling to care for her needs.

What is an orphan? In both the Old and New Testaments, the orphan was a fatherless child. (A child without both parents, siblings or grandparents is very rare in Biblical times.)

1. Are there any widows in your extended family? Share with your responses to the following...

a. What are some of the emotional needs of a recent widow? A long time widow?:

b. What are some of their financial or material needs??

c. What kinds of spiritual needs do widows encounter?

2. With reference to the previous question, do the needs of the orphan differ

3. The word "love" appears more than 600 times in the Bible and is the focus of all the benevolent acts of both God and man. Love is really important stuff! In the following passages are examples of little or step by step acts of love that are vital to the emotional and spiritual health of

our world. In each passage, try to identify the little acts or steps of love that we are to take:

John 14:15,23

Ephesians 5:1,2

Colossians 3:14

Luke 7:47

Ephesians 4:2,32

I John 4:16

4. From your memory of the New Testament histories of the life of Christ, list at least three examples of little things that Jesus did to show his love. (You have the opportunity to decide what is “little”.)

5. Read I Thessalonians 2:7-12. Given the word picture Paul uses in this passage, what kinds of acts do you suspect Paul performed in his treatment of his fellow Christians in this city? What do you think was the response by the Christians?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Little acts of love together usually carry more weight than one or two big acts of love. It is strangely similar to the sandblaster: lots of little acts

of love remove the corruption - the rust and corrosion of life - and leave the object itself unharmed. Or one bucket of water can kill the plant, but lots of drops can sustain it.

Rather than the focus on the dramatic or the single act of love, would we not better serve those we love by giving them a constant flow of love, however small those many acts may be?

In your prayer time, consider together with your partner(s) some of the things you could do to make a difference in your world through little acts of love...

Lesson 9 Getting A Handle On Prejudice

KEY VERSE: “To show partiality in judging is not good...” Proverbs 24:24a

1. Prejudice: Few people would admit that they hold a prejudicial attitude toward someone or something. We would all like to think we are more fair minded than that. But prejudice exists, and often it is subtle and hard to detect. The following questions get us started in identifying prejudice...

a. It has been said that... “Prejudice is a great time saver: it enables you to form opinions without bothering to get the facts.” Is that what is meant by prejudice? [Elaborate.] If not, what is it?

b. Toward what have you seen prejudice exhibited?

c. Most of the time we are aroused by prejudice against a person, creed, idea, sect, or the like. But, is it possible to have prejudicial favor toward something? If so, give an example:

d. This will take a measure of transparency on everyone’s part, but it is an important question: can you share any prejudices you have had or currently have. [Note: It is not our purpose as a group to solve everyone’s prejudices here. The important thing is to be open and honest about them. Give the members of your group plenty of freedom to share without being judgmental.]

2. Read Matthew 22:15-17. In this well known story, we learn something about the way Jesus approached prejudicial decision making...

- How is Jesus characterized in this passage with reference to prejudice?
- Who were the people making this evaluation? His friends? His enemies?
- Although they seem to be trying to trick Jesus, nevertheless they seem quite sincere about their evaluation of Him. Think of some modern figure [not of your church fellowship] about whom you have the same regard:

3. Read John 4:4-19,25-30. Rather than argue about prejudice, it seemed to be the strategy of the Master to take a very different route. This story from His life is a classic example of His unique but effective approach:

- What was the typical attitude of the Jew toward the Samaritan? How did the Master respond to this prejudice?
- What was the attitude toward women in that day? How did the Master respond?
- What would you imagine the attitude of the people to be toward a woman of such loose moral character as that described in this story? How did the Master respond?

4. In the following passages are some clues on how to begin to walk in the footsteps of Jesus with reference to avoiding prejudice...

- Deuteronomy 19:15. What is to be avoided? Practiced?
- Romans 10:12. How are the various families of mankind to be viewed?
- Acts 10:34,35. What is God's perspective on mankind?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

The pattern of prejudice is one that persists for generations; every family of mankind has its own bias and finds it difficult to get past it [them]. How they arise, or even how they are transmitted pales in comparison with the need to rid ourselves of them. They are a constant battle.

Recently the temptation is to not only end prejudice, but end justice and any righteous judgment. ["Don't lay your guilt trip on me!" they say, or, "You can't legislate morality - especially mine!" Of course we can, and must if murder, sexual immorality, etc. and a hundred other crimes of consequence are to be at least hindered.] Somewhere between prejudice on one side and letting everyone do their own thing on the other stands godliness. It is a place to be searched out and found.

Where do we begin? Start with something you know is already the object of the Spirit's conviction. If you can, share it, pray concerning it, at work through it with another loving brother or sister. God will bless you as you do...

Lesson 10 Finding The Motivation To Obey

KEY VERSE: "...the law that gives freedom..." James 2:12

1. Our growing up years varied widely in how we experienced them, but virtually all of us can relate to being asked by a parent to perform a task - let's say, taking out the garbage or cleaning up your room, and reacting by saying to ourselves something like, "I really don't want to do THAT right now!" The following questions explore this attitude...

a. Looking back on it, what do you think led to a negative response to the request (order)? Was it just tone of voice, or was there more?

b. How did the quality of your relationship with the one making the request (order) influence your response?

c. Picture this: it is a week before your wedding & your mate-to-be asked you to take out the garbage. Describe your response. Was it different from the ones you described above? Why?

2. Read Matthew 21:28-32. [Please use the NIV translation for this episode. The wording in the KJV and NASB is different although the substance and point of the story is identical.] The story of the two sons tell a very important lesson about the Lord's - and man's - appreciation of obedience...

- Place yourself in the shoes of the first son. Why do you think he said "No!" at the start? Speculate as to why he changed his mind:

- Now place yourself in the shoes of the second son. Why do you think he said “Yes!” at the start? Do you think he changed his mind or was it his plan to disobey from the start? In other words, did he lie to his father?
- What was the real difference between the two sons?
- The Lord Jesus likens those who are being saved to one of the sons and expresses his approval. Which son, and, why the approval?

3. In the following passages, with your group’s help, try to identify that which the Lord does to MOTIVATE or ENABLE we humans to obey Him:

James 1:25

John 15:10

John 14:23

Joshua 1:8

Ephesians 5:5-7

4. The following passage is the classic on obedience. From the Lord’s dramatic choice of a parable, we can conclude that He gives it a very high priority and that He is motivated to have us obey because it is absolutely the best for us...

Luke 6:46 “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?
 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words
 and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who
 dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the
 torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.
 49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice
 is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The
 moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was
 complete.”

- What is the “rock” in this story equivalent to? The “sand”? The “flood”?

5. From what we have learned in our lesson, how significant is the relationship with the one being obeyed as to whether we exercise sincere and voluntary obedience toward their requests (orders)? Do you see a relationship between a person’s relationship with God and the level of their obedience?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Obedience is a word that raises the hackles of many people in this independent, self-absorbed culture of ours. (Evidence? When was the last time you heard “love, honor and OBEY” in any dramatized wedding in the media?) But in a family, obedience is vital: the parents set the direction for the children that often have no idea what problems, dangers and needs they may be encountering. God designed man to live like a family with Himself at the head. He is the ONLY one that knows best, and he wrote the rule book. (He is the President, Congress and Supreme Court all rolled into one!)

Is obedience important? Of course! Do we struggle with it? Naturally! That is why He has provided an array of motivational tools to help us stay on track: love, rewards, family support, a guiding Holy Spirit, consequences, promises, examples of success & failure in the Bible, prayer, clear instructions, faith, etc.

Is there an area of obedience in which you are presently struggling? Have you used the tools He has provided? Can you identify one you might put into action? Share with your prayer partner as you are led by Him. The Lord will surely bless as you respond to Him...

Lesson 11 Using the Power Of The Tongue For The Good

KEY VERSE: “Never let evil talk pass your lips say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them.” Ephesians 4:29

1. Here is a situation that will be the focus of our questions in this section:

It was a family reunion and a number of relatives had gathered, including your older sister. Your sister was the one that provoked a lot of fighting and quarreling between you growing up, and still seems to be at it: she makes a cutting remark in front of the family about your appearance - among other things. Two weeks later, your brother calls and asks how things are going between you and your sister...

a. What would you do? (circle as many as apply)

1. Tell him everything is fine.
2. Tell him all about what she said and how hurt you are.
3. Say nothing at all.
4. Pretend nothing happened.
5. Politely put off your brother until you have had a chance to discuss the matter and your feelings with your sister, then tell him about the situation.
6. Same as 5. but do not discuss it with him later.

b. If you have the freedom to do so, share a reason why you made the choice you did in the previous question:

c. What might be the possible impact on the relationship between your brother and sister if you chose #2?

2. Read James 4:11,12 & Ephesians 5:29-32 . How do these passages guide us in responding to each of the following?...

- In what ways are we limited in our communication with others?
- In what ways are we permitted to be critical* of others - especially fellow Christians?

*The dictionary defines critical as “looking for faults”; criticism as “a remark pointing out a fault”; critic as “one who finds fault with something.”

- Give examples of comments that “build up” others:
- Give examples of comments that are the opposite of “building up” others:

3. In the following passages, there are principles that guide us in our practical discourse with others, principles that help us to build up rather than do the opposite:

Matthew 12:36

Proverbs 18:8

Proverbs 16:28

Psalm 141:3

x

4.

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Lesson 12 Getting Back Control Of The Tongue

KEY VERSE: “Never let evil talk pass your lips say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them.” Ephesians 4:29

1. To the United States Constitution there has been added a Bill of Rights in which certain civil liberties have been promised by law. One of these liberties (the 1st Amendment) promises that “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech...” The following questions deal with this promise:

a. What types of speech should this amendment be understood as permitting? What types are prohibited, that is, are such things as lies, slander, prohibited?

b. Do you feel that certain kinds of speech (i.e., certain words under certain circumstances) should be abolished as a matter of law? If so, can you give some examples of the type of things our government should protect us from?

c. Do you think the government should protect us from gossip, rumors, and whispering? In other words, should the kinds of things seen so often on the covers of those tabloids in the grocery store be declared unlawful?

2. The Bible has some very strong things to say about the dangers of certain types of speech and what to do about protecting oneself from its damaging effects. In the following small sampling of dozens of such passages, identify the dangerous types of speech and the preventatives indicated. (Be sure to first read the reference definitions of the Bible words, below, before beginning.):

The Dangerous Type of Speech Preventative

Proverbs 20:19

Proverbs 11:13

Proverbs 11:12 (NIV)

II Corinthians 12:19-21

Proverbs 16:28,24

Reference definitions: GOSSIP = A statement at least partially based on fact which casts another person in a bad light; a secret revealed. (This is different from a LIE which casts a person in a bad light with untruths.)
 TALEBEARER = A person who spreads a story to others, a story which (though often true) casts another in a bad light. MALICIOUS GOSSIP = one who gossips with the intention of hurting the feelings or reputation of others.

3. What does one do to get ones speech back into control? The Bible has certain very definite guidelines that put us back on track:

a. Read Colossians 4:5,6 and Ecclesiastes 10:12. What elements must be provided in order to have the appropriate verbal response in a given situation?

b. Where does grace come from? Is it manufactured by men? Is it deserved?

c. If we wanted grace - or more grace - for our speech, what must we do?

4. Read Proverbs 12:18. Once we understand the great truth of the previous question (#3 above), we must be introduced to two additional truths, truths found in this Proverbs passage (and in many other places for that matter). In your own words, identify these two truths and give an example of how they might be applied in everyday speech:

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

It is a temptation to ask that the government outlaw all forms of evil speech. The problem is that they may call the kind of speech you use “evil” such as sharing your faith with another. In that case, free speech becomes very valuable. But how do we then begin to resolve the problem of wicked speech?

We have certain laws that limit out and out lies (as, for example, perjury) but when it comes to using the truth or half truths for wicked purposes, there really are few laws to protect us. That is when the unique Christian life style becomes important: only by example can we expect to win over others to embrace a lifestyle that includes positive speech. Gossip, negative criticism, talebearing and the like are expressly forbidden in the scriptures. In fact, they are classified with sins like adultery and murder in terms of their seriousness and effect.

Are there examples of these dangerous forms of speech in your life? Would you like to help set the world the vital example for good, upbuilding speech? Pray as the Lord leads in this matter...

Lesson 13 On Detecting True & False Wisdom

KEY VERSE: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it ...”James 3:13

WISDOM: The Bible teaches that there are two types of wisdom, one that takes God’s principles, values and perspective into account, and one that does not. The Bible defines wisdom as a knowledge and respect for God’s word, and a life that is sincerely lived according to its standard.

1. As we begin this week’s lesson, we take a look at wisdom in the world immediately around us. Have several offer their suggestion as to a possible answer to the following:

a. Using one or two word definitions, give some of the characteristics that distinguish the wise person in our present world:

b. Among those that qualify as your personal friends and acquaintances (but excluding the people in your group) who is the wisest?

b. Among the people living today, who seems to be the wisest to you?

2. James (in 3:13-17) says that there are two kinds of wisdom, one from the earth and the other from heaven. In the following passages are some clues as to how to detect the wisdom that comes from Heaven. Describe these clues in the space provided [Note: this is only a small sample of an incredible number of such passages and clues. Those listed seem to this author especially important in our present culture]:

Proverbs 10:19

Proverbs 13:10

Job 28:28

Proverbs 12:5

Philippians 4:8

James 3:17

3. The following are statements made by individuals said to be wise by the standard of public opinion. As your group reads them, as you have freedom to do so, offer your opinion as to the type or kind of wisdom each seems to contain:

a. "The world is a vast temple dedicated to Discord." VOLTAIRE

b. "...it is much more safe to be feared than to be loved, when you have to chose between the two." MACHIAVELLI

c. "...that which is the most awful of evils - death - is nothing to us, since when we exist there is no death, and when there is death we do not exist." EPICURUS

d. "God created man, but I could do better." ERMA BOMBECK

4. Many of the more reflective and spiritually sensitive leaders and educators in our culture are alarmed about the lack of moral and relational wisdom* among young people today. Why do you think there is seemingly so little wisdom today? In helping us respond to this question, we consider the influence of several factors. Comment on the influence of the following:

a. Wisdom as taught or demonstrated in our schools...

b. Wisdom shared at family gatherings...

c. Wisdom demonstrated on television and the media...

* By moral and relation wisdom: such things as taking responsibility for personal sin, discernment between right and wrong, developing and practicing strategies for self-control, exercising practical compassion, etc.

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Solomon said “Wisdom is the principle thing... whatever you do get wisdom.” To “have” wisdom means to say or do that which God would do if He had your circumstances. James put it this way: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” (...our key verse for this lesson.)

Putting wisdom to good use also means figuring out which information, or which advice, or which example or model is the one we can confidently respond to. As in James 3:17, the passage we looked at in question 2,

there are certain characteristics that distinguish godly wisdom from an earth-based, limited wisdom. We can ask ourselves some questions related to these that will help us “look before we leap” - a “leap” that can end in disaster.

With your prayer partner, do a little “wisdom check” in your life, and among your influences and pray as the Lord leads...

Lesson 14 What God Has To Say About Quarreling

KEY VERSE: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” James 4:1

1. Think back to a memorable quarrel that you had sometime in the past, perhaps one at school with a friend. In the following questions, use the friction you had with your friend as a model for understanding what happens in a quarrel:

a. Looking back on past strife, what were the most common reasons for quarrels between you & your friends?

b. Did the quarrels of your childhood usually start because the other person - your friend - was fault?

c. Who usually brought the quarrel to an end, you, your friends, or...?

d. Describe your heart during the time of the quarreling: Were you angry? Were you sad? Disheartened? Confused? Lonely? Vengeful? Or...? If it was more than one of these, try to describe a percentage of each (such as, “40% angry, 60% sad,” or whatever proportions seems correct to you.)

2. In the following are some of the things that are the occasion for quarreling as described in the Bible. Try to identify these circumstances as specifically as the passages permit:

Proverbs 13:10

d. Read Colossians 4:10 [NOTE: This event occurred after the Acts passage, above.] What do you suppose brought about the change in Paul's attitude?

4. Read James 4:1-3.

a. What does James say is at the root of all quarreling?

b. What change in point of view does he say will help limit the breadth and duration of such strife?

c. What do you think: Is it God's will for Christians to quarrel? Is it God's will for non-Christians to quarrel? Is quarreling EVER something that God wills for us to do?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

People have always quarreled. The fact that they do in no way legitimizes quarreling. In fact, it only proves how vital it is for us to face and deal with it.

But how? Some respond to the challenge of a quarrel by giving up and always being the loser ("OK," they say, "We'll do it your way.") Others give up verbally but inwardly are angry - even hostile or bitter. Others try to just walk away, but in their heart they have not avoided it. Others argue that they are only human, and go on with quarreling hoping that God will forgive them when it is all over. Still others believe that since they are "right" then that somehow allows them to quarrel. All of these are mere excuses or rationalizations.

We quarrel because of the desires of our flesh, and we attempt to excuse it because of our pride. Quarrels begin because we forget God; they are let lose because we forget to love others as we would ourselves.

Our concluding assignment for this lesson is not an easy one. For some it will be the most difficult of all assignments: Can you agree with God that quarreling is sin? That's what the Bible says it is. Are you willing to say, "God I confess that my quarreling - whether I started it or not - is sin." With your prayer partner see if you are ready to take this first step. God will surely bless you as you do.

Lesson 15 The Strategy To End Quarreling: Humility

KEY VERSE: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” James 4:10

HUMILITY: A character trait in which a person develops a completely accurate view of himself - especially concerning his sense of self worth, his sinfulness, his wisdom - as he stands before God & others.

HUMILIATION: A feeling of worthlessness or disgrace imposed on one person by another.

1. Humility. Most of us value the quality in a person which, when communicated to us, says, “You are certainly my equal and, in many ways, my better.” We do not feel like we have to be in control with such a person, and we feel like we can trust a person who automatically respects us (though we certainly don’t often deserve such unqualified respect!) With the wonderful quality of Biblical humility in mind, answer the following in your group:

a. Are there many truly humble people (as defined Biblically, above) in your immediate world? Why or why not?

b. Is humility something a person is born with, or is it learned - or is it both?

c. How does a person go about learning humility? How do YOU learn humility?

d. Describe one example of a situation in which you were given some genuine help in learning humility.

2. Humble people in the Bible: From your recollection of Bible characters, name a person (other than Jesus, Moses or Paul - they're all too obvious) that seems humble to you, and why you selected them...

3. Read Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 57:15. Just how important is humility in God's scheme of things here on this earth?

4. In the following passages we are given some of the principles related to humility - its meaning, importance, and development in the hearts of people. See if you can describe what they each have to say about humility in a single sentence, but in your own words:

Proverbs 22:4

James 4:10, I Peter 5:5

Proverbs 11:2

Proverbs 16: 18

Philippians 2:3

Matthew 18:1-4

5. There are many situations in the Bible that were turned into quarrels because of pride or in which quarrels were avoided because of humility. In

the following passages try to identify the individual, the situation and whether a quarrel was averted or caused by that individual...

a. Exodus 5:2...

b. Daniel 5:23

c. Matthew 15:22-28

d. Matthew 8:8

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Quarrels break out because of our sinful nature (as we discovered in our last lesson). Quarreling is sin. At the base of all sin is pride. It is therefore not surprising that the answer to quarreling that God gives us is “Humble yourselves.”

The early Christians called this “the highest of all virtues” (see the writings of Augustine of Hippo and others) because it had the greatest effect for good of any of the character qualities of Christ. We seem to know this as if it were written into our hearts, but instead of practicing humility or encouraging it in others, we have simply neglected it. Or worse yet, we try to use humiliation as the tool to prompt humility instead of MODELING of humility, that which initiates and nurtures true humility.

One writer on this subject put it this way (if we may paraphrase him): “Humility is acquired only if we ourselves come to see our sins for what

they are before God. When we see the shame of them and then maintain the memories of these as a “Hall of Shame,” a place of remembrance and not a place where we live, we maintain a proper perspective. This is true humility.”

Are you experiencing true humility? Talk about this with your prayer partner and then pray as the Lord leads...

* It was suggested by the editing crew that the author - yours truly - leave in the three mistakes he made in the original of this lesson question to demonstrate just how much of an interruption or “problem” a fault generated event - the unexpected - can create.

2. Read Genesis 3:16-19. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, God said that He would send certain painful “interruptions” into Adams activities and plans during the years ahead. Briefly describe these various “interruptions”:

3. Read Romans 8:18-21. In this passage, the Apostle Paul expands on the whole idea of painful “interruptions” to our desires and plans. What does he say is taking place when the unwanted comes?

- Will this situation always prevail; will things always be this way?

4. The Bible teaches us that we can expect the seemingly unexpected in the day to day situations of our lives. In fact, the Bible teaches that we can prepare for the unexpected - even plan for it! In the following passages we are given important guidelines for disaster preparedness. In your group, try to summarize the guideline into a few words:

Proverbs 6:6-8

Romans 5:3-5

Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:10,11

Genesis 45:4-7

Philippians 4:4-8

James 4:15,17

Proverbs 16:3

5. In light of the passages we have studied in this lesson, offer three or four insights on the subject of planning for the future that would be profitable for a young person in the following situation:

Your young person is about to take a trip to the next state to go to work the entire summer for a relative. He/she is desiring to save enough money to go to school back at home for the following school year. It is possible to actually save enough to do this, but it will be tight...

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Effective, appropriate planning involves many elements. We need good goals in order to create good plans. We need to take the adequate amount of time, and seek wise counsel as we plan. But more often than not we are likely to idealize our goals and plans and not prepare for three things that are most often left out: adequate personal consultation with God, appropriate accounting of sin and its consequences on the outcome (it will undoubtedly mean we will have to be flexible), and understand and accept the cost and sacrifice - the "pain" - that comes when we carry out our plan.

In one of the trades there is a proverb that goes something like this: “Once you have made your best estimate as to what it will take to do the job, double it, add 10% and then you’ll come up with the real final figure.” Some find this to be too difficult to accept: “That’s too negative, too pessimistic.” Others give up: “That’s too expensive, too costly.” Having been in this trade in the past, this author can assure the reader that it is an amazingly accurate proverb.

The same is true for good planning in general: God’s will always takes into account sin and sacrifice. Are you making some plans right now that are significant to you but which have not included the influence of sin and sacrifice? Take time with your prayer partner to work through asking God to help you take them into account right now...

Lesson 17 Saying Only The Things That Help

KEY VERSE: “Do not speak evil of each other...” James 4:11a

1. Ever lose control verbally? Whether we are the receivers or the initiators of a mouth that is out of control, we can all relate to the pain, loss and confusion that can result. The following questions take a look at some of the situations and principles behind the loss of verbal control:

a. In your group, suggest some of the things that might set people off verbally. In other words, what kind of circumstances can lead to the loss of verbal self-control?:

b. What kind of situations can push the “my-verbal-self-control-is-now-OFF” button in your life?

c. When someone loses their verbal self-control, do you find that they then begin to lose other kinds of self-control? Does one frequently lead to the other? (For example: one person curses another, then the other curses back, then there is a shove, then a punch, then...)

2. Read John 8:6; Isaiah 53:7 and Matthew 26:62,63a. Jesus used a technique to diffuse certain difficult situations, a technique that is sometimes used today. What is this technique and what did Jesus appear to be able to avoid by using it?

- Read Proverbs 11:12; 10:19; 13:3. What does the Bible say about the general use of this technique, the one used by Jesus, explored in part #1 of this question?

3. Read Ecclesiastes 5:1,2; Proverbs 28:9; 25:12. Learning to say only the good things that help people requires discipline of our heart - our human spirit; for any godly character quality to become a part of our life involves practice and the work of the Holy Spirit. In these passages is another such spiritual discipline.

a. What is this discipline?

b. Why do you think the work of the Holy Spirit would be necessary to make this discipline a part of our inner person, our heart?

4. There are many principles and disciplines that help prepare us for following the command we have in the Bible that says:

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

In the following passages try to identify those principles and disciplines:

Proverbs 23:22

Proverbs 15:28

Proverbs 15:23

Psalms 52:4-7

Psalms 64:2-8

Ecclesiastes 11:12,13,20

James 4:11

5. As we have seen in this lesson thus far, the Bible puts tremendous emphasis on saying things that build up people - whoever they are. Even when we are confronting people with their sin we are to use the following guidelines, ones Paul used whenever he shared the Gospel with others:

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4:6

What might be some of the ways we could carry out this directive, that is, always letting our conversation be “full of grace” when we encounter others who may not agree with us? How about those that are brothers/sisters?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

All of us have said something we did not mean and then complain to ourselves about the fine “mess” we made after it was all over. Sometimes the “mess” begins with us getting angry or frustrated, or sometimes it is because we have poor information to go on and make poor decisions, or sometimes we say the wrong thing and can think of no reason at all as to why we said it.

The important thing is that if we are to be the kind of people God wants us to be, it isn't going to come naturally. It will take a work of God. We will have to work at it within the power of His might. We will need that stuff called grace, which comes by asking for it, by prayer.

And this is the point of our lesson: if we want to truly obey Him and speak only good to our neighbor, we must pause that brief moment before we speak - every time we speaking, and get God's guidance and strength. That brief moment will mean the difference between God's will and our natural will being expressed. With your prayer partner, take a few moments to talk about making a commitment to talk with the master each time before you speak and see if you are at the point where you can make that commitment to him. Surely, if the Bible is at all true you will be blessed if you make it...

Lesson 18 Making Special Promises

KEY VERSE: "...let your "yes" mean "yes" and your "no" mean "no"... James 5:11

1. Broken Promises. You have just loaned some money to an old friend who seemed to be in need. The day of promised return payment arrives, but there is no sign of the money. Your phone calls don't get through to him at the office and he never seems to be at home. Several weeks go by and you still have not heard from him. Putting the financial side of the issue aside for a moment, consider the following questions:

- a. Be as realistic as you can: what kind of emotional/psychological response do you think you would have if you were the one loaning the money in this story?

- b. Talk about what may be happening in the head/heart of the loanee in our story?

- c. Would the reactions of the two parties change if the amount were \$5.00? If it were \$500.00? If it were \$50,000.00?

2. Read Hebrews 6:16,17. According to this passage, what is the purpose of an oath? Did God use it (the oath) for the same reason?

3. Read Genesis 20:1-14 and 21:22-24. In this story we have an example of a typical oath being requested and offered. The following questions ask us to examine the message behind these events...

- a. What did Abraham do to King Abimelech that prompted the King to extract the oath mentioned in chapter 21?

- b. It can be easily argued that Abraham told the truth to the King. Was Abraham, therefore, actually guilty of anything? If so, just what - exactly?

- c. What happens to our stature or reputation when we do what Abraham did?

- d. What do you think: does an oath like the one given by Abraham help the situation? Does it make things “better”?

- e. What do you think: how often should such oaths as these be used?

4. In the following passages are instructions as to how to go about declaring and using oaths and vows in day to day life. In your group, try to come up with one or more guidelines as suggested by each passage:

Mark 6:22-26

Matthew 5:33

Proverbs 20:25

Psalm 15:4

Psalm 66:13,14

Ecclesiastes 5:4

Ecclesiastes 5:5

Ecclesiastes 5:6

James 5:12

5. From what we have studied thus far, in your group suggest some possible examples of vows we might offer to the Lord in our day:

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Vows and oaths have a rich history in Old and New Testament times. They helped establish transactions between men and between God and men on firmer footings; promises build trust.

But like the surgeons scalpel, oaths and vows are dangerous when they are abused: they are so simple and easy to use, yet can release fearful death and destruction. To misuse a vow is to possibly turn the course of ones life in a very unfavorable direction; to use it properly is to open the possibility of rich blessing from God.

The Bible's message to us is clear: use vows, but use them with care. Reserve them for times when they are needed and sincerely expressed.

Is there an area in your life that needs a sacred promise? How about Bible reading? Prayer? Giving or tithing? Marital recommitment? Evangelism?* Whatever the area, if He prompts the vow, follow Him in it and watch Him work.

Pray as the Lord leads...

*How about sharing the Gospel with at least one new unbeliever each month? Pretty awesome task? Pretty awesome God!

Lesson 19 Vows That Make The Marriage Work

KEY VERSE: “Make VOWS to the LORD your God and fulfill them...”
Psalm 76:11

1. Think of a marriage relationship in your world, one that you have had contact with personally, one that has endured successfully for a long time - say, 35 or more years. Usually there are some things that stand out in such a marriage - memorable things - that tell something about the kind of commitment that was made at its beginning. In your mind's eye, consider this marriage as you respond to the following questions:

a. What are some of the pressures this marriage has had to endure?

b. Sometimes a couple will make a promise to marriage as an institution (“I’ll stay married no matter what!”), but are not very successful in making the personal relationship part of the marriage work. In effect, they have made a vow to the marriage but not necessarily to their partner. Is this long term marriage (above) a “marriage centered relationship” or a “partner centered relationship”? Describe the qualities that helped you decide which it was:

c. What do you think: has this long term marriage always had lots of love in it to keep it going, or were there times when love was scarce but they kept going anyway?

2. Read Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31. In these passages (translations of the Hebrew and then the Greek for the same thought) is a very brief description of the three principle activities of marriage. What are these three parts, and what does one do to accomplish them in our day ?

PRINCIPLE MARRIAGE ACTIVITY

How Accomplished In Marriage Today

1.

2.

3.

- Is one of these activities a “vow”? If so, which one?

3. Read Ephesians 5:22-24 and 5:25-28. In this important passage are instructions to husbands and wives on marriage:

a. List what you think are the two most difficult activities found in this passage for the WIFE...

b. List what you think are the two most difficult activities found in this passage for the HUSBAND...

c. How often does the average husband or wife succeed in doing the things requested in this passage?

q All the time q Most of the time q Some of the time q
Seldom

d. In light of your answer to “c.”, what is it that allows a marriage to succeed?

4. It is evident that the demands of marriage exceed the natural supply of strength and energy to sustain it - at least in the manner intended by God. In the following passages are promises that the followers of God recognized as having come from Him. They were design to help us deal with our weaknesses. In your group see if you can identify these promises:

Psalms 9:7-10

Romans 8:38-39

John 10:28, 29

John 15:5

5. In a recent study a startling discovery was made: 80% of the marriages in which there is an accidental death of a child end in divorce. Describe one or two principles or thoughts from the passages we have studied today that would offer real help for the marriage of such a couple?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Marriage is an awesome thing: it is the blending of two lives in such way so that the two together are equivalent to something greater than either of the two of them alone. The reality of this is played out everywhere in

Scripture. For example: “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor [Lit., a blessing] from the LORD.” Proverbs 18:22

As we see, not only does obedience bring blessing, but so does a vow - to a wife or husband. For surely, only by a vow does a man and woman actually become husband and wife. If a couple loses sight of the promise to each other before God, or consider their vow as just some vague commitment they made to a principle or an ideal called “marriage,” they will miss part of the blessing that God intended for them to share.

Tragically, such a misdirected vow may lead them to grow weary of the person they are married to. But if the vow is properly understood to be a once-for-always, I’ll-keep-it-even-if-you-don’t-or-can’t, and it’s-to-you-as-a-person, the marriage has every opportunity to prosper.

So it is with any vow, honestly made. Do you have a promise that needs clarification and refreshment? Can you share it with your prayer partner? If you are up to date on all your vows, is there one you need to make now to set you into motion for more growth? God bless you as you share and pray...

Lesson 20 Praying Under Pressure-and Not Giving Up

KEY VERSE: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should continuously pray...” James 5:

1. In most everyone’s life there was a time when a difficult situation was faced and a call went out to God. We might be very ill, or facing danger from an unknown intruder in our house, or sliding on ice on a lonely stretch of highway, or... We may not have know who God very well or read much in the Bible, but we called out and there was an answer. The following questions ask us to think about such an experience and the prayer that went with it:

- a. Tell your group BRIEFLY about such a situation in your life, the prayer, and the answer that came:

- b. How much thought did you give to your prayer before you uttered it?

- c. When you finally got the prayer out, was it eloquent? Was it phrased in beautiful words? Did it need to be?

- d. What were at least two elements to your prayer that made it “effective”?

2. Prayer, like eating food or having the need to be loved, is an almost universal experience. In your own words, describe what prayer to God is all about for you:

3. Jesus is considered the Master teacher on prayer, and rightly so. But we are told only a little about what Jesus actually did and said in His personal prayer time. The following questions ask us to examine the model of “pressure” praying offered to us by Jesus:

a. Read Matthew 14:23-25. If the Fourth Watch was between 3:00am and 6:00am, how LONG did Jesus pray?

b. Read Hebrews 5:7. How personally involved was Jesus in His prayer time?

c. Read Matthew 26:36-44...

- Do you detect any fear in what Jesus says here?

- When others grow weary of praying, what does Jesus do?

- Does Jesus always get a “Yes!” to His heartfelt prayer?

d. After examining the passages in this section, how would you characterize the complexity and formality of Jesus’ prayer life under pressure?

4. The Bible pictures prayer as an activity that can go on all the time, an activity that should be a regular part of the Christian's daily life. But as is the experience of many, prayer gets slowed or comes to a stop, even under pressure. In order to pray the Jesus way - to pray continuously, we have been given some very practical helps. Try to write down the helps from each passage listed below. [NOTE: Some of these are things that we are NOT do, things that keep us from praying continuously]:

Matthew 6:5-7

Matthew 7:7,8

I Timothy 2:1

I Timothy 2:8

Colossians 4:2

Philippians 4:6

Ephesians 6:18

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Prayer is one of the most important parts of the life we have in Jesus Christ. Yet, few would say that they pray as often or in the way that they ought. Why? The passages we have looked at point this out: we forget that prayer is to be persistent even in the face of difficulty, or a delayed answer, or the answer "no". We also forget the huge territory that prayer covers: our worship of God, those that do not know Christ,

authorities, our service people, all those in mission work, our church and its ministers. If we just prayed about the things that God has specifically asked about and those that Jesus and the apostles modeled, there would be no end to prayer!

Maybe it's time for a fresh start on prayer in your life and in your world. Have you thought about a daily prayer basic, like having three square meals or getting into your Bible each day?

With your prayer partner, ask the Lord where he would have you to take the next step in become a man or woman of prayer...

Lesson 21 Finding The Motivation To Stay Prayerful

KEY VERSE: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should continuously pray...” James 5:13a

1. **BEGINNING A NEW HABIT.** Most of us have had the opportunity of beginning a new habit. It is not always an enjoyable experience at the start - especially if it is “good for us”. The following questions ask us about the process that we must go through to begin and sustain a new habit:

a. When you have started a new habit, which comes first (for you) the realization that the old habit was not working, or the attractiveness of the new habit?

b. For you personally, what is the greatest obstacle you face when starting a new habit?

c. Rank the following in personal degree of difficulty: starting a new **MENTAL** habit (e.g., remembering a new telephone # or work routine), beginning a new **EMOTIONAL** habit (e.g., learning to control anger), a new **PHYSICAL** habit (e.g., no finger nail biting), a new **SPIRITUAL** habit (e.g., reading the Bible daily, praying specifically and daily). [“1” is the most difficult, etc.]

• mental • emotional • physical • spiritual

d. How long does it usually take for you to have to consciously “work at” a new habit before it becomes “second nature” to you?

e. In changing a habit that is particularly difficult to overcome - especially in the spiritual realm, do you usually call upon other people

for help? If so, who, and, what kind of help from them actually works for you?

2. Read the following passage, noting the various parts of it that discuss prayer:

I Samuel 12:12 “But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, ‘No, we want a king to rule over us --even though the LORD your God was your king. 13 Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God --good! 15 But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

16 “Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! 17 Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.” 18 Then Samuel called upon the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel.

19 The people all said to Samuel, “Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.” 20 “Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. 22 For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. 23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. 24 But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. 25 Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.”

teaches us what is best and then asks us to continue to pray accordingly. The problem comes, first, in that we tend to be such poor listeners, then, second, we tend to think that He does not want us to pray. “He already knows,” we often say. But He wants us to pray until we actually see the answer. What will keep us at it? What will keep us praying? It is the underlying principle in all of prayer:

“God, I love you with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all, my mind. Therefore, I will pray for the things you want and will keep praying because you want them and you want me to pray. Because I also love my neighbors, I will keep praying for them as well. I know that your love for me and for them will sustain me in my prayer.”

Love is the key to continuing in prayer. A loving community has no problem sustaining its prayers for God’s will or for others. In your prayer time, consider the role of love in your prayer life...

Lesson 22 Enjoying the Blessings of Praise

KEY VERSE: "...Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." James 5:13b

1. **RECEIVING PRAISE.** You have just completed an art project for a night class you have been taking. It is a still life oil painting that took a semester of hard work. The professor says "It is wonderful!" but you doubt it. "It's only my third painting!" you say with sincere modesty. He insists on entering it in a community art show. It wins much acclaim and a "Best of Show" blue ribbon.:

a. How would you respond to the praise offered by those seeing your work at the art show? What would you say in reply to their comments?

b. What kind of feelings do you usually have as a result of accurate praise?

c. Do you like praise? Do you enjoy receiving it?

d. How does your response differ when praise slips into flattery (i.e., superficial or false praise designed to gain some end to the advantage of the one doing the flattering)? Describe your reaction to false praise:

e. What do you think: Is it appropriate to do something for the purpose of receiving praise?

2. Read Isaiah 29:13-16. How does God feel about praise directed toward Him? What do you think his usual response might be?

- How does He feel about false or superficial praise? What does He do about it?

3. Read the following (Psalm 144, of David) and take note of the various reasons the author praises God. Pretend for a moment that you are an American soldier and our nation has come under attack by hostile forces. A pitched battle is taking place in your home town, and you are assigned to protect it. In your group, using your sanctified imaginations, try to think of ways to say what is in the highlighted section only using figures of speech or objects from the 20th century:

Ps. 144:1 Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. 2 He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me. 3 O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? 4 Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.

5 Part your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke. 6 Send forth lightning and scatter [the enemies]; shoot your arrows and rout them. 7 Reach down your hand from on high; deliver me and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hands of foreigners 8 whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful. 9 I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you, 10 to the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword. 11 Deliver me and rescue me from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful. 12 Then our sons in their youth will be

like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace. 13 Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields; 14 our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets. 15 Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.

4 In your group, try to identify 4 things which you believe ought to be the object of praise toward God, things for which He gets little verbal praise in our day:

5 A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Accurate (that is , specific, genuine, realistic) praise is a blessing to anyone who receives it. Why? Because it is a confirmation of God working in us, that God's design is good and that we are fulfilling our purpose.

In turn, when we praise God, we are honoring the source of all good things, and giving Him the credit he deserves. In this way we bring His love and care and creativity full circle: that which has been made by the Master now gives the Master praise; the pot tells the potter that He is doing good.

Who is the audience for this praise? The whole of creation, including the angels. And so is Satan: every act of praise is a rejection Satan's thesis that we can do it on our own, and that our way is better. By turning to praise we place in proper perspective all that we have and all that we do. But we so easily get out of practice. We often forget specific, accurate praise. With your prayer partner(s) spend some time praising some of the things that make you glad God made you and that you know Him...

Lesson 23 Don't Waste Your Illness

KEY VERSE: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray...” James 5:14a

1. **BEING SICK.** Every family has its traditions concerning illness. As if acting according to some unwritten script, the members of the typical family play out roles (either the role of the sick person or the role of the well person) that get passed down from generation to generation in amazingly consistent ways. Discuss the characteristics of these more common roles as you have encountered them in your experience:

a. Describe the “Someone-please-help-me-I’m-dying!” sick person role:

b. Describe the “I’ll-just-grin-and-bear-it-and-no-one-will-know” sick person role:

c. Describe “I’ll-crawl-under-a-rock-&-disappear-until-it-is-over” sick person role:

d. Describe the “We’ll-give-them-anything-they-want-to-make-them-feel-better” well person role:

e. Describe the “There-there-there-there-now” well person role:

f. In your group share the sick person role and/or the well person role that you think describes you most accurately:

2. Many people find it difficult to except the illness they have and sometimes become very resentful about it. Why do you think they feel this way?

3. There are many discussions about illness in the Bible. The following questions help us examine what the Bible says about the cause of sickness:

a. Read Leviticus 26:15 and I Corinthians 11:28-31. In the Old Testament, God told Israel that sickness sometimes came because of...

b. Read Job 2:27. But, if a man is righteous and becomes sick, what might be the initial source of the illness?...

c. Read Daniel 8:27. When we lose our strength and become drained of all energy and end up feeling sick, does it mean that we have sinned?

d. Read II Corinthians 12:7-9. Does the Lord use sickness for positive reasons (as opposed to negative punishment)? If so, what?

4. Read Mark 3:8-13 & Matthew 13:55-58. In these passages, do we have any indication that Jesus healed all of the sick people that he came in contact with? What reasons for this are indicated?:

5. Some people think that Jesus and the Bible promises “To heal all of our diseases” and they cite I Peter 2:24. Looking at the verse, does it teach that He will heal all of a person’s physical and mental diseases or is he talking about spiritual diseases?

6. Read Matthew 11:20,21 and 16:4. If the focus on healing is that God would perform a miracle and restore the body or mind to its original state, will this necessarily help the one seeking it? Could such a seeking actually bring harm?

7. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

When we become weak in our physical or mental self, the temptation is to want to be well and seek diligently for wellness while at the same time missing entirely what God is doing in us through the illness. In our life, our spouses life, our children, our friends, our leaders, are lessons that may very well make sickness one of the best things that ever happened to them.

If God uses the sickness and suffering to shape his children for their good, we would do well to ask ourselves as a first thing: “Lord, what is the reason for the visit by this illness?” The answer sometimes takes a while, and sometimes God has to wade through a host of our complaints in getting the answer to us, but it usually comes. To the person that does not trust in the value of illness, there is little gained but disappointment and bitterness.

Have you discovered a lesson or a blessing in illness? Have you ever thanked God for a sickness - that is, that which came through sickness? Among your requests and sharings as you pray, see if you can come to the place where you can express gratitude for what God is doing with your illnesses...

2. Finding the relationship between prayer and faith is a very practical issue for all of us. To search this question out, read Hebrews 11:8-18 and discuss the following in your group:

a. "By faith" Abraham did what in the following verses:

1. Vs. 8

2. Vs. 9

3. Vs. 17

b. From what you have read in the passage, how did Abraham know that the actions (recorded in the previous question) were things he was supposed to do? How did he find these things out - or did he just make them up out of his head?

c. According to verse 13, many people coming from Abraham did not get to see all that Abraham was promised yet they continued to live as if it was coming. Why?

d. Can people today live by faith in the same way as described in this passage?

4. Read Hebrews 11:6 and Acts 27:25. Putting these two passages together, we learn about both the value of and the process for applying genuine faith.

a. (In 11:6...)What is the value of genuine faith?

b. (In 27:25...) What practice puts genuine faith to work?

5. Read James 2:17. Let us suppose that a person should read something in the Bible - say, "You shall not steal." - a truth that is for all time, and says that he has faith in God but continues to take things that do not belong to him. Does this man have genuine faith? If not, what does he have?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Let there be no mistake, faith is the key. But faith means listening to God, trusting (i.e., believing) Him, and, through appropriating His power, acting on what we understand He wants. Abraham believed God, and we have seen the pleasant result. So did Paul. So did David and Daniel and many, many more.

In John 8:39 we read "If you were Abraham's children then you would do the things Abraham did." We are the children of Abraham and David and Daniel and, yes, the Lord Jesus, when we do as they did. Whether in the written word or by prompting of the Holy Spirit: the key is to do as the Master wishes.

Has the Master pointed out something He wants from you and wants to enable you to do, but you have only been "thinking about it"? Wouldn't today be the best day to start by saying "Yes, Lord." Then add these all important words: "Lord, please help me." With your prayer partner share and pray as the Lord leads...

Lesson 25 Don't Leave A Friend In His Mess-If You Can Help It

KEY VERSE: “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” James 5:20b

1. **SAVING A SHIPWRECK VICTIM.** From time to time we read or hear about the heroic exploits of Air & Sea Rescue personnel who have saved individuals adrift in the ocean. Finding and recovering those in such peril often proves expensive and time consuming, not to mention dangers involved. A successful rescue involves some very important practices and considerations. Our first question is about these:

a. Why is it that people end up adrift in emergency at sea? (Give some of the possible origins for such a possible.)

b. Does it help to have a lot of training to do this kind of rescue work? Have successful rescues been accomplished by individuals with no training? How is this possible?

c. How would you feel as a rescuer if you were called to help someone in trouble in the water and found that they were there because they had done something really stupid. Would you give them a lecture? If so, would it be **BEFORE** or **AFTER** the rescue? Why?

d. If a person gets into trouble in the water once, how often do you think a rescuer would be willing to go help them if they got into trouble again?

2. Rescuing people that have gotten into trouble **SPIRITUALLY** is very important but difficult work and not unlike the work of air and sea rescue.

In the following passage, locate the responses to the questions that follow:

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.

a. What is the very first thing identified as the initial step in the spiritual rescue program outlined here?

b. According to this passage, there is just one qualification for the work of rescue: being "spiritual". According to your understanding, what is it like to be "spiritual"? (I Corinthians 3:1 helps define this term.)

c. What style or attitude does it say we are to have when we do rescue work? (vs. 1a)

d. When we begin rescue work, we are told that it may lead to our needing to be rescued - if we are not careful. What sort of care do we need to take?

e. According to verse 1, we are told to "restore" the one that is in need of rescue. The [Greek] dictionary says that this word means "to mend, furnish, or, refinish completely; to make in like new condition". Does this mean confrontation? Argument? Modeling? What?

f. The word “restore” is also in the present tense meaning, literally, “be continuously making an effort to bring to a like new condition”. What does this say about the length of time it will take and the kind of patience required to finish rescuing?

4. If you were a Christian that had gotten mixed up with sin or wandered away from the truth into a lie or stumble into something trivial, how would you like to be treated, that is, rescued?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Rescue is a very important work that we have all been called to give attention to. There are many who actually need the rescue but too often we are unwilling to take the initiative to begin the process. We have our reasons, but these seem weak when we find ourselves needing to be rescued.

Is there someone in your world that needs a rescue - or at least a rescue attempt? Are you ready to help? If not, can you take the first step to removing whatever it is that is in the way? Pray concerning this as the Lord enables.

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