

TESTED BIBLE STUDIES  
FOR SMALL GROUPS

VOLUME I

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# INTRODUCTION

The Bible study lessons 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 A 1 - What is the Heart & Soul of the Church?

- A. Consider for a few moments what the early New Testament Church might have been like. List several characteristics that you think may have distinguished it from the Synagogue or other religious or social groups mentioned in the Bible:
- B. Read I John 1:1-4...
1. What types of evidence were presented to the disciples that convinced them about the nature and message of the Lord Jesus? (vs.1,2)
  2. What was the basic message that John and the other Disciples received from the Lord? (vs.2b)
  3. John had a strong emotional/spiritual response to the message of Jesus (vs.4). How do you think this emotion revealed itself in John's life, that is, what outward things would we have seen in him?
- C. Read Romans 14:13-19
1. In verse 17, Paul makes the Kingdom of God sound like it is very much at the heart of the Church. What is the Kingdom of God like according to this passage?
  2. According to this passage (vs.18,19), what do the Christian "do" in response to the fact that they are part of the Kingdom of God?
  3. Briefly describe what you think would be the sacrifice involved and the benefits given by God if the members of a church were wholly committed to see this passage (vs. 17-19) become a reality: Sacrifice Rewards/Benefits
- D. In the following passages, what are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit ministers to believers? How does He help them and what does he help them to do?:

1. Ezekiel 36:27 (a prophecy concerning the work of the coming Holy Spirit)
2. Acts 1:8
3. I John 3:24
4. John 14:16,26
5. II Timothy 1:14

[Note: treasure = “testimony” (vs.8) “gospel” (vs.10), “sound words” (vs.13)]

- E. When the members of the New Testament Church wanted to get the full effects of the Holy Spirit's ministry in their life, what did they believe God for?:
1. Ephesians 5:18
  2. Galatians 5:13-17
- F. Summarize in your own words what we must do to appropriate the Holy Spirit's full effect in your life:
- G. Let's pray for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our life, that it may come in all its fullness...

## Lesson A 2 - Everyone Counts In The Church!

- A. Describe some of the feelings that occur when a person in a family or a Church feels like they do not have a meaningful place among the members:
- B. Do such feelings usually result in division?
- C. Read I Corinthians 12:12-17, 24b-27
1. What is the picture or analogy used by Paul to show us what the Church is like?:
  2. According to this passage, how important is each person in the Church?:
  3. How prominent or skilled must a person be in order to have a legitimately meaningful place in the Church?:
- D. Read Matthew 18:19,20
1. According to Jesus, what advantage is there to praying with someone--especially in a Church discipline situation (which is the context of this passage)?
  2. What do you think: does God listen to the prayers of an individual more than a group, or a group more than an individual?    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No
  3. Offer your suggestions: Can you think of occasions when God would be seeking the prayer of each of the members of a group instead of the prayer of any one particular individual?

## E. Read Romans 15:1-7, 13

1. According to this passage, what resources are available to the Christian to help do the work of ministering to others?
  - a) vs. 1
  - b) vs. 3
  - c) vs. 4
  - d) vs. 5
  - e) vs. 7
  - f) vs. 13
2. What are some of the things God has already equipped us to do in the Church, particularly for our neighbor?
3. According to verses 5-7, what are some of the things that God is looking for from the Church as a whole?
4. Does everyone in the Body need to participate in order for these commands to become a reality?

## F. Is harmony in the Body of Christ something that is automatic? If not, what must be done by each of us to preserve it?

1. Ephesians 4:3
2. Philippians 1:27, 2:2

## G. In light of our study, list some of the reasons the Lord needs each of us to function as part of the Church today:

## H. Let's pray concerning one thing you could do this week that would help you to feel more a part of the Body of Christ...

## Lesson A 3 - The Holy Spirit Belongs to Us!

- A. When non-Christians are asked about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, what kinds of things do you think they bring up?
- B. Read John 16:7,8,13-15
1. Describe the way that Lord Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure? Was this method effective?:
  2. How have some of the various translations rendered the name of the Holy Spirit given in verse 7?:
  3. What was the Holy Spirit going to do in the life of the believer?:
  4. How was the Holy Spirit going to prepare the world so that the believer would be able to do his work?:
- C. What seems to be the main reason the Holy Spirit was sent into the lives of the believer, as seen in the following Scriptures?:
1. Acts 4:31:
  2. Acts 11:22-24:
  3. Acts 13:9-12:
- D. Many believers seem afraid to share the good news about Jesus Christ. Based on the passages we looked at in question C. (above), do you think the phrase “filled with the Spirit” might have something to do with courage to share the Gospel?
- E. Consider for a moment: What would happen to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer if he did not use the Spirit's power for testifying of the Gospel?
- F. The ministry of the Holy Spirit touches the lives of the believer in many ways, all of which prepares us for the work that God has in mind for us. Briefly describe His work as seen in the following passages:

1. Rom.8:14
  2. Rom.8:16
  3. Rom.8:26
  4. Rom.5:3-5
- G. What characterizes the person who pretends to be a believer, but who is actually without the Spirit of God? (Jude 19)
- H. How can we be sure we are “filled with the Spirit”? (Eph. 5:18):
- I. Let's write down the name of one person for whom we might pray that God would open a door in their life. Pray that you might use a filling with the Spirit in order to share the Gospel with that person...

## Lesson A 4 - Building a Relationship With The Spirit

A. Have several in your group describe the work the Holy Spirit did in bringing them into a relationship with Jesus Christ:

B. Read John 3:1-8. The Holy Spirit plays a very important role in the spiritual birth of man, a transformation Jesus calls “being born again”. See if you can identify that role by working through the following questions:

1. Who was Nicodemus and what would you guess would be his level of Scripture knowledge? (vs.1,2; see also John 3:10)
2. What do you suppose would be his understanding of who Jesus was? (vs.2a)
3. Jesus answers Nicodemus even before he can ask the question he brought with him. Can you figure out, based on the Lord's answer, the question Nicodemus brought?:
4. With what did Nicodemus quite naturally confuse spiritual birth? How does Jesus explain\* the difference between the two? (vs. 4)

(\*We would understand the words “born of water” as referring to physical birth, the placenta bursting)

5. In what ways would the physical birth process (being born the first time) compare with the spiritual birth process (being born again)?
  - a) How many individuals are involved at the start? Who are they?
    - (1) Physical Birth...
    - (2) Spiritual Birth...
  - b) How visible are the early stages of development?
    - (1) Physical Birth...

(2) Spiritual Birth...

c) What happens when the process is complete?

(1) Physical Birth...

(2) Spiritual Birth...

C. Read I John 3:9,10.

1. What kind of children result from a person being born of the Spirit? To whom are they related?
2. When a person is born of the Spirit, what remains within that person?
3. Based on the picture we have here in this passage, would it be reasonable to expect that we could get ride of this “seed”?

D. Read I Corinthians 6:15-17. When our spirit gets together with God's Spirit (when we are born again), what happens to these two spirits within us?:

E. Read John 16:7,8 and Titus 3:5,6: What does the Holy Spirit actually do to prepare us for being born again believers?:

F. Consider carefully the following statement: “The Holy Spirit goes ahead and prepares the heart of every individual to whom a Gospel presentation is made. Not all respond, but all are prepared.” Do you agree or disagree?

G. Identify one unbelieving person in whose life the Spirit is working, and bring them before the Lord in prayer...

## Lesson A 5 - The Church Comes Alive!

- A. The fellowship of Christians has been a positive experience for many people over the centuries. Take a moment and share with the group one of the most encouraging things that has happened to you as a Church attender:
- B. During the early days, just after it began, what were some of the things that the Holy Spirit did to build and nourish the Church? List the characteristics after each passage:
1. Revelations 2:7 (also 11, 29)
  2. Hebrews 2:1-4
  3. I Thessalonians 1:5,6
  4. Colossians 1:8
  5. Ephesians 4:3
  6. Ephesians 2:18-22
  7. Romans 14:17
  8. Romans 8:26,27
  9. Romans 5:5
  10. Acts 20:28
  11. Acts 16:6-9
- C. In light of our study on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Church in the previous question, discuss what the Church would be like if the Spirit were somehow hindered from doing its work?:
- D. From your memory about the New Testament Church in the Scriptures, describe some of the things that were taking place that were encouraging a sense of “awe” and nurturing a feeling of “joy and gladness” among the people (as in Acts 2:46):

- E. Read III John 4 and I Thessalonians 2:19. What kinds of things would bring a similar sense of joy into the modern Church?
- F. In the discussion time before our closing prayer today, take a few minutes and ask: “Lord, point out to me how I might bring greater joy to my Church through YOU.”
- G. If you can, share with your group what the Lord might have said on this matter through our lesson today...

## Lesson A 6 - Walk By The Spirit and LIVE!

- A. The physical act of walking, when evaluated by a trained observer, tells much about the condition, characteristics and even the character of the observed. In your group list some of the things you can tell about a person from their physical walk: [Note: Don't forget to include PROGRESS, ZEAL, DETERMINATION , etc.]
- B. Read Genesis 5:22 and 6:9. From the ancient days, the term WALKED was used to describe more than traveling on foot. Based on the passages you have just read and using your own words, describe the activity mentioned:
- C. In the following passages we are told some of the ways we are not supposed to WALK. See if you can attach a practical or contemporary understanding to each of them [Note that some translations use the word CONDUCT or LIVE instead of the actual word WALK in the following]:
1. I John 1:6
  2. I John 2:11
  3. I Corinthians 3:3
  4. II Corinthians 4:2
  5. Ephesians 2:2
  6. Ephesians 4:17-20
  7. II Thessalonians 3:11
- D. In the following, we are given some ways that we are supposed to walk. Attempt once again to attach a practical or contemporary understanding to each of them:
1. Ephesians 5:5-10
  2. Romans 6:4

3. Romans 14:15
  4. Eph.4:1 & Col.1:10
  5. II Corinthians 5:7
  6. Philippians 3:17
  7. Colossians 4:5
- E. Think rather carefully about this one, it's a bit tricky: According to II Corinthians 10:2 and 10:3 there is a walk related to the flesh which is appropriate and one which is not. What are these two walks and how do they differ?
- F. Discuss in your group: With all of these types of WALKS that we are expected to walk (or not walk), how is the believer supposed to be able to live at that standard?
- G. With your group...
- share one area of walking mentioned above that you can believe God for in the coming week (i.e., where will He be helping you -- with your cooperation and faith -- during the coming week?]

## Lesson A 7 - Let Us Be Of ONE Spirit!

- A. During the next few minutes, give some examples of the various ways our culture encourages divisions, disputes, and negative divisive types of competition:
- B. What are some the things you like best about unity\* when you experience it in your home, business or church?
- C. What do you think: Is it man's natural inclination to practice unity? Why or why not? :
- D. Read I Corinthians 1:10.
1. List the several exhortations Paul gives in this passage.
  2. Given the strength of the statements made in this passage, do you think Paul actually believes the Corinthians can carry them out? Why or why not?
- E. Read Philippians 2:2, Ephesians 4:1-6 and Colossians 3:12-15. Based on your reading, see if you can suggest an answer to each of the following:
1. Is unity something that just “happens”, or is there some human effort involved in receiving it?
  2. Once unity is acquired, is there anything that ought to be done to maintain it? If so, what would that be?
  3. What role does the Holy Spirit seem to play in the preservation of unity in the Church?
- F. Read Romans 16:17-20. This brief paragraph gives us some clues about the nature and practice of unity in the Church:
1. What are we to watch out for and what do we do with it when we spot it?
  2. What is the role of the Lord Jesus Christ in the preservation of unity?

3. How important is staying with the teachings of the Bible in the endeavor to preserve unity?
- G. What do you think is the greatest threat to the unity of the church today?
- H. With your group...
1. Share one insight that the Holy Spirit has spoken to you about concerning the subject of unity... or
  2. Share one area in which the Holy Spirit is saying to you, "Here is how you can help Me maintain unity in the Body...!"

[Definition: **Unity** is the state of mind and heart in which two or more people experience a common purpose and work together by a common set of principles toward the same basic goals. The presence of unity does not presume or even require some level of uniformity. It does, however, require harmony -- in much the same manner as the singers in a choir all sing but not the same notes]

## Lesson B-1 The Healing Power Of The Tongue

1. A friend comes to you and tells of a report they heard about you being spread among others. The report is untrue, but is still being spread. What are some of the things you might want to do? What do most of us usually do?:
  
2. What is it about rumors, gossip, and the like, that makes them so painful when we are their victims?:
  - Why do you think we seem to enjoy them so much (when we hear them) when they are about others instead of us?
  
3. Proverbs 18:21. According to the Bible, just how important are the words we speak?:
  
4. In the following verses from the book of Proverbs are some of the GOOD things that words can be used to accomplish. See if you can identify at least one GOOD thing in each passage:
  - 12:14
  - 15:23
  - 24:(24)25
  - 15:1(a)
  
5. Again from the book of Proverbs: see if you can identify at least one EVIL thing that words can be used to accomplish:
  - 16:28
  - 15:4(b)

- 11:9(a)
  - 13:3
6. Read Proverbs 26:24-28. What are at least three things that eventually happens to a person who misuses words?:  
  
v.26b v.27 v.28
  7. Read Proverbs 16:24. What can happen to the person who commits their mouth to speaking only GOOD words?:
  8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

In your work place, neighborhood, home, church, or just on the phone, you will be tempted to use evil speech instead of the wonderful healing power of good speech.

In your group, talk about a commitment for one week, for using words that build up and heal **only**.

If you feel you can, share the area of greatest temptation as the focus of prayer. (EVERYONE SUFFERS FROM THIS PROBLEM, SO... Don't try to tackle all of the areas at once -- you'll fail for sure. Just try to get a good start at one place.)

## Lesson B-2 Discovering True Acceptance

1. One of the strongest needs found in every person regardless of their circumstance is the need to be accepted -- loved for who he or she is. When a person does not receive this acceptance, what can -- and usually does -- happen to their emotions and ability to relate to others?:
  
2. Acceptance is communicated by more than the words we speak. What are some of the things that others do that communicate acceptance to you, personally?:
  
3. Does God accept people just the way they are? How do we know? Have you experienced this acceptance personally?:
  
4. In the following list of passages are some examples of the kinds of things that God does to provide for and demonstrate His acceptance of us in Christ. See if you can identify the thing(s) which He does to communicate his acceptance and list them at the right:
  - Colossians 1:21,22
  - II Corinthians 5:21
  - Psalm 103:10-12
  - John 14:12 • Isaiah 40:31
  - Isaiah 41:10
  - Psalm 34:7
  - John 10:29 • I Peter 2:24

5. In light of the passages that we have just read, give your opinion as to why some people do not feel accepted by God and fail to -- even dread the very thought -- of coming to God in prayer?
  
6. Read I Corinthians 6:9-11. What process does God use to remove any of the barriers regarding His acceptance of us or our acceptance of each other in this world?
  
7. If we were not feeling accepted -- loved and received for who we are -- at any time in our life, what would be a good 'first thing' for us to do? How often might we find ourselves do this kind of activity?
  
8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Do you feel accepted by God? Do you feel close to Him -- as close as you have at the best moment between you in the past?

If yes? You are UNIQUE! Praise God! Spend some time thanking Him for your wonderful state!

If not (and that is most of us) take a moment and privately, or with your group, confess to Him, let Him cleanse you, and receive His forgiveness.

## Lesson B-3 Learning To Use HIS Authority

1. Describe some of your thoughts and feelings when: you are given responsibility to head a project and those working with you do not respond to or respect your leadership:
  
2. Do you think God has these same kinds of responses when humans fail to respond to His authority and leadership?
  
3. In your estimation, what is the most difficult thing about being a leader?
  
4. Read Daniel 2:21 and Romans 13:1. From where do rulers obtain their authority to rule?
  - Is this true of secular rulers as well?
  
5. Read Titus 3:1 and I Peter 2:13,14. Why is it so important for us to have leaders and rulers over us?
  - What happens when we don't have them?
  
  - At what level of leadership do you think we can stop respecting our leaders; do we just respect important or significant leaders?
  
6. Why do you think God has reserved for Himself the responsibility of selecting the leaders we have?

7. Read Isaiah 10:1, Ezekiel 45:9, and Hosea 5:10. Is the Lord interested in the fate of unrighteous leaders in this age -- or just in the age to come? What does He promise to do to wicked leaders?
  
8. Read Proverbs 20:28; 25:4,5; 28:2. Do leaders need our help to rule and rule well? In what way?
  
9. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is there a leader that you are having a struggle with -- either someone near or someone far away?

Have you given thought as to how you might help them or improve their relationship with you?

Spend a few moments and share your concerns with your group and then take the matter to the Lord with as much openness as you are able to muster.

## Lesson B-4 Dealing With My Anger

1. Anger is a very visible **emotion** and **moral attitude** in our day. Describe some of the more frequent ways people experience or express their anger:
  
2. The Bible has much to say about the anger and the wrath of God. Does it bother you that God gets angry? Why or why not?:
  
3. When God gets angry, does He "blow his top" (as we sometimes say about humans when they express anger quickly and vigorously)? How does He experience and express His anger?
  
4. Read Ephesians 4:26,27,31,32. In light of these passages and the issue in the previous question, what kind of limits do you think God has put on the anger of man? What can we do, what shouldn't we do?:
  
5. Read James 1:19,20. What is the major weakness with anger that springs from human hearts?:
  
6. In the following list of passages are some cautions about anger. Identify the activity that protects us from the dangers of anger:
  - Ecclesiastes 7:9
  - Ecclesiastes 10:4
  - Proverbs 29:8
  - Proverbs 22:24,25

• Proverbs 19:11

7. Do you think it is possible for someone to be angry in an unrighteous way and no one know about it? How?
  
8. In light of our study thus far, what is one area that you feel you need the most help from concerning the control of anger? (Only those that really want to should share on this one.)
  
9. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is there an area of anger in your life that God does not have reign and rule over? Can you share it with your prayer partner? Can you ask the Holy Spirit to take charge of it?

If not, are you willing to let the Lord do a searching inventory on the subject in your life? Can you ask Him to do it beginning soon? Today?

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**WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THE VARIOUS FACES OF ANGER:**

Anger In The Old Testament:

There are many diverse and colorful words that are used to describe this important characteristic. It is associated with physical characteristics like "inner burning", the "flaring or snorting of the nostrils". It is also seen in relationships such as a "pouring out of emotion" or a "violent outburst". The third class of words are related to pictures of what wrath does: "to refine or smelt", "to thresh, winnow or tread out", or "to demolish".

The important lesson is this: "The OT words for anger do not tell us whether anger is right or wrong, nor do they explain the anger of God. They simply tell us that anger exists." Anger is morally neutral: the moral aspects are related to how it is used. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Richardson

## In The New Testament:

There are basically two words for anger and wrath here: **ORGÉ**, "excited", which speaks often of the wrath of God; **THYMOS**, "smoke", meaning a conscious or deliberate act of expressing anger and is sometimes found in passages where anger is condemned (see Gal.5:20).

**An Important Thought:** Anger is a part of our nature -- and of our Lord. The proper use of anger is a learned behavior. Without discipline and these learned skills, anger toward others or ourselves is so potentially destructive it can -- and usually does -- result in the worst sort of evil.

## Lesson B-5 Caring Is The Remedy!

1. In the English language, the word "care" has two rather distinct general uses. One use is rather negative and the other quite positive. What are these two meanings and -- in your opinion -- how did the word end up with such different meanings?:
  
2. Read John 13:34,35. When the Bible speaks of caring, just how important is it and what happens when it is absent in the church?:
  
3. Read I Corinthians 12:21-26, especially verse 25. (Read from an NASB version, if possible.)
  - Describe the role of caring that is to take place in the church (and by implication, outside the church). Who is to be cared for? What kind of caring is to take place?
  
  - What do you think would happen to the church that put that kind of caring into place on a regular basis?:
  
  - Explore some of the possible ways that a Growth Group might express and experience some of this type of caring:
  
4. Caring does not always take a form that we immediately appreciate. In the following passages identify the unique, important, yet sometimes painful forms of caring described:
  - Proverbs 3:11,12
  
  - Proverbs 9:8

- Proverbs 27:6
  - Proverbs 13:24
5. Read I Thessalonians 2:5-12. See how many different ways of caring you can identify in Paul's description of his ministry team's work in Thessalonica:
  6. Read I Peter 5:7 and Luke 10:40-42(NIV).
    - We have freedom from the "cares of caring" according to the first passage. Why? How does it work in our lives?
    - In light of our study, what important truth had Martha forgotten to apply that caused her anxiety?
  7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

How is the caring ministry in your life? Does caring sound like too much work? Are you too busy to be involved with real caring? If not, what might be missing?

In your group, ask the Lord to give you the special strength and blessing that is a part of sharing and caring as described in the Bible. Is there someone in particular that the Lord has said: "Please show some care toward..."

Are you looking for the blessing?

## Lesson B-6 It Pays to Plan God's Way

1. Planning a project, an activity, an outing: describe how you feel about the subject of planning. Is it enjoyable, difficult, troublesome, distracting, fun...?:
  
2. There are many people that have difficulty planning the events and activities of their lives. Even Christians sometimes have acquired the reputation of being poor planners. Why do you think people fail to plan?:
  
3. Read James 4:13-17.
  - In your understanding, what is the sin that James is condemning in verses 13, 14 and 16?
  
  - According to verse 15, do you think he is forbidding the practice of planning? Why or why not?:
  
  - According to verse 17, what do we end up inadvertently doing in a situation in which we fail to plan?
  
4. Based on your experience with God and the Bible, does God plan His work and His activities? How do you know this?
  - Does His planning get in the way of His creativity, His caring, or His joy? Explain:

5. According to the following passages, what are some of the things we must include if we are to have successful experiences at planning?:
- Proverbs 20:18
  
  - Proverbs 24:6
  
  - Proverbs 16:3
  
  - Proverbs 20:5
6. According to Luke 14:26-30, what happens to the Christian if they fail to plan with reference to his spiritual walk with God?:
7. In your group, share some of the spiritual areas that might require planning if the goal the Lord has for us is to be reached:
8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Are you working on some goal that is a struggle for you at this time? Is practical planning standing in your way? Do you find it hard to plan things out as the Bible suggests? Is there someone that you know of that could help you to become a better planner? Would a class, book, or seminar help? Would you ask the Lord to give you some guidance in taking the first step in becoming a better planner?

Is there a spiritual goal that the Lord has impressed upon you but which is not being realized because of inadequate planning? If you can

share this concern in your group, please do so and make it the object of your prayer this week.

If there is no struggle here, Praise the Lord! Thank Him for His blessing!

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About the Words In The Bible for Planning:

The words for to counsel, a counselor, to advise, an advisor, to devise something (as to invent), to skillfully put something together (as an artist would paint a picture), to plan, to prepare (as for a battle), to put together a strategy -- all these concepts come from the same basic root word in the language in which the Bible was originally written (that is, Hebrew).

## Lesson C-1 The Struggle For The Faith

1. As an athlete is preparing himself for a contest, what kind of goals help him to prepare for the race properly and effectively? In other words, what should he focus his thoughts on if he hopes to really win?:
  
2. Read I Corinthians 9:24-27, II Timothy 4:7,8, and Ephesians 6:12.
  - As Paul struggles to win the contest that God has put him in, in reality against whom is he struggling?
  - Why do you think that Paul almost never mentions human enemies when he talks about struggling for the faith, although there are almost always humans involved in his struggle?:
  - In your understanding, what is the difference between struggling for the faith and struggling against someone who differs with us in our beliefs?:
  
  - What kind of effort did Paul give out in his effort for the faith? How much did he sacrifice?:
  - If Paul were here today visiting our Growth Group, what kind of activity and effort do you think he would ask from us in our struggle for/contention for the faith?:
  
3. Read Jude 3, 4 and 19-23. Jude talks about some of the practical aspects of struggling for the faith...
  - What kind of problem does the church face in its struggle for the faith?:

- According to verses 22 and 23, what are we supposed to do with these people so far as it depends on us?:
  - What very important principles must always be kept in mind if there is to be victory (according to verse 20 and 21):
4. Looking at Jude 1, what minimum preparation is needed for someone seeking to ready themselves for the inevitable struggle for the faith?:
  5. Neither Paul nor Jude ever seem to complain about the struggle for the faith. Why do you suppose they speak so optimistically and so positively about something that seems to give some a reason to be fearful?
  6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Afraid to enter the struggle for the faith? Could it be that you might be struggling against someone instead of for someone?

Does the struggle FOR the faith seem hard, and difficult? Is there some preparation needed on your part to more effectively contest for the prize?

Are you willing to enter into the battle? Remember, there is a great prize waiting for you at the end!

Will you pray to that end with your group? If it is not the right time for you, will you ask Him to show you the next step?

## Lesson C-2 The Unbelief Trap

1. Lack of Faith: everyone struggles with the problem of lack of faith at one time or another. Describe some of the things that go through your mind when you can't seem to find adequate faith:
  
2. According to the scriptures, where does faith come from? Where do we go to get it when we need it? Or, do we just have it?

[Note: What is meant by "faith" needs to be made clear: Faith is "a personal confidence in God." There are at least two ways that it can be seen in our world: faith which causes a person to become a Christian -- also called SAVING faith, and the faith that enables us to follow God and do what he asks -- also called SERVING faith. SAVING faith gets us into the family of God, SERVING faith enables us to overcome the obstacles on the road of life.]

- Read Ephesians 2:8,9. Where does SAVING faith come from?
  
- Read Luke 17:1-5. Where did the disciples think SERVING faith came from?
  
- Read John 14:11-14. What is the result of the SERVING faith that has been given to those who follow Christ?

[Note: In the following section, we will examine some of the sources of lack of "serving faith" and explore some of the alternatives.]

3. According to each of the following passages, what forces work to hinder the faith of the person desiring to serve Jesus Christ?:
  - Matthew 24:9-12
  - Ephesians 6:12, 16
  - II Timothy 4:10
  - Hebrews 2:1-3a
  - Hebrews 10:22-25
  
4. In seeking to increase the amount of "serving faith" that a Christian might have available, the Bible tells us that there are two very important things we must remember about the nature of this faith:
  - Luke 17:5,6
  - Hebrews 11:32-34
  
5. In light of the study we have just shared together, what are some of the ways we might increase our "serving faith" before the Lord? What action steps might we take to see this faith realized in this life?
  
6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is your faith smaller than you would like it to be? Are you afraid to use it because it might fail? Have you grown weary from trying to do the right thing without using serving faith?

If you feel free to do it, take a few moments to share with your group your need in this area. Ask the Lord to help you use the faith you have that it might grow. Remember, even tiny mustard seed faith can do many wonderful things!

## Lesson C-3 Who Is In Charge of Your Life?

1. There are many voices in our world calling out for the position of "boss" of our life. Some of these voices are obvious, even blatant. Others are hidden and not very obvious at all. In your group, see how many different kinds of "bosses" you can come up with -- especially some of the hidden ones:
  
2. The word "Lord" means different things to different people. For some it is a negative thing, for others it has a very positive and constructive meaning. When you see the word used in the Bible or see it associated with Jesus Christ, what does it mean to you -- personally?:
  
3. When the Bible speaks directly or indirectly about Lordship of Jesus, what are some of the things it is referring to?:
  - Revelation 5:12
  - Matthew 28:18
  - Philippians 2:10
  - Romans 14:9
  - John 20:26-29
  - I Corinthians 11:27
  - Acts 7:59,60
  
4. Read I Corinthians 15:27,28. What is to be the future for the "Lordship of Christ"? Will it last? Will it eventually win out over the various alternatives to His lordship?

5. What happens when a person says "no" to the "Lordship of Christ" -- are they able to have absolute lordship over their own personal life? What do you think: if we don't submit to the Lord Jesus, do we eventually end up having to submit to some other Lord, such as our lower nature? Look for evidence one way or the other in the following passages:
- Psalm 81:8-16
  - Ephesians 4:17-19
  - Romans 1:21
6. Based on the above study, do you believe that it is God's desire that we serve Jesus Christ as our Lord? Why? What reasons does the Bible give for this? Does it benefit man to do so?

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

Is Jesus your Lord? Have you asked Him to be your Lord? Is it something you have asked Him to do but might have taken back at some time in the past -- even recent past?

Would you be willing to say "Yes" to Him again?

Do you think He would want you to say yes?

If you wish to do so, share your "Yes" with your group.

If your answer is "No" for right now, consider asking Him to help make your "no" a "yes".

## Lesson C-4 What It Takes To Build A Strong Christian

1. We have all met individuals that we felt were strong Christians; these were people we admired because they seem to carry with them a little of God himself. Even some who do not profess to be Christians are able to identify "real" or godly Christians. List some of the qualities you have noticed in such strong and growing Christians:
  
2. What do you think: The people who act like strong Christians, are they born with these qualities, or do they somehow "earn" the right to them from God, or are they trained to act that way, or do they simply experience a miracle that automatically makes them that way when they become Christians?:
  
3. In the following passages, what does the Bible say accounts for the spirit strength and dynamic faith of growing Christians?:
  - Acts 20:32
  
  - I Peter 2:1-3
  
  - Ephesians 4:11-16
  
  - II Peter 3:17,18
  
  - Job 17:9

- Hebrews 6:1

- I Thessalonians 3:9,10

4. Consider the examples of growing spiritual strength and faith in each of the following. What things do you think were going on in their lives that explain why they were growing:

For each of the following verses answer...

*Who is growing? What is the evidence of their growth?*

- Luke 1:80

- Luke 2:40

- II Thes. 1:3

5. Read Ephesians 3:17-19. What is the role of love (i.e., agapé love, the love that flows from God, love that has no limits or conditions) to the whole process of becoming stronger Christians?
6. Read I John 2:27-29 (NIV). What is the role of the filling of God's presence (i.e., the filling of His Spirit or the abiding presence of Christ within a person) in the life of the growing, strong Christian?

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

Most Christians want to grow and become stronger in their faith and commitment. Many struggle with becoming strong because they don't know how, or they feel guilty about past failures, or they are afraid of what it might cost them (such as certain pleasures, friendships, leisure time, etc.) or they feel too weak to even start.

Everyone has felt one of these pressures at one time or another. Can you identify a pressure that hinders your growth? Can you share it with your group? (These things are rather personal so don't get unnerved if you can't share at this time.)

Consider some of the things that the Lord might be saying to you about growing. Would you say "Yes" to growth -- even if it may seem difficult?

Is He speaking to you about one of the areas we have studied in this lesson as a starting point? Would you be willing to say "Yes" to this area?

## Lesson C-5 God Is Always Willing And Able

1. Friendship is a wonderful thing, something we all need if we are to prosper in this life (as Daniel Defoe's story of the lonely Robinson Crusoe so clearly illustrates). Describe some of the responses you have seen or experienced when a friend decides to stop being a friend; describe the experience of being abandoned:
  
2. What kind of attitude toward maintaining personal relationships was demonstrated by the Lord Jesus while He was here on earth?:
  - John 15:15
  - John 14:18
  - John 13:1
  
3. What kind of attitude toward relationships is expressed and/or demon- stated by our Heavenly Father?:
  - Deuteronomy 4:31
  - Joshua 1:5
  - Isaiah 54:10
  
4. Read Deuteronomy 7:9, Psalm 89:1, and Hebrews 6:18.
  - Does God keep His word about His promises?
  
  - For how long a period of time does he keep His promises?
  
  - Toward whom does he refuse to make promises of blessings in the first place?

5. Read Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 6:18 and 13:5. Based on the record in the scriptures we have studied thus far, if Jesus came into the life of a person, would he ever leave that person?
  
6. What happens to us when we start to doubt the existence of our relationship with God? Do you think that God wants people to have doubts about their relationship with Him?
  
7. When we come to the point where we begin doubting that God cares about us or is for us, what action can we take to end that doubt?
  
8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Does God love you? Are you sure about it? Have you thanked Him for His love -- recently?

Do you experience God's love on a regular basis, or does He seem far away and uncaring? Many people have that kind of experience. Sometimes it is lack of communication, sometimes it is offenses that have built up, sometimes it is a misunderstanding. The fact is, God loves you and always will, no matter what may have happened between you. He wants you to renew that relationship and experience His love afresh.

The Bible says: "While we were yet sinners, Christ DIED for us." Do you think that His love and acceptance is any less today? No, of course not. With your group, take another step in His love -- whatever level you may be at this day.

## Lesson D-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 time 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?
- Philipians 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 D-2 How Big Is Our God?

1. There are many reasons why we do not put our trust in God on a daily basis. The reasons are very similar to why we did not put our trust in God at the start when we first heard about Him. What are some of the basic reasons why people don't believe in or trust in God?:
2. Read Isaiah 45:7-11 and 29:15,16. Concerning the complaint that God does not do things the WAY that we would like Him to do them, does He have the RIGHT to do things as He sees fit?:
  - Does He understand enough to know how to do the things He does in the best possible way?

Explain:

3. Does God care about doing what is best and right and good, or does he act in an arbitrary, thoughtless or careless fashion concerning His creation? In the following passages, identify God's attitude toward us His creation:
  - Isaiah 46:4
  - Psalm 31:23
  - Psalm 37:23-25
  - Matthew 10:28-31
  - Isaiah 25:4,5

4. Based on our study give some of the reasons why we might easily overlook the good in the difficult things that God is doing:

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

With your group, discuss some possible areas in your life where you might be having a struggle trusting the Lord. Give some time to looking at that area with the idea that God wants the best for you there and will provide it with your cooperation. If you can, turn that area over to Him afresh in prayer.

## Lesson D-3 How Big Is Our God?

1. The Bible says that the return of Jesus Christ is "at hand" and "imminent" [i.e., could come at **any** moment]. Let us suppose that Jesus arrived within the next hour. What sort of reaction do you suppose your friends and neighbors would have to such an event? What might they do?:
  
2. Describe the **importance** of the Second Coming as it is explained in the Bible (it is discussed in more than 530 verses):
  
3. What does the Bible say the world will be like when the Second Coming of Christ takes place?:
  - Matthew 24:37-39
  - Luke 17:28-30
  - Psalm 37:23-25
  
4. What kind of preparations are in order if the Master is coming back at a time that no one knows?:
  - Mark 13:32-37
  - I Corinthians 1:7
  - I Corinthians 4:5
  - I Thessalonians 5:23
  - Titus 2:11-13
  - I John 2:28

5. Which is more important: to know about the signs and doctrine of the Second Coming (i.e. to understand the important theological implications and teachings regarding it) or to be sufficiently prepared for it --personally -- when it comes? Why?:
  
6. What preparations are the most difficult for people of this age to make in order to be ready for the second coming of Christ?
  
7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

With your group, discuss some possible areas in your life where you might be having a struggle trusting the Lord. Give some time to looking at that area with the idea that God wants the best for you there and will provide it with your cooperation. If you can, turn that area over to Him afresh in prayer.

## Lesson D-3 The How & Why of Being Ready For Jesus

1. The Bible says that the return of Jesus Christ is "at hand" and "imminent" [i.e., could come at **any** moment]. Let us suppose that Jesus arrived within the next hour. What sort of reaction do you suppose your friends and neighbors would have to such an event? What might they do?:
  
2. Describe the **importance** of the Second Coming as it is explained in the Bible (it is discussed in more than 530 verses):
  
3. What does the Bible say the world will be like when the Second Coming of Christ takes place?:
  - Matthew 24:37-39
  - Luke 17:28-30
  - Psalm 37:23-25
  
4. What kind of preparations are in order if the Master is coming back at a time that no one knows?:
  - Mark 13:32-37
  - I Corinthians 1:7
  - I Corinthians 4:5
  - I Thessalonians 5:23
  - Titus 2:11-13
  - I John 2:28
  
5. Which is more important: to know about the signs and doctrine of the Second Coming (i.e. to understand the important theological

implications and teachings regarding it) or to be sufficiently prepared for it --personally -- when it comes? Why?:

6. What preparations are the most difficult for people of this age to make in order to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ?

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

Are you ready for the Second Coming of Christ -- *personally*? This is a very personal question, yet one that will influence many aspects of day to day living.

Perhaps one way to look at it in a positive way might be to ask: "What things am I doing right that I should keep on doing and would be proud of (in the good sense) if Jesus came today? Are there some things that I would like to add to that category?"

With your group, talk over some of the things you might want to add to that list. Ask God to help you.

## Lesson D-4 The God Who Shares His Patience

1. Talk about a time when you "lost your patience." (Pick an incident about something relatively simple.) What is it that you "lost"? Can you describe it?:
  
2. The English word *patience* does not always appear in the Bible passages where the patience of God is described. What English words are used by modern translators to explain the Hebrew and Greek words for the Lord's patience?:
  - Nahum 1:3
  - Jeremiah 15:15 (NIV)
  - Acts 13:17,18 (NIV)
3. In your group, see if you can discover at least one way that the Lord demonstrated patience within the context of the following situations:
  - With the world population before the flood
  - With Moses and the Israelites in the desert
  - With the Jews while Jesus was being crucified
4. Read I Peter 2:18-23. If we receive some pressure, tribulation or distress that we do not deserve, do we have the right to react strongly to it -- especially in a negative way?:

- What did Jesus do under similar circumstances?
  
- What can a person do to respond well to unjust treatment?

5. Read Galatians 5:22,23, Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2. Where does Godly patience come from?:

- From what you have learned from this and the other passages studied, how might one go about acquiring true patience?

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

Sometimes we are ready to say "Lord I need patience -- and I want it right NOW!" We laugh at the humor but it reveals that we are all at least a little afraid to ask for patience fearing that it can only come through problems.

Perhaps its time we stopped seeing them as problems and calling them as they really are: opportunities.

Is there an opportunity in your life right now that needs a good dose of patience? Have you shared your situation with a prayer partner? Have you asked God for that special ability to see it though? Why not ask Him for it right now...

## Lesson D-5 Faith and Treasure

1. The Bible says that "the love of money is the root of all types (or kinds) of evil." In what way does the love of money assist in certain kinds of evil coming out in our lives and in society?:
  
2. If it is true that the love of money aids in the production of certain evils, does it **always** lead to these evils? Can the right attitude toward it do **good** as well? Think of an example of money leading to good:
  
3. According to the following scriptures, where does the money we have come from?:
  - Ecclesiastes 5:19 (NIV)
  
  - I Chronicles 29:12 (NIV)
  
  - Deuteronomy 8:18 (NIV)
  
4. What are some of the specific dangers that the gift of money and possessions can present to us humans?:
  - I Timothy 6:9
  
  - Matthew 19:23
  
  - Mark 4:19

5. Read Hebrews 11:6 and Deuteronomy 8:13,14. What do you think: is "faith" something we are to use specifically in the process of accumulation and distribution of money?

What do you think might happen if we ignored "faith" in the way we collected and spent money?

6. Let us assume for a moment that **faith** means something on the order of "trusting as true what God has said about man and his condition" or "the statements from God about heaven and earth are accurate and we should live by them." According to the following verses, what truth is God asking us to *believe in* or *have faith in*?:

- Matthew 6:19,20

- Luke 12:29-34

- I Timothy 6:17-19

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

How much faith goes into the use of money in your home? That is a very personal question! So is this one: If someone went to the vault in heaven where your valuables -- the ones you sent on ahead -- were kept, how much would be there?

There is a reward for everyone that operates by faith in the area of money. Thank Him for the reward, and if faith is lacking here, ask for His guidance.

## Lesson D-5 Faith and the Future

1. Tomorrow. When you think about tomorrow and the kind of God the Bible describes (you know, loving yet just, creative yet unchanging, powerful yet compassionate) what does tomorrow hold for you as an individual? Between now and Judgment Day, are you optimistic or about the future:
2. Assuming for a moment that we are optimistic about tomorrow , what kinds of things would we end up thanking God for after tomorrow had arrived?:
3. Let us suppose that tomorrow brought us some problems and heart-aches. What kinds of things could we thank God for in those circumstances? [To answer this question, think of a possible difficult circumstance and imagine what you might be thankful for within it]:
4. Read Psalm 40:1-10. How does David respond to the difficult situation he faced in verse 1? What were some of the things he did as a response to God's response?:

- vs. 3

- vs. 4

- vs. 5

- vs. 6
  
- vss. 7,8
  
- vs. 9
  
- vs. 10

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

Can you remember the last time you sang a "New Song" to God for the things He has done? Perhaps you have never sung such a song. In our share and prayer time, see if you can discover something that you have never thanked God for before. Make that your "New Song." Share with God in prayer.

## Lesson D-7 Faith and Generosity

1. Most of us grew up with some kind of "folk proverbs" about possessions -- and the lack of them. An example might be: "A penny saved is a penny earned" or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Share with the group a proverb about possessions that you learned in your earlier years:
  
2. The Bible is full of pointed little truths about possessions. Briefly identify the message or point of each of these little proverbial passages:
  - Deuteronomy 16:17
  
  - Ecclesiastes 5:19
  
  - Jeremiah 17:11
  
  - Proverbs 23:5
  
3. Here are some more of these little truths, but this time the focus is generosity and giving. Briefly state the point of each of the following:
  - Proverbs 11:18
  
  - Proverbs 15:8

- Proverbs 22:9

- Isaiah 58:10

4. Read I Timothy 6:18, Hebrews 13:16, and Deuteronomy 15:10,11. How important is giving in the plan that God has for this present world?:

5. Sometimes the way that God looks at the things we do seems to be very different than the way man sees it. The Bible says that God looks at the heart, at the inner man, and that He evaluates things from an eternal perspective:

- According to Luke 21:1-4, how does God regard a small gift from a poor man?
- According to Proverbs 3:9,10, how does God regard those who are generous with what's earned **first**?; how about those who give just what's left over at the end?

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

The Bible says that where our treasure is, there is where our heart can also be found. This applies to those we love, those in need, and to the work of the Kingdom of God. It is interesting that similar principles apply to all three areas.

Regarding the priority of the Kingdom work, do you see yourself applying the generosity principles we have studied in this lesson? If not, would you like to? Do you believe Him for the blessing He promises if we are following Him in these principles?

If you are ready, ask Him -- through prayer -- to help you grow in the area of generosity. The Bible explains that He hears any time we ask according to His will. Remember, He loves you!

## Lesson D-8 Faith and Obedience

1. We have all come to a traffic sign (even as a youngster) and had the strong urge to pass the sign without stopping to "save time". Yes, it would have been breaking the law and might have gotten us a ticket, yet there remains a strange and perverse little urge deep within us that still says "Go ahead! Do it!" We call it rebellion, but rebellion is really a part of a bigger problem disobedience.

This is, perhaps, a rather bold question to ask, but it will help us get started thinking about today's subject in a practical way: share with the group one area in which you have a problem being obedient:

2. What does the Bible say about the importance of being obedient? Summarize the point made in each of these passages:

- I Samuel 15:22

- Jeremiah 7:23

- Acts 5:29

- Ephesians 5:6

3. What are some of the benefits of being obedient to God? What promises does God make to those who obey Him?:

- John 14:23

- I John 2:17
  
  - Deuteronomy 11:13-15
  
  - Deuteronomy 11:26-28
  
  - Luke 11:28
4. Read I Peter 1:13,14,22 and Acts 5:30-32 and II Corinthians 2:9. Some have said that since those who follow Christ are "no longer under the law", as Paul puts it, we no longer have to obey any laws. Is this a correct conclusion as to what "no longer under the law" means? Are we required to be obedient to God and His commands during this age?:
5. One of the most difficult areas for the Christian to be obedient to God's commands is in the area of giving (sometimes called stewardship). List a couple of the reasons why obedience is a problem here:
6. Read Malachi 3:10 and Matthew 23:23 (NIV). What is the command and the blessing concerning giving? That is, what does God expect us to obey and what does He promise in return?
7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

One of the greatest opportunities we have as God's creation is to follow our Maker's instructions and be blessed accordingly. He is literally waiting to bless us!

Is obedience to God something you wrestle with? Have you come to terms with His commands and blessings concerning giving?

With your group, see if you can share where you are on this subject. Please, be careful to share only at that level which is appropriate for you.

May God richly bless you as you share and grow.

## Lesson D-9 FINDING & HAVING ENOUGH

1. A major chewing gum manufacturer advertises that one of their products provides "pure chewing satisfaction." If "to be satisfied" with something means "to have had enough" or "to need no more", could we rightly conclude that once we chewed their gum, we would not want any more of it?

There are many things that give temporary, often VERY temporary satisfaction. The real question, of course, is what gives satisfaction that lasts: "What are at least two things that really do satisfy us in this life?"

2. What are some of the things that discourage contentment in our lives today?
3. According to the following passages, what kinds of things or situations should help us achieve contentment?:
  - I Timothy 6:8
  - Hebrews 13:5
  - Luke 3:14
  - Job 36:11 (NIV)
  - Proverbs 19:23 (NIV)

4. Read Philippians 4:10-13. See if you can identify the following:

- Through what kind of circumstances does one learn how to be contented?
- According to the Word of God, where does the ability to be contented come from?
- In what kind of circumstances is it possible to be contented?
- Is contentment something you can figure out and achieve on your own?

5. Read (in the NIV) Daniel 4:4-8,25-27,28-32,34. From this slice of history from the life of a great king (Nebuchadnezzar), see if you can discover some answers to some age old questions on contentment:

- What kind of "contentment" do you think he had as mentioned at the start of this story?
- What did God do to teach this man the meaning of the word?
- Where did he finally have to look in order to find the peace of real contentment?

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

This may be difficult for you to talk about, so don't be disturbed if you feel uncomfortable with it: are you content with your circumstances? God wants you to be at peace with Him and undisturbed by the loud appeals from the world. He wants you to be content. With your partner, discuss this important topic and pray together as the Lord leads.