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AT24S

LIVING OUR FAITH  
Student's Lessons

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## LESSON ONE

### HOW OUR FAITH IS DIFFERENT

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Hebrews 1:1-4; Acts 17:22-28a.

MEMORY VERSE: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

CENTRAL TRUTH: God has revealed his complete plan for man's salvation in Jesus Christ.

John and James were discussing their neighbor, Hassim. John said, "Hassim is a Muslim. I am praying that he will one day accept Christ and become a Christian." "Why," asked James. "Doesn't he do what his religion teaches?"

"Oh, yes," John responded, "but even so he will not go to heaven without faith in Jesus."

James replied, "I think that as long as he is devout and working hard to please God, he will go to heaven even if he is a Muslim. It is his effort that counts."

What do you think of James' ideas? Is every religion the same? Will all lead to salvation and relationship with God?

Today we will look at the Christian faith. We will see how it is different from other faiths. We will see how God revealed himself to the world and gave salvation to man. We will clearly see the true path to God.

God Has Revealed Himself to Man: Read Hebrews 1:1.

God chose the Jewish people as his special people. Through them he revealed himself and blessed all the world. He began by revealing himself to Abraham when he chose him and led him to a new land. He continued his revelation to Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and Jacob's children. He used Moses to show the "children of Israel" his power and love. He used the judges, some of the kings and many prophets to reveal who he was. Whenever his people strayed from him, he called them back. His plan was for all people to come to him. He planned to draw all men to him through his people, Israel.

Jesus Christ-God's Final Revelation: Read Hebrews 1:2-4.

At just the right moment in history, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus was God in the form of man. He was the Creator of all life. He came to die for his creation. Jesus showed man exactly what God was like. He controlled the entire universe but freely gave himself to men. He offered himself as a sacrifice for our sin. He conquered sin and death and is now in heaven waiting for the end of time. When all men have heard the good news of salvation, Jesus will return to earth. He will judge all men and draw his own to him.

It is through Jesus Christ that we see God's plan and love for all men. Only in Christianity does God die for his creation. Only in Christianity does God take care of man's sin for him.

Faith For All Men: Read Acts 17:22-28.

Paul spoke to the educated Greeks in Athens. He tried to help them understand that the "unknown god" whom they worshipped was the true God. They already believed that a god had created the universe. Paul wanted them to see that this same God wanted to save them. He tried to help them understand that one God had created all men. He sought to draw them to him. He wanted them all to be saved. Because we live and have our being in him, we must be with him to know the full joy of life. Paul wanted these Greeks to understand and accept this truth.

Salvation By Grace Through Faith: Read the Memory Verse.

Most religions teach that man is a sinner who needs to be saved. Most religions agree that man is not able to live a perfect life. But most religions teach that man can save himself by good works. Or perhaps he can pay for his sin with religious rituals. They believe God stands far off and waits for man to pay for his sin. They believe man can save himself through his own efforts. Only Christianity says man cannot pay for his sins. There is no work good enough. There is no magic strong enough. There is no ritual holy enough. Man is lost and cannot save himself.

Only Christianity offers salvation as a free gift. Only in Christianity does God the creator die for his creation. Only in Christianity does God seek man in order to save him. Only in Christianity can man be saved by the grace of a loving God through faith in Jesus Christ. This is what makes Christianity unique. It is God's final revelation of himself to man.

What This Lesson Teaches Me

We have learned that God has revealed himself to man from the beginning of time. His final revelation of himself was in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus salvation was offered to all men. Salvation is a free gift which we receive through faith. This gift shows us that God is love. His grace saves us. We cannot save ourselves. In this way Christianity is very different from other religions.

We believe that faith in Christ is the only way to be saved. No matter how hard we work or how good we are, it is not enough. God requires perfection. We can be saved only if we accept his free gift in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it matters very much what faith we follow. Christianity is the only way to have a right relationship with God.

To Think About and Do

God wants all people to know him. The Bible tells us many times that God is nearby, ready and waiting for us to call him.

Read Psalms 16:8. Where is God?

Read Psalms 34:18. To whom is the Lord near?

Whom does he save?

Read Psalms 145:18. To whom is the Lord near?

Read Hebrews 10:22. How shall we draw near to God?

Read James 4:8. What will happen when you come near to God?  
God is ready to meet your needs. Will you come near to him today?

Scriptures To Read This Week

Sunday: 2 Corinthians 4:6-12

Monday: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Tuesday: Philippians 2:6-11

Wednesday: Colossians 1:15-20

Thursday: Colossians 1:21-23

Friday: Romans 8:1-9

Saturday: Read Your Bible study lesson for this week.

## LESSON TWO

### NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Matthew 5:1-9

MEMORY VERSE: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Jesus changes us when we accept him as Saviour.

In Lesson One we saw how God planned to save man through Christ. Today we will see how man changes when he accepts God's free gift.

A New Creation: Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

When a person accepts Jesus as his Saviour, he is "in Christ." A special relationship begins between that person and Jesus. He gets his life from Jesus. He lives in Jesus as a plant lives in the earth. If the plant is pulled from the ground, it dries out. It eventually dies. It is the same for the Christian. If he is separated from Christ, he has no life at all.

The person who lives "in Christ" is new. He is different from what he was before he knew Jesus as his Saviour. He is created again, he is born anew, he starts over. All his past sins and mistakes are forgotten. His new life gives him a chance to live as God wants him to.

This new life was planned by God so his relationship with man could be good again. (verse 18) Man had broken the relationship by disobedience. He could do nothing to make the relationship right again, so God did the work for him. (verse 19) He sent Jesus to die in man's place. He paid the penalty for man's sins. Through him, man can become new and clean--a "new creation." He can become fit to have a relationship with Holy God.

Once we are reconciled to God, we have a job to do. (verses 18-20) We become God's ambassadors. We work for him and speak on his behalf. We invite others to be reconciled to God through Jesus.

Character of the New Creation: Read Matthew 5:1-9.

Jesus taught his followers how their lives should change after becoming Christians. He told them how to have blessing and joy. The stories of these people show us what Jesus meant.

After working hard at school, John got a good job which paid well. Although he had a nice house and many things, he was not happy. John was separated from God by his sin. He realized that he had nothing valuable, because he did not have Jesus. His joy began when he came to Jesus.

Jesus taught that people would be happy when they realized they needed him in order to be happy. He is ready to have a relationship with you. Read Matthew 5:3.

Martha had lived a life of sin before coming to Jesus. When she came before the church to tell them of her decision, she cried many tears. She knew she did not deserve the gift of salvation. She knew she deserved to die for her sin. But Jesus made her happy because he forgave her completely.

Jesus taught that mourning for your sin is good. It means you realize how God hates sin. He wants you to be happy as a Christian, so he will comfort you. Read verse 4.

Caleb's parents did not want him to follow Jesus. He was persecuted by his family and neighbors when he became a Christian. They told him to leave home. They kept all his possessions. Caleb did not become angry. He left home quietly, knowing God would take care of all his needs.

Jesus said people would be happy if they were patient and humble. Then he would help them and meet all their needs. Read verse 5.

Judith told her friends, "If you see me do anything which you think Jesus would not do, please tell me. I want to be like Jesus." She studied her Bible and prayed every day. She wanted to know Jesus and do as he wished.

Jesus taught that people would be happy if they really wanted to be like him. If they really try to do what is right, he will help them to be like him. Read verse 6.

Grace was kind to everyone and looked for ways to help people. She said, "Jesus showed love to me and helped me by dying for me. I want to be kind to others because he was kind to me first."

Jesus said people would be happy if they were kind to others. Then God will be even more kind to them. Read verse 7. From the moment Jacob became a Christian, he began to prepare to serve God. He used every opportunity he had to study the Bible. He bought Christian books to learn more. He set his heart and mind on serving God.

Jesus taught that if a person will set his heart on finding him, he will be satisfied. He will find him wherever he looks. (See verse 6 again.)

Job told everyone he met about Jesus. He gave his time to visit and share the gospel. He was happiest when someone accepted Christ. He loved bringing people to Jesus.

Jesus said his followers would be happy if they would spend their time bringing people into a right relationship with God. Then they would really be his disciples. Read John 15:8.

In these verses, Jesus has shown us the characteristics of a person who is born again. Do they describe you?

Crucified with Christ: Read the Memory Verse.

How we can have the characteristics of the Christian life which Jesus taught? The secret is this: Die to our own desires. Let Jesus live in us.

A most wonderful thing happens after we receive the free gift of salvation. The Holy Spirit of God comes to live within us to help us live as we should. He helps us fight sin and follow Jesus's example. We can live a victorious Christian life, if we let Jesus live in us.

What This Lesson Teaches Me

We can restore our relationship with God by accepting Jesus as our Saviour. His Spirit comes to live within us to help us live as God wants us to. He changes our character and makes us like him. He prepares us for service to him. People should be able to see a difference in us when we accept Jesus. They should see that we are led by him and are like him.

#### Things to Think About and Do

Mary became a Christian one night at her brother's house. Before this, she had been afraid of the dark and would never walk alone in the dark. But after receiving Christ as her Saviour, she left her brother's house without fear. She looked up into the night sky and noticed how bright the stars were. She forgot all about how dark the night was.

When you became a Christian, did you look at things differently? If we are new creations, all things should be new. Our eyes should be new. We should want to see Jesus. Our ears should be new. We should want to hear about Jesus. Our desires should be new. We should want to please Jesus. Can others see a difference in you? If you have become a new creation, if Christ is alive within you, you should be different. Ask God to continue to work to change you and make you like him.

Read Matthew 5:1-9 and ask God to help you have the characteristics of a Christian which Jesus mentioned here. Meditate on these. Make them a part of your life.

#### Scriptures To Read This Week

Sunday: Ephesians 5:1-5

Monday: Nehemiah 8:1-8

Tuesday: Acts 17:10-12

Wednesday: 1 Timothy 1:5-7

Thursday: Read Psalms 119:33-40

Friday: Read Psalms 119:41-48

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson for this week.

## LESSON THREE

### STUDYING THE BIBLE

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Psalms 119:9-16; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

MEMORY VERSE: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalms 119:105).

CENTRAL TRUTH: To grow as a Christian, we must study God's Word and apply its teachings to our lives.

Two brothers named Peter and Paul became Christians on the same day during the same worship service. Each was sincere in his decision and truly wanted to follow Jesus.

As time went by, however, people saw a big difference between the two. Peter grew in his faith. He lived a pure life. He witnessed and brought others to Jesus. His neighbors saw how much Jesus had changed his life.

Paul fell into sin. Again and again, he would come before the church to confess his failings. He did not bring others to Jesus. His life was not a good witness to others. They could not see much difference in his life after he became a Christian. Paul did not grow. He remained a "baby" in his faith.

Their pastor was very interested in the difference between the two. He visited them and asked about their lives since they accepted Christ. As they talked, he knew why Peter had grown and matured and Paul had not. He saw one big difference. Since he accepted Jesus as his Saviour, Peter had read and studied the Bible every day. He learned what Jesus was like and what God expected of him. He gained strength from the Bible to live as God wanted him to. Paul had not done this. He read his Bible only when he came to church. He did not know God's Word or get strength from it to resist temptation. Their use of the Bible had made all the difference in the growth of the two brothers.

The Value of Bible Study: Read Psalms 119:9-16.

Psalms 119 tells of the help and comfort the writer gets from reading the Bible. He uses many words for God's Word: law, statutes, precepts, etc. All of these terms refer to the teaching we read in God's Word.

In verses 9-12, he praises the Bible because it helps him keep his life free from sin. A person can be helped to confess his sin and be clean within when he reads the Bible. He can know how to live a righteous life by following its teaching. (verse 9) If he seeks God, he will find him in his Word. When he knows God, he wants to obey him. (verse 10) If he knows God's law, he knows how to obey him. (verses 11-12) Pleasing God becomes important because he knows and loves him. Reading the Bible can change our lives.

Thomas gave us an example of this. He moved from his village to the city to work. He was tempted to begin a sinful relationship with a young woman in his office. He remembered the story of Joseph in the Bible. He had refused to give in to temptation. Thomas was able to resist temptation, too, because he knew his Bible. He knew that sin is not acceptable to God.

Verse 13 shows us that when we know God's Word, we share what we know. When we have been helped by it, we want others to be helped, too.

The Bible brings hope, comfort, healing and victory in times of trial. In verses 14 and 16a, the psalmist says God's Word brings him so much joy that he values it more than riches. Can we say that about what the Bible teaches us? Do we value it above everything?

Verses 15 and 16b show us that the writer thinks about what he reads. He doesn't just read it, he puts God's Word in his heart. (See also verse 11.) He will not forget it. He will use it everyday of his life. He will work hard to understand and know it, so he can understand and know God.

The Power of God's Word: Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

It is helpful to have an older Christian to help and encourage us as we study the Bible. In this passage, Paul encouraged his young friend, Timothy to remain faithful to what he had read in the Bible. He told him to continue to study and think about God's Word.

Timothy had a good foundation because his mother and grandmother had faithfully taught him from the Bible. It was through their teaching that he found God's salvation. Remember that Timothy did not have the New Testament to read. It was through reading the Old Testament that he found God. How much quicker we can find him by reading of his life and ministry in the New Testament!

Paul told Timothy that the Bible can help in at least five ways:

1. It can show you how to be saved through faith in Jesus. (verse 15)
2. It can teach you what God wants you to know and do. (verse 15)
3. It can show you the difference between right and wrong. (verse 16b)
4. It can help you be "complete" or mature in Christ. (verse 17a)
5. It can prepare you for the work which God has for you to do. (verse 17b)

If the Bible can do all this for us, every Christian should study it. Everyone who really wants to grow in Christ will study it.

A Light for Living: Read Psalms 119:105.

God's Word is described as a "lamp to my feet and a light to my path." We need to walk in that light always. If his Word is not in us, then we are in the dark. Walking in the dark can hurt us. In order to be safe, we should follow God's plan for our lives. We can read about that plan in the Bible. If it guides us, we will grow. We will please God and be close to him. People will see the difference in our lives and know our faith is real.

What This Lesson Teaches Me

The Bible is more than just a book. It is the Word of God. Studying it helps us know God and what he wants us to do. It helps us become strong to resist temptations and have happy lives. It increases our faith. Every Christian who wants to be mature needs to study God's Word every day.

Things to Think About and Do

Sometimes we do not study the Bible because we do not know how to study it. You can read a portion and understand it by asking yourself questions about it. Then you can write what it means to you.

Read John 1:1-5, verse by verse. Make yourself think about the verses. Ask God to help you understand what they mean. As you try to understand these verses, ask yourself, "Who is the Word?" (Jesus) "What is meant by "...the Word was with God and the Word was God?" (verse 1). (Jesus and God are one.) "What did Jesus and God do together?" (They created the world.) "What did Jesus give to men?" (life and light) "How powerful is the light?" (more powerful than darkness or evil)

After you have read and understood the verses, write what they mean to you. You might write, "These verses show me that God and Jesus are one. That means God died for me! He created me and saved me. If I stay close to him, evil cannot harm me. He shows me the way to go."

If you study your Bible like this everyday, you will get a lot of help from it. It will become a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. It will light your way and help you be all God wants you to be.

Scriptures To Read This Week:

Sunday: Psalms 136:1-9

Monday: Colossians 1:9-14

Tuesday: James 4:2-10

Wednesday: Matthew 7:7-14

Thursday: Luke 5:15-16; 6:12-13

Friday: Luke 22:39-46

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON FOUR

### GROWING THROUGH PRAYER

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Luke 11:1-10

MEMORY VERSE: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

CENTRAL TRUTH: A growing Christian prays in order to know God and his will.

"I don't understand prayer," said Martha, a new Christian. "If God knows what we need before we ask him, why do we have to ask him?"

"Prayer is much more than just asking God for things," replied Pastor James. "It is also praising him and thanking him. We grow as Christians when we pray because we listen to him and know his will. He shows us when we have sinned so we can ask for his forgiveness."

"How did you learn that prayer is all that, Pastor?" asked Martha.

"Well, I have studied the model prayer of Jesus. It showed me many things about prayer. Why don't we look at it together now?"

Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Read Luke 11:1.

They read in Luke 11 that after Jesus had prayed, his disciples asked him to teach them to pray. They had seen how important prayer was to Jesus. There was something special about the way he prayed. His prayers brought him joy and peace. They were more than just ritual or habit.

"They saw that Jesus' prayers were conversations with God. They wanted to know how to talk like he did, Martha," explained the pastor. "Let us look at what Jesus taught the disciples about how they should pray. We call it the Model Prayer."

The Model Prayer: Read Luke 11:2-4

"The first surprise the disciples had was that he said they should call God 'Father,'" explained Pastor James as they read verse 2. "Jesus wanted them to know they could call God Father because God loved them and cared for them as a Father loves his children."

"Well, my father did not love me. He beat me and my mother and then he ran away and left us without anything. I don't like to think of God as Father," said Martha in a sad voice.

"I know that many earthly fathers are not what they should be. But our heavenly Father is loving and kind. He is the best example of a father! He gives us all we need. He is trustworthy and faithful. He protects us and cares about what happens to us. He will never leave us. God is the kind of father we all wish we could have. When we receive Christ as our Saviour, God becomes our loving heavenly Father who will not harm us in any way," said Pastor James.

"This is clear in verses 11-13," added Pastor James. "Let us read these verses together." (Read these verses now.)

Then Pastor James continued, "After calling on God, Jesus taught the disciples to praise his name. In those days a person's name meant his whole personality. So they were praising God and who he is. Jesus wanted God's name to be 'hallowed' by all men. That means men would know God is holy. Jesus would do whatever he could to help other men honor God.

"Next Jesus said they should ask for God's will to be done. He asked God to make man's will the same as his will. Jesus wished for this, but he knew God had to work in the hearts of men to change them. Only then would they obey him."

"So although this is a statement, Jesus was really asking God to make these things happen, is that right?" asked Martha.

"Yes, I believe it is," replied Pastor James. "Then Jesus went on in verses 3-4 to teach the disciples to ask God for three things. First, he said they should ask for their daily bread. 'Bread' probably meant all their physical needs. This showed that he knew all needs would be met by God. Then, he told them to ask for forgiveness of their sins. Jesus said a very interesting thing here. He asked God to forgive sins because we forgive others who sin against us."

"Will God not forgive us if we do not forgive others?" asked Martha.

"I think it means that if we are unwilling to forgive others, we do not really see ourselves as sinners. We should forgive others because Jesus has forgiven us. To hold on to anger or hurt feelings is sin. It hurts us." "Yes, I know that is true. I was angry at my father for a long time. When I finally forgave him, I felt peaceful," added Martha.

"Yes, I have experienced that, too. Finally, Jesus told the disciples to ask God to keep them from sinning. He knew God had the power to help us resist temptation. We must ask God to do this," said Pastor James.

Keep On Asking: Read Luke 11:5-10.

"In these next verses, Jesus told his disciples a story. It is about a man who bothered his neighbor at night until he answered him and gave him what he wanted. Jesus said because the man kept asking, the neighbor gave him what he wanted," explained Pastor James.

"Does that mean we can change God's mind if we keep on asking and bothering him?" asked Martha.

"I don't think it means that exactly," replied Pastor James. "God knows what we need and what he is going to do for us. He has known that since the beginning of time. But God wants us to ask without giving up. In a way, this shows him how serious we are about what we are asking. And sometimes, as we continue to ask, he helps us understand what to ask for. But whatever happens, God will answer. We see that clearly in verse 10. And whatever his answer is, we know it is for our good. He only gives us the best."

"Sometimes it doesn't seem like that is true," said Martha sadly.

Abide in Me: Read John 15:7.

"I know, Martha. Sometimes God's will is not our will," replied Pastor James. "But if you read John 15:1-7, you will see that through prayer we can know God's will. We can become a part of him. He draws us to him as we pray so we can know

him and his will for our lives. If we pray according to his will, we will always get what we ask for. Our goal is to know him well enough to know what to ask for."

"Yes, I see!" said Martha excitedly. "If we ask for what HE wants we will always get it. The secret is to know what to ask for!"

"Exactly," said Pastor James. "And that is why prayer is so important to a Christian. It helps us know God well enough to know his will. Then we can love and serve him in the way we should."

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

Prayer is a very important part of our Christian life. Through prayer, we talk to God, our Saviour. We get to know him and his will for our lives. We praise him and thank him for our blessings. We receive his guidance when his Spirit speaks to us. If we pray when we read the Bible, God helps us understand his Word.

God wants us to know him, so we will know his will for our lives. He want us to pray for his will to be done. Then our lives will be filled with the best which comes from him. He wants us to be faithful in our prayers. He promises to answer when the time is right. God is faithful to keep all his promises.

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Read these verses to see what we learn from Jesus about prayer.

Mark 1:35\_\_\_\_\_

Mark 6:46-47\_\_\_\_\_

Luke 3:21\_\_\_\_\_

Luke 5:15-16\_\_\_\_\_

Luke 6:12\_\_\_\_\_

Luke 22:41-42\_\_\_\_\_

John 11:41\_\_\_\_\_

John 17:20\_\_\_\_\_

In these verses Jesus taught about prayer. Meditate on each and ask God to help you understand and practice its teaching. Matthew 5:44; 6:6-8; Mark 14:38; Luke 10:2; 18:1.

#### SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Acts 2:44-47

Monday: 1 John 1:1-4

Tuesday: 1 John 1:5-10

Wednesday: Ephesians 2:14-18

Thursday: Ephesians 2:19-22

Friday: Galatians 6:1-10

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON FIVE

### GROWING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Colossians 3:9b-17

MEMORY VERSE: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians can grow through fellowship with other Christians if they work together in peace and unity.

We can read about the development of the church in the New Testament. In Acts we read how the first Christians surprised people because they lived and shared together in love. Their comment was, "See how they love one another!" The way they related to one another drew men to Christ. They wanted what these Christians had.

Paul reminded the early Christians in his letters that Jesus unites all men. When we accept Christ we become a part of his family. Paul said we become the body of Christ on earth. He breaks down all barriers of race and class. He takes away the problems which come when people of different backgrounds live together. The differences exist, but we can live together peacefully. His Holy Spirit works to change us.

John's letters reminded the early Christians that love is the basis of our faith. He says if we do not have love, we do not have Christ within us. It is Jesus' love which binds us together and gives us peace.

Clothed in God's Grace: Read Colossians 3:9b-12.

When new Christians were baptized they took off their clothes and put on a white robe. This was a symbol of the change that had taken place within their hearts. It was plain for all to see that there was a change in the person. But Paul said that more than just the clothes should be changed. He said man's nature should change when Jesus came into his life. He took off the old sinful nature. He put on the new nature which is changed by God. This new nature is becoming more and more like Jesus every day.

Jesus came to save all men. He did not come just for the Jews, the educated, or the wealthy. His salvation was for all. Paul reminded the Colossian Christians that when Jesus lived in their hearts, their differences were removed. And so in the early church, former Jews worshipped with former pagans. The wealthy worshipped with the poor. Slaves and masters sat side by side, their differences ignored, their relationships changed.

Certain characteristics helped the Christians live together in peace in spite of their differences. They tried to develop these:

- Compassion and mercy for others which leads to loving action
- kindness, which is goodness shown to others when they do not deserve it
- Lowliness of humility which removes all pride and values all as children of God
- Meekness which shows God's control in his life
- Patience which recognizes one's own weakness and leads to forgiveness of others

Forgiveness Because You Were Forgiven: Read Colossians 3:13-15.

Forgiveness should be given freely because it was given freely to us. Jesus said we should forgive because we needed to be forgiven. We have no right to hold on to our anger and hurt if God was merciful to us and forgave us. Forgiving others is God's way.

LOVE binds everyone together in perfect harmony. Love does not look for wrong but looks for ways to help others. Love should be the main characteristic of every Christian.

If Christians ask God to help them have these characteristics, there will be harmony in the church. Verse 15 says if we let Christ's peace rule our hearts, we will have reasons to be thankful.

All in Jesus' Name: Read Colossians 3:16-17.

When the church met together they did many different things. They studied God's Word and listened to teaching. They were admonished when they fell short of God's plan. They sang songs of praise together in worship. They shared food and fellowship. All these activities were good and helpful. In all of them they could be unified and at peace. But they had problems from time to time. Paul gave them a good measuring stick for everything they did. He said, "Ask yourselves if Jesus would be pleased with what you are doing and saying. If so, do it and say it. If not, do not do or say it." What a wonderful way to test ourselves! If Jesus would do it or say it, it is good. If he would not, we should stop ourselves. If we are faithful to use this test, we will have reason to be thankful to God. He is working in us to change us. We are working to become more like Jesus. The characteristics of the new nature are becoming part of us. We will please God in our lives and fellowship with other believers.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

When we become Christians, we join the family of God. We become part of the body of Christ. We are united with all other believers through the relationship we have with Jesus. God is our Father, Jesus our Brother. That makes all other believers our brothers, too. We should love them and show that love in action and speech. This is God's will for us.

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me..." (Matthew 11:29). Later when he was explaining the cost of being his disciple he said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). After humbly washing his disciples' feet, he said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

In Philippians 2:1-2., Paul begged the Philippian Christians to live together as one body.

Read Philippians 2:3-4. What did Paul tell the people not to do?

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What did he tell them to do? \_\_\_\_\_

Read Philippians 2:5-8. What did Jesus do to show he did not care to grasp being equal to God?\_\_\_\_\_

How did he show his humility?\_\_\_\_\_

Read Philippians 2:9-11. What was his reward for obedience and humility?\_\_\_\_\_

We, too, will receive a reward for our obedience to God as we practice humility like Jesus did. We will glorify God. We will live in peace with our brothers. We will know the joy of being like Jesus.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Psalms 1

Monday: Psalms 21:1-7

Tuesday: Matthew 6:1-6

Wednesday: Matthew 6:7-15

Thursday: Revelation 4:1-11

Friday: Hebrews 10:24-25

Saturday: Read Your Bible Study Lesson.

## LESSON SIX

### GROWING THROUGH WORSHIP

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Isaiah 6:1-8

MEMORY VERSE: "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians grow through worshipping God.

Gideon was chosen by his church to lead the music in the worship service. He planned the songs, the prayers, time for announcements and special music. He met with the pastor each week to plan.

One week as they met to plan, the pastor suggested that they plan a time of silent prayer. Gideon said, "Oh, Pastor, that is just a waste of time. People do not like to sit in silence. Let's have a song instead."

The pastor said, "Gideon, I like songs, but we have to think about our purposes as we lead worship. We have to ask ourselves what we are trying to do as we meet together."

"Well, aren't we trying to make the people feel lively and happy?" asked Gideon.

"Is that why we meet together each week for worship, Gideon?" "Well, I don't know. I guess I never really thought about it. Why do we have worship, if it isn't to make us feel good?" asked Gideon.

"The best example we have of true worship is found in the book of Isaiah. Here we read of a time when Isaiah came to the temple. From this story, we can see why we worship. We can see what we should try to accomplish as we plan worship for our church."

Meeting God in Worship: Read Isaiah 6:1-2.

Isaiah came into the temple. He was feeling sad because the king Uzziah, had died. Uzziah's son was now king. He was not strong and faithful like his father had been. Isaiah was worried about the future of Judah.

As he entered the temple, he saw the Lord. He was seated on a throne, high and lifted up. His coat filled the whole temple. This picture shows what Isaiah thought of God as he saw him. He was great. He was big and powerful. Isaiah was filled with awe.

Above the throne sat seraphim. These were creatures who had three sets of wings. They covered their faces and feet with two sets. With the third they flew about. This showed their respect and honor for God. It showed that they had been purified by him. It showed that they were ready to go wherever he told them to go.

The seraphim praised the holiness of God. Only God is holy, perfect, without sin. Before God's holiness Isaiah felt sinful. As he looked on the power and glory of God, he was overcome by his own guilt.

Isaiah called his sin "unclean lips." Man speaks what is in his heart. If this heart is pure, pure words come out. If it is not, his sin is seen in his actions and words. What was visible in Isaiah's life was dirty compared to Holy God. He, and the rest of Judah, needed to be cleansed by God.

As we see God when we worship, we too should see our sin.

Confession and Cleansing: Read Isaiah 6:6-7.

As soon as Isaiah confessed his sin, God was ready to help him. He sent the seraphim to cleanse him. They touched his lips with a hot coal. This showed that he was purified.

God is ready to show us our sin and to cleanse us as we come to him in worship. When we recognize our sin and ask for his help, he will give it immediately. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Ready for Service: Read Isaiah 6:8.

Once Isaiah was made pure, he heard God's voice. God saw Judah's sin and wanted to help them repent and come back to him. He needed a voice, someone to be his witness and preacher. He asked, "...Whom shall I send...?" (Isaiah 6:8).

Because Isaiah had seen God's glory, he saw his own sinfulness. When he asked God to cleanse him, God answered his need immediately. Then Isaiah was able to hear God and was ready to do whatever he asked of him. He answered without hesitation, "...Here Am I! Send me" (verse 8). He wanted to serve God because he saw his greatness and was thankful for his forgiveness. He wanted to give God the gift of his service. Like the seraphim, he was ready to go anywhere at God's command.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

After looking at these verses with Gideon, the pastor said, "So you see, Gideon, worship should help us see God and his holiness. It should help us see ourselves and our need for his help. Once we have it, we can hear his voice. We are ready to go out into the world and serve God however he asks us to. We are ready to obey him."

Gideon replied, "I see now, Pastor, and I see why it is important to pray, especially silent prayer. We need to listen to God, as well as praise him."

"Yes, Gideon," replied the Pastor, "and you see that although worship does make us feel good, it is not only for that. The most important thing is that we prepare ourselves for service to God."

As they continued to plan for the worship service, Gideon thought about how they could help the people do that.

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Jesus had a lot to say about false worship. He knew that worship was more than just attendance and ceremony. Look in Matthew 6:1-8 to see some of the things Jesus said about worship. Ask yourself these questions about your own worship.

Verse 1     Do we worship to be seen by men or because God is worthy?

Verse 2 Do we give offerings so men will see us or because we love God and want to help in his work on earth?

Verses 3-4 Do we seek a reward for our giving?

Verses 5-6 Do we pray to be praised by men? Do we make a show of prayer?

Verse 7 Do we pray meaningfully, speaking to God? Or do we use the same words over and over again?

Verse 8 Do we trust God to answer our prayers and give us what is best?

Ask God to help your worship be more acceptable to him. Then it will help you grow and be able to serve God better.

#### SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Psalms 23

Monday: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Tuesday: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Wednesday: James 2:14-17

Thursday: 2 Corinthians 8:1-6

Friday: Romans 12:1-8

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON SEVEN

### GROWING THROUGH GIVING

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Romans 12:1-8

MEMORY VERSE: "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians dedicate their lives and resources to Christ.

The pastor visited a young couple who had joined the church. He asked them about when they had accepted Christ. Both shared happily. "And since that time," said the husband, "we have given all our lives to the Lord. We try to serve him in all that we do."

"I am so happy to hear that," said the pastor. "We will look forward to seeing you minister in our church. Let me give you these offering envelopes so we can record the giving of your tithe of your income." The couple looked surprised, then uncomfortable. The pastor noticed and said, "Do you not want your giving recorded? Do you like to give your tithe in secret?"

The young man answered, "Well, Pastor. You see, we are just starting out in our married life. We still have to buy many things for our home, and we are expecting a baby as well. We do not feel that we can give a tithe. We just give whatever we can each week. We feel that is enough for now."

Can we give "our whole lives" to God and withhold our tithes and offerings? What does Christian stewardship include? We will look at this matter today.

The Christian's Duty Toward God: Read Romans 12:1-2.

Stewardship begins by admitting that all things belong to God. We are to care for them and use them to build his kingdom. God does not force us to use his money and gifts as he wants. As with all things, we have a choice.

Paul recognized that the first thing we need to give God is ourselves. This includes our souls, minds and bodies. A person cannot truly give God his soul without giving him his body, the house of the soul. Since the mind commands the body, it too must belong to God. Paul said we must present our bodies to God as an offering. We know that an offering must be holy to be acceptable to God. Paul encouraged Christians to live holy lives so their sacrifices would be acceptable to God.

He warned them that the world would try to fit them into its mold. People would try to tell them how to act and what to say. Paul reminded them that the Holy Spirit would help them resist the world. Then they would be the good, acceptable and complete sacrifice that God required.

The first step of Christian stewardship is to give ourselves totally to God. Then he can work in us to help us be all he wanted us to be.

The Christian's Duty to Himself: Read Romans 12:3-5.

We are what we are by the grace of God. If we are good, it is only because he has made us that way. If we can do something, he has given us the ability to do

it. Paul wanted Christians to remember this. He did not want any Christian to be proud of himself. He wanted him to remember that all things come from God.

Another important truth to remember is that each of us is important. Some people have problems with pride, but many people have problems with shame. They feel they are not good and cannot do anything. Verses 4-5 are clear in saying that all members are important and have something to give to the Church and to God.

The second step of Christian stewardship is to recognize our worth before God. This means we should not think of our selves too highly. God is our measure. Before him, we should be humbled. However, we should realize that we are very important to God. He died for us. He gave every believer gifts to use for him. Each one is important in building the body of Christ. We should value what God has given us and use it for his glory.

The Christian's Duty to the Church: Read Romans 12:6-8.

God has given each Christian spiritual gifts to use in the church. These gifts allow the church to do its work in the world. Paul listed some of these gifts and urged Christians to use them to serve God.

Some are given the gift of prophecy. We call these people preachers today. Some are given the gift of service. They help meet the needs of others. The gift of teaching is given to some. Teachers help build up the body as they teach new believers and others. Some are exhorters. These members have the gift of encouraging others. Some are given the gift of giving. They are blessed with great joy as they give freely to the church and to those in need. Others are given the gift of leadership. These help organize the work of the church. Finally, Paul lists the gift of mercy. These people show Christ's kindness to those who need it.

From these verses, we see the third step of Christian stewardship. After we have given ourselves to God and recognize our value, we are ready to serve him. As we use the gifts God has given us, we are good stewards.

The Gift of Giving: Read 2 Corinthians 9:7.

God expects all believers to give a tithe of their income. He wants us to give joyfully because we want to give. It should come from a grateful heart. We should give cheerfully because God has given us so much. When we give faithfully, we receive more blessings that we can hold.

Some people, however, have the gift of giving which lets them give much more than the tithe.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

Christians who want to grow, must realize that God is the owner of all things. We are to use and care for the things he has given us as faithful stewards. This includes our bodies, minds and souls. It means our abilities and our service. It means our time and our money. Everything we have belongs to God. We must use it all to bring glory to him. When we do this, God blesses us. Cheerful givers are never sorry they gave.

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-13. Answer the questions which follow.

1. What does "sowing" mean in verse 6?
2. If we give freely, how will we receive?
3. How should we not give? (verse 7)
4. What can God do for us? (verse 8)
5. What will we receive for our generosity? (verses 10-12)
6. Does this "enrichment" necessarily mean material things and money?
7. Is giving required by God? (verse 13)

God tells us to give back to him part of what he has given us. If we obey him, we are blessed. That is his promise. Will you test him today? You will find that he is true. He will bless you as he promised.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Proverbs 2:1-15

Monday: Proverbs 24:3-7

Tuesday: Mark 1:16-22

Wednesday: Mark 6:7-13

Thursday: Mark 6:30-34

Friday: Ephesians 4:11-16

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON EIGHT

### TRAINING FOR SERVICE

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Mark 1:16-20; Ephesians 4:11-16

MEMORY VERSE: "And Jesus said to them, `Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men'" (Mark 1:17).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians are called to service and must be trained for it.

Hannah came home from work with exciting news. "I have been chosen to take a special course to learn more about the business."

"Don't you know how to do your job?" asked her mother.

"Yes, but everyone knows if you want to move ahead in your career, you have to get more training. This is a great opportunity for me!" Hannah said. "Now I can get a higher position and more responsibility."

Hannah said that everyone knows if you want to move ahead you have to train. Is that true for the Christian, too? If we want to be the best Christian we can be, do we have to work at it? Do we have to study? Do we need training? The Bible shows us that we do. Everyone who "moved ahead" in faith spent a lot of time training. We will look at how to train for Christian service in our lesson today.

The Call to Service: Read Mark 1:16-17, 19.

Jesus passed by Lake Galilee and saw four men whom he knew, Peter, Andrew, James and John. Jesus had met these men earlier. He realized they were some of the men God wanted him to train for service. They were busy at their work, fishing or mending their fishing nets. Jesus called them from their work and asked them to follow him.

"Follow me" were words which rabbis or special teachers used to call their disciples. The men understood that Jesus was asking them to be his disciples. He would teach them more about God and how to do his work.

Jesus called men who were busy. He does not seek lazy people or people with nothing to do. He calls us while we are busy and asks us to be busy for him.

He usually does not ask us to do something which is very different from what we are doing or like to do. He asked these fishermen to become "fishers of men." The work would be the same, only the catch would be different. It is like that when he calls us. Most of the time he uses us where we are. Or he calls us to do something which we like to do.

The Cost of Service: Read Mark 1:18 and 20.

Jesus called these men while they were working. They responded immediately. They dropped the nets they were casting. They left the boat where they were working. They left their families. They followed Jesus when he called them.

When Jesus calls, how do we respond? Are we willing to drop what is in our hands and follow him like Simon and Andrew? Are we willing to leave possessions and family like James and John? If we want to be disciples of Jesus, there is

a cost. We must be willing to follow him where and when he says. We must be willing to give up our plans and our wills, so we can follow his plans and his will. If we want to serve God, we must do it in the way he asks.

Training for Service: Read Ephesians 4:11-12. Jesus established the Church for our benefit. It gives us Christian fellowship and opportunities to grow.

God has chosen some to be evangelists, apostles, prophets, teachers and preachers. These people have the spiritual gifts which help all of us grow as Christians. We can learn from them, if we listen when they teach and preach. We should take advantage of the opportunities given to learn. Most churches have regular classes for teaching its members. We should attend these sessions if we are serious about growing in our faith. This is God's plan for his Church. This is how he builds up the Body of Christ.

The Mature Church: Read Ephesians 4:13-16.

God wants the Church to be mature in unity and knowledge. He wants our faith and service to be firmly established in Jesus. If it is, the Church will have the qualities which will draw others to Jesus. It will be strong, yet loving. It will be a working, serving Church. Each member will be doing the work he has been called to do.

For the Church to be mature, each member must be mature. For each member to be mature, all members must be trained. Each must take seriously his call to service. He must learn what the Bible says. He must learn how to minister in Jesus' name. Then he will have a part in building a strong unified church which is serving God as he has asked.

The Master Trainer: Read the Memory Verse.

When Jesus called his disciples, he did not say, "Okay, now you are called, get to work?" No, he spent three years with them, teaching them what they needed to know to be faithful servants. He himself, trained them. He is still the Master Teacher. He gave his Holy Spirit to us to help us understand and remember what we have been taught. He will help us as we train to be the best Christians we can be.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

Jesus still calls disciples to follow him. He still wants them to do his work on earth and trains them, if they are willing to learn. He has planned for their instructions by giving some Christians the gifts needed. He started the Church, the body of believers, to support his followers.

Those who are serious about being his disciples, will enter a training program, just like Hannah did for her job. Just as no one can get ahead at work without training, neither can the Christian move forward without it. We cannot grow without effort. Being a disciple is costly. It takes time and energy. Are you willing to be a disciple of Jesus? Are you willing to work at growth? The Holy Spirit is ready to help you. Answer Jesus' call today: "...Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Christians need to train for the work they are given to do. Many times they can receive that training through their church. But at times, one must let God teach him privately what he needs to know. Read these verses for help in this.

John 14:26. Who is ready to help us? \_\_\_\_\_

What will he do for us? \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:27. How can we be sure we will be taught by him? \_\_\_\_\_

John 15:5. How can we be sure to grow in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 2:15. How should we prepare for service? \_\_\_\_\_

What is an important tool for our growth? \_\_\_\_\_

To be the best we can be, we must work at it. Begin training to be the best today. Read your Bible, attend Bible study, pray for guidance. You will grow if you faithfully train for growth.

#### SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Matthew 6:25-34

Monday: Matthew 7:13-14

Tuesday: Matthew 5:10-11

Wednesday: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Thursday: Romans 5:1-5

Friday: Ephesians 6:10-18

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON NINE

### GROWING THROUGH STRUGGLE

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 5:10-11; 6:25, 31-34; Ephesians 6:10-18

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

CENTRAL TRUTH: We grow by overcoming each day's tests and temptations.

Elijah was born with a birth defect. His legs had no strength. He could not use them at all. The doctors told his mother that when he was two years old, he could have an operation. Then if he worked very hard to develop the muscles in his legs, he would gain the use of them.

He received the operation as planned. Afterwards, his parents worked with him everyday to exercise his muscles. This hurt Elijah very much. He would cry and try to get away from them, but they knew he had to suffer the pain to gain the use of his legs. Although they had to hurt him now, in the end, he would be thankful. He would be able to walk. If they did not put him through this pain now, he would be a cripple for his whole life. So, every day they faithfully exercised his legs as the doctor told them to do. In time, the pain lessened. His legs became strong. He overcame his problem by enduring the pain of the exercise. His parents allowed him to endure the pain so his legs would grow strong.

No one likes to suffer, and no one enjoys seeing another suffer. Sometimes, however, suffering is necessary for growth.

Happy Through Persecution: Read Matthew 5:10-11.

Jesus told his disciples openly that if they followed him, they would have persecution. Others would hate them because they did not want to hear what God required of them. Jesus said if we could be faithful through the persecution, we would be happy. We would gain the kingdom of heaven.

It is not easy to endure persecution. It hurts us when we are rejected by family and friends. It is hard to be laughed at. But Jesus endured all of this for our sakes. We are called to the "narrow road," the "hard way." We are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps. If we are faithful, we will be rewarded. We will know joy and have eternal life.

Trusting Through Difficulties: Read Matthew 6:25, 31-34.

Many people followed Jesus because of the miracles he did. They liked the idea of being fed and healed. But when they were called upon to take up their cross and follow Jesus's example, they turned away.

Many people today turn to Jesus because they think all their problems will end. Did Jesus promise that? No, but he did promise that God would be with us through all our trials. He did say that God knows what we need and will give us what we need.

He urged his followers not to worry. At times, that is hard because life is hard. Sometimes it seems like we will not be able to overcome our problems.

But Jesus promised, "...Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (verse 33). We need to trust God in times of need. This does not mean we can sit back and do no work for ourselves. But it does mean that we do not become discouraged in our difficult lives. We trust God to take care of us. We keep on trusting even when times are hard.

Protected Through Struggles: Read Ephesians 6:10-18.

Paul thought of our problems, temptations and trials as battles. He knew Satan was responsible for all the evil that comes into our lives. He trusted God to fight with us against our enemy. He knew God was ready to give us the weapons we need to overcome him.

Paul used the Roman soldier's armor to help us understand this idea. The soldier first wrapped himself in truth. Some Bible translations say he put on a belt of truth. This would give his back strength as he stood in battle. The belt also held his sword. For us, our belt is truth. We can stand in battle if we hold on to God's truths.

Next the soldier put on his breastplate to protect his body from wounds. Our breastplate is God's righteousness which we receive when we confess our sins. If we stand righteous before God, he will protect us from the enemy. The soldier had special shoes which made him ready to move into battle. Our shoes are the gospel of peace. We must know what the gospel is and be ready to share this gospel wherever we go.

The Roman soldier carried a wooden shield to catch and put out the burning arrows of his enemy. Satan shoots arrows of doubt, fear and temptation at us. We can put them out with our faith.

The helmet protected the head. Our helmet is our salvation. We can put it on and know that the enemy cannot change our thoughts or actions.

The soldier fought with a sword. Our sword is God's Word. It can cut the enemy down and make him run away. We saw Jesus defeat Satan by using Scriptures. We can defeat him, too, if we know God's Word and use it against him.

Verse 18 shows us our final weapon, prayer. We put on each piece of our armor with prayer. We should pray at all times, with alertness, for all believers. We support ourselves and others with prayer.

The Crown of Victory: Read the Memory Verse.

When we stand the test and endure the trials, we will be rewarded with a crown of life. This means abundant life now and eternal life with God. We know the joy of overcoming our enemy and being true to God.

WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

God allows trials to come to our life, so we will grow. Without struggle, we remain babies. But God does not leave us alone in our problems. He stands with us to help us overcome. He gives us victory if we wear his armor and let him work in our lives. If we seek him and his kingdom, he will always be ready to help us and give us what we need.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

"Fear not, for I am with you, but not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). God has promised us his protection. Read these verses to see how God has protected his children throughout history.

Exodus 14:13-14

What were the Israelites to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What would God do for them? \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 17:45

What were David's weapons? \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

What weapons did Paul use? \_\_\_\_\_

Where should these weapons be? \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 4:12

What has God given us as a weapon? \_\_\_\_\_

How is it described? \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 40:31

What will happen to us if we depend on the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_

God is our shield and defender. Depend on him in times of struggle.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Isaiah 1:16-17

Monday: Matthew 5:21-26

Tuesday: Matthew 5:27-30

Wednesday: Matthew 5:31-37

Thursday: Matthew 5:38-44

Friday: Romans 15:1-6

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON TEN

### CONCERN FOR OTHERS

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: 1 John 3:11-18, 23-24

MEMORY VERSE: "...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Our Christian faith is shown by our loving concern for others.

One day some Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus. "And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:35-39).

First, love God. Then love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. These are the two greatest commandments. In fact, Jesus said, if we obey these two, we have obeyed them all. If you think about that, you will see that it is true.

The Message: Read 1 John 3:11.

John believed that the basic message God had for man was love. He reminded these Christians to whom he wrote that this was true from the beginning. How far back did John go to reach the "beginning?" Did he go back to the Garden of Eden? God's message was love there. Did he go back to Abraham? Again, God showed his love. To Moses? Love. To David? Love. To the sinful, rebellious Israelites? Always love. Since God's message to man was love, it should not surprise us that he would want us to love each other. We copy him. He is love. So we love each other to be like God has since the "beginning."

Hatred and Love: Read 1 John 3:12-15.

Sometimes, to explain something, we explain its opposite. This is how John began to explain love. To help us understand what he meant, he explained hatred. Hatred kills. It kills the spirit of another even if it does not kill his body. It also destroys the one who hates. This is always true. Hatred brings death. We can come out of this death by trusting in Jesus. When we do, we stop hating. We begin to love. This is a sign of our union with Jesus. (verse 14) John taught that anyone who hated could not be a child of God's. God does not teach hatred. He teaches only love.

Love and Sacrifice: Read 1 John 3:16-18.

Jesus showed us what love means when he died for us. Love means putting others' needs before your own. It means laying down your life for another. That is what Jesus did for us. That is what he asks us to do now.

Laying down your life does not necessarily mean that your body dies. But it means you are willing to do anything to help someone in need. You are willing to forget about yourself. You give up whatever is needed in order to help them.

God responds to man in love. If we belong to him, we ought to respond to others in love. John urged all Christians to love others and show our love through our

actions. If we see someone in need and do not help them, God's love is not in us. Without actions, our love is dead. No one can see it. John says unless it is visible, it does not exist.

The Marks of a Christian: Read 1 John 3:23-24.

John states two requirements for belonging to God. First, we must have faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Then we must love one another. These are the marks of a Christian, faith and love. If these are not present in our lives, we have no part in God's kingdom. We do not belong to him.

John reminded us that we know we are his by the power of his Holy Spirit who lives in us. His Spirit makes us sure of our salvation. He helps us have faith and show God's love.

The Spirit's Fruit: Read the Memory Verse.

As God's Holy Spirit lives in us, he helps us grow. He helps us understand God's will for us. He gives us the desire to want to be like him. He cultivates God's characteristics in our lives. These characteristics are: love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The foundation of them all is love. If we have God's love, we will have all the other characteristics. This fruit is the evidence of God's control of our lives. It shows the world that his Spirit has filled our lives.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

God is Love. If we are his children and his Spirit lives within us, we will show his love to others. We will notice when people are in need. We will not just think about ourselves all the time. We will have a real desire to serve others and help them. If this love is not visible in our lives, we are not his. John clearly states that if he has filled our lives, we will show his love to others. This is a sign of our faith. Without love our faith is dead.

If your faith is weak and your love is not visible, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. Ask him to cultivate his fruit in your life. He is waiting to help you grow. He wants you to lead others to God through your deeds of love.

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Jesus commanded us to do good works. He gave us his example. We should lay down our lives in service to others. But does that mean we always give everyone what they want?

What would you do if a man came to your door, dirty and dressed poorly? He asked for some money to feed his family. As you came near to him, you smelled beer on his breath. What would you do?

What would you do if a child at church asked you for money for school fees? His father did not have a job. He was a good farmer, but he had lost his farm. You have a plot of ground but no time to cultivate it. What would you do?

What would you do if a young boy you knew came running into your house frightened and panting? He was running away from the police who suspected him of stealing. He asked you to hide him. What would you do?

Sometimes the best way to help a person is in helping them to help themselves. We should always be ready to give aid to someone in need, but we need to look to the future. Is it better to give a drunkard money or better to give him food? Better to pay school fees or help the father find work so he can pay them? Better to help a boy face his problem or let him hide from it? The Holy Spirit will help us know how to react to problems if we let him lead us. He will help us know how best to show Jesus' love.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Matthew 19:16-22

Monday: Luke 9:57-62

Tuesday: Romans 8:31-39

Wednesday: Hebrews 12:1-6

Thursday: John 15:12-20

Friday: 1 Peter 3:13-17

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON ELEVEN

### THE COST OF COMMITMENT

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 3:13-17

MEMORY VERSE: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Christians may suffer because of their commitment to Jesus.

Jesus called his disciples to follow him and become fishers of men. We do not know if the disciples fully realized the price they would pay to be his followers.

They travelled all over the world to spread the gospel. They were beaten, put in jail and some were killed because they were faithful to Christ. Jesus warned his disciples that it would be this way. They still followed. No price was too high to pay. Being Jesus' disciples is hard, but it brings great blessings.

Called Out of the World: Read John 15:18-20.

The Pharisees and other Jewish rulers hated Jesus. They did not accept his claim to be the Son of God. They did not believe he was the Messiah promised by God. He was different from what they expected. Jesus was not a conquering king, but a "suffering servant." Although Isaiah had prophesied such a Messiah, the Jews refused to believe him. They hated him because he told them their "righteousness" was not good enough for God. They hated him because he had power to heal and do other miracles. They hated that he showed love to the poor and sinful and overlooked their "good works." Because they hated Jesus, they hate his followers, too.

Jesus called his disciples to be different from others in the world. (verse 13) The "world" means sinful man who is far from God. Jesus wanted his followers to be righteous and close to God. He knew this would cause problems for them. The "world" would hate them because they were different. They would despise them because they revealed the world's sinfulness by their own goodness. They would try to make them deny their faith, or they would destroy them. They would not want to live in the same world with these ones who made them feel uncomfortable.

John the Baptist is a good example of how the world hates Christians. They hated him because he openly said Herod and Herodias were living in a sinful relationship. He showed them their sin. Their solution to their problem was to kill him. That is what they did. They shut him up by getting rid of him. He could no longer accuse them of sin. He was dead.

Suffering for Righteousness Sake: Read 1 Peter 3:13-17.

Peter knew what persecution was. He had already suffered for Jesus' sake when he wrote these words to other Christians who were suffering. He knew the truth of what he wrote.

He knew that people could persecute a Christian, hurt him and even kill him. But really they could do nothing to him. A Christian is more than a body. He is spirit. His body can be killed, but this spirit is eternal. No man can

touch a Christian's eternal spirit. Therefore, he cannot really hurt him. So a Christian can be a Christian openly. He has nothing to fear.

Even if the Christian is harmed, he will be blessed. Peter was undoubtedly remembering Jesus' teaching which we studied two weeks ago. In Matthew 5:10, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...." Peter knew from experience that faithfulness in persecution brought joy and blessing. Jesus is close to us in times of persecution. He is ready to help us be faithful, as he was faithful.

Peter knew that when we are persecuted, it is easiest to be quiet about our faith. We may want to just leave quickly without answering our persecutors. But Peter said we should be ready to give a witness for Jesus. We should not be proud or loud. We should give a gentle witness. In this way, we will not drive others away, but draw them to Jesus. People are attracted by kindness and love. They are pushed away by harshness and judgement.

Peter reminded us in verse 16 that we should live righteous lives so those watching will not have reason to laugh at our weakness. We should give no one reason to doubt the strength of our faith. They should see Jesus in our lives. We should never get angry at our persecutors. We should always be forgiving and loving as Jesus was.

When we suffer for doing what is right, we are blessed by God. If we are faithful to God through our suffering, we bring glory to him. God does not want us to suffer, but suffering is sometimes necessary. We must be willing to stand firm in the Lord.

Following the steps of Jesus: Read the Memory Verse.

Jesus suffered greatly so we could have salvation. Because he was faithful, he has been given a place of honor in heaven. He has brought glory to God and life to us.

If we are his disciples, we are to be like him and follow his example. He gave himself for others. He suffered for us. We must be willing to follow his steps, even if it means suffering as he did.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

We often want an easy salvation. We want all the blessings of life without any of the suffering. Jesus told us to expect suffering and persecution. If we are faithful followers of his, many people will hate us. We will be good as he was. The evil "world" does not love good. Good reveals evil. The world will hate us for revealing its evil ways. If we want to be disciples of Jesus, we must be ready to give up our lives. We must be ready to suffer for Jesus' sake. "... A servant is not greater than his master" (John 15:20). Our Master suffered for our sakes. Are we willing to suffer for him? That is the cost of following Jesus. Are you willing to pay the price of being a Christian?

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND TO DO

We have looked at the cost of being a Christian. We know we have to give our lives to be disciples of Jesus. Giving up our lives does not always mean dying. We may be asked to give up something else that is very important to us other than our physical bodies. Several who thought they wanted to follow Jesus found that the cost was too great.

Read Matthew 19:16-22. Did this young man love God? \_\_\_\_\_  
What did he love more than God? \_\_\_\_\_

Read Luke 9:57-58.

What did this man fail to realize?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read verses 59-60.

What did Jesus want this man to be willing to give up for him?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read verses 61-62.

What did this man need to give up? \_\_\_\_\_

Being a disciple costs everything we have. We must be willing to die to our own desires and put God first. Are you willing to pay the price of discipleship? Read Philippians 2:12-13 for help.

#### SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK

Sunday: Matthew 1:18-25

Monday: Matthew 2:1-12

Tuesday: Luke 2:1-7

Wednesday: Luke 2:8-14

Thursday: Luke 2:15-20

Friday: John 1:1-18

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON TWELVE

### CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AS CHRISTIANS

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: John 1:1-5, 9-18

MEMORY VERSE: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth..." (John 1:14a).

CENTRAL TRUTH: Jesus' birth meant that God became flesh and lived among men.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem many years ago. His birth was miraculous. His mother was a virgin. His father was God. His beginnings were humble. His parents were staying in a room together with animals. He was laid in a manger, but angels announced his arrival. Shepherds and later wise men came to honor him. His birth would bring "great joy" to all people. He would be a Saviour. He was called the Christ, the Messiah. His birth would change man's relationship to God. Some recognized him as the promised one of God, come to bring salvation to all who believed on him.

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year when we remember especially the birth of the Baby Jesus. But Jesus did not begin his life and work in Bethlehem. According to John, he has always existed. He is Immanuel, God with us.

The Word Made Flesh: Read John 1:1-5.

John 1:1 make three things clear. 1.) The Word (the divine) has existed forever, 2.) the Word has been with God and 3.) the Word is God. Without a doubt, the Word and God are the same being. They are one.

John revealed that the Word helped create the world. Nothing was made without his creative power.

John gave his own personal experience with the word. (verses 4-5) He was light and life. He changed John's life. He brought light into darkness. His light was greater than the darkness. It conquered darkness. The Word is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Word in the World: Read John 1:9-13.

Jesus was the "true light." This implies that there had been other lights. The law had brought some light to the Jews. The prophets brought some light. John the Baptist had brought light and had announced the coming of another who was "greater than he." Jesus was that one. His coming showed everybody exactly what God was like. It revealed truth.

Verses 10-11 let us see some of the disappointment Jesus must have felt while he was on earth. He came to the world that he created. They did not recognize him. He came to the nation which he had chosen as his own. It was through them that he wanted to show the world his plan for salvation. They did not receive him. Although Jesus knew it would be so, as a human, it must have hurt him to see it happening. He came bringing truth and light. Very few wanted to accept it.

But again, from experience, John knew the great joy which came when it was received. To those who believed, he gave the right to become his children.

They did not become his children because they were Jews, nor because their parents were Jews. It was not because they tried hard and kept the law. They became God's children through the goodness and mercy of God himself. They became his children when they accepted his plan for man's salvation. It was a gift of God, not of works.

Glory, Grace and Truth: Read John 1:14-18.

John again told us what he knew to be true. The Word, the divine God, became a man and dwelt among man. (verse 14) The Jews knew what it was for God to "dwell" among them. He had done so before, when a tabernacle was built for his spirit after they had escaped from Egypt. (Exodus 25) God was present with them in his Spirit then. Now he actually lived among men in bodily form. John had seen him with his own eyes. He had lived with him and learned from him. He saw his miracles and knew that only the divine Son of God could do as he did. He saw the glory of God in Jesus. He knew he was God in man's form.

John had been a disciple of John the Baptist. He heard John say Jesus was the one he had been talking about. (verse 15) He recognized Jesus as the Messiah and told his disciples to follow Jesus now that he had come.

What did Jesus bring to man? "Grace upon grace." Grace immeasurable and unending. Grace which was totally undeserved, but given freely. Grace was God's plan for salvation.

Most Jews thought the law was God's plan for man's salvation. Moses had been given the sacred law long before. Most had realized they could not keep the law. Many did not try. But some fervently tried to keep every part of it. They worked hard for salvation they could never win. They could never keep it all, no matter how hard they tried. So grace and truth came. They came in the form of Jesus, born in Bethlehem. Jesus who was the Word made flesh, God in man's form. Although no man has seen God, through Jesus we know what he is like. We see that he is grace, truth, life and light.

WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

Jesus was born in Bethlehem many years ago. His birth was miraculous, and the meaning of this birth is what is important to Christians. Jesus was God. He humbled himself and came to earth as a man. He left the glory of heaven so he could die for us. His death means life to us. He brought light into the darkness of man's life. He showed us truth. He gave us his grace, his great love. He loved us while we were yet sinners. He died in our place.

As we approach the Christmas season, we need to examine ourselves. Are we worthy gifts to present to the Christ child? Does our celebration of this event honor Christ as it should?

How can we help our family and church have a more meaningful Christmas this year. What can we do to show our response to such a great event? Such a miraculous birth deserves our attention and worship. Such a loving plan for our salvation deserves our lives and faithfulness.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

How might you help your children understand the wonder of the Christmas story? Plan to share a special time with them each day several days before Christmas. Plan special family worship times. Read the Christmas story from Matthew 1:18-2:23 and Luke 1:26-56 and 2:1-40. Also read the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7;

and Micah 5:2. Sing special Christmas songs with them. Let your children act out parts of the story so it becomes real to them. Let them make clay figures of the nativity. Help them pray, thanking God for each part of his plan to bring Jesus to earth. Make this a special time for your family. Show love and do kind deeds for one another. Love and kindness are the greatest gifts you can give to each other. They are gifts God gave to us at Christmas time.

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK:

Sunday: Ephesians 4:1-7

Monday: Philippians 2:1-11

Tuesday: Philippians 2:12-18

Wednesday: Philippians 3:1-11

Thursday: Philippians 3:12-16

Friday: Philippians 3:17-21

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.

## LESSON THIRTEEN

### ALL OUR LIVES FOR CHRIST

VERSES USED IN TODAY'S LESSON: Philippians 3:7-16

MEMORY VERSE: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:17).

CENTRAL TRUTH: The Christian should live as Christ lived. This is possible only if Jesus lives in him.

"...The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

The Pearl of Great Price: Read Philippians 3:7-9.

Paul was a special person before he became a Christian. He was a Pharisee who had been given special work to do. He was eager in his work to destroy Christianity, this new religion which he thought was false and a threat to Judaism. Paul was a Jew from the same tribe as King David. He spoke Hebrew and knew the Hebrew culture. He knew the law. He obeyed it. He was beginning to be a very important man. But on the road to Damascus, he met Jesus Christ. Jesus changed his life. For Jesus' sake, Paul left his fame. He left his society and culture. He gave everything he had to become a follower of Jesus.

Although Paul knew the value of what he had had before, he counted it as rubbish compared to knowing Christ. People undoubtedly thought he was a fool for leaving his former position. He had to go into hiding. He suffered persecution. He was beaten and put into prison. Paul gave up the good life for a very difficult life. But to Paul it was well worth the cost. Nothing was more important than knowing Jesus.

Paul had been righteous according to Jewish standards which were based on the law. But Paul knew that obeying the law would not save him. He knew that only God could do that. Paul's righteousness could only come through faith in Jesus Christ.

Knowing Christ: Read Philippians 3:10-11.

Paul left everything in order to "know Christ." He wanted to have the power that Jesus had at the resurrection. What did this mean? Jesus was brought back from death at his resurrection. Paul, who was dead in sins, was brought back to life when he met Jesus. The new life enabled Paul to live as God wanted him to. Paul wanted this power because he wanted to please God more than anything else.

Paul wanted to share in Jesus' sufferings. Paul did not like to suffer. He did not seek situations which would cause him to suffer. But neither did he run away from them. Paul suffered greatly for sharing the gospel of Jesus. He was beaten, imprisoned, stoned and shipwrecked. Each time he suffered for Jesus' sake, he knew him better. Jesus was close to him and helped him through the difficulty. Paul learned something about the suffering which Jesus went through for our sakes. Paul liked identifying with Christ in this way.

Paul knew that for Jesus to rule his life, he had to die. He had to put all his own selfish desires behind him and leave them. He had to let Jesus control him.

Then and only then would he know the power of the resurrection. Then and only then would he live as God wanted him to live. Then and only then would he know the real joy that comes from following Christ completely. Pressing On: Read Philippians 3:12-16.

Paul knew he had not yet reached his goal. He was not yet perfect as Jesus was. In fact, he knew he would never be until he died physically and was made completely new by Jesus.

Nevertheless, he kept trying. He pushed on toward the goal of perfection in Christ. He did not let his failure discourage him. He did not long for "the old days" when he was famous and respected. He moved on, never looking back. He knew that only by pressing on would he arrive. Being caught in the past keeps us from progress. Paul wanted progress above all. He wanted to be closer to Jesus.

Paul knew this was the path to maturity as a Christian -- giving himself completely to Jesus. But he knew that not everyone agreed with him. Some gave up when they failed. Paul urged them to hold on to their progress and not be discouraged.

Power, Love and Self-control: Read the Memory Verse.

Paul reminded Timothy that we have no reason to live in fear. God has given us power, love and self-control. With God's help we can reach our goal. We have all we need when our lives are given to Jesus. He enables us to press on and complete our task. He wants us to succeed and will do all he can to help us.

#### WHAT THIS LESSON TEACHES ME

In this unit of lessons we have studied about our faith. We have learned how to grow and practice our faith every day. We have seen the way to have a successful Christian life. We should not try to live it by ourselves, but we must depend on Jesus. He will live within us and help us to be like he is. We need to believe that the Christian life brings joy and allows Jesus to control us. Do you believe that? If so, then let go of your life. Let Jesus reign in your heart as king and Lord. He will bring joy and peace. He will never make you sorry that you gave yourself to him. Die to self now. Let Jesus live in you and make you really alive!

#### TO THINK ABOUT AND DO

Most Christians realize that the way to live the abundant life is to obey Christ. Often we become discouraged because we fail or because of other problems in our lives. Christ does not want us to become discouraged. He wants us to live a full and obedient life. In order to do so, we need to give ourselves fully to him.

Read these questions. Think about them. Pray that God will help you do what you know you need to do in order to follow him more completely.

1. What should be most important to a growing Christian?
2. What would happen to our world and our nation if all Christians would give themselves totally to Jesus?
3. What would happen in my community and my church if Christians would do this?

4. What would happen in my home if we all did this?

5. What would happen in my life if I did this?

Read each of these verses. Ask God to help you apply their truth to your life.

1 Corinthians 9:24      Hebrews 12:1      2 Timothy 4:7-8

SCRIPTURES TO READ THIS WEEK:

Sunday: Hebrews 12:1-11

Monday: Isaiah 6:9-10

Tuesday: Matthew 13:1-9

Wednesday: Matthew 13:18-23

Thursday: Matthew 13:24-30

Friday: 13:36-43

Saturday: Read your Bible study lesson.