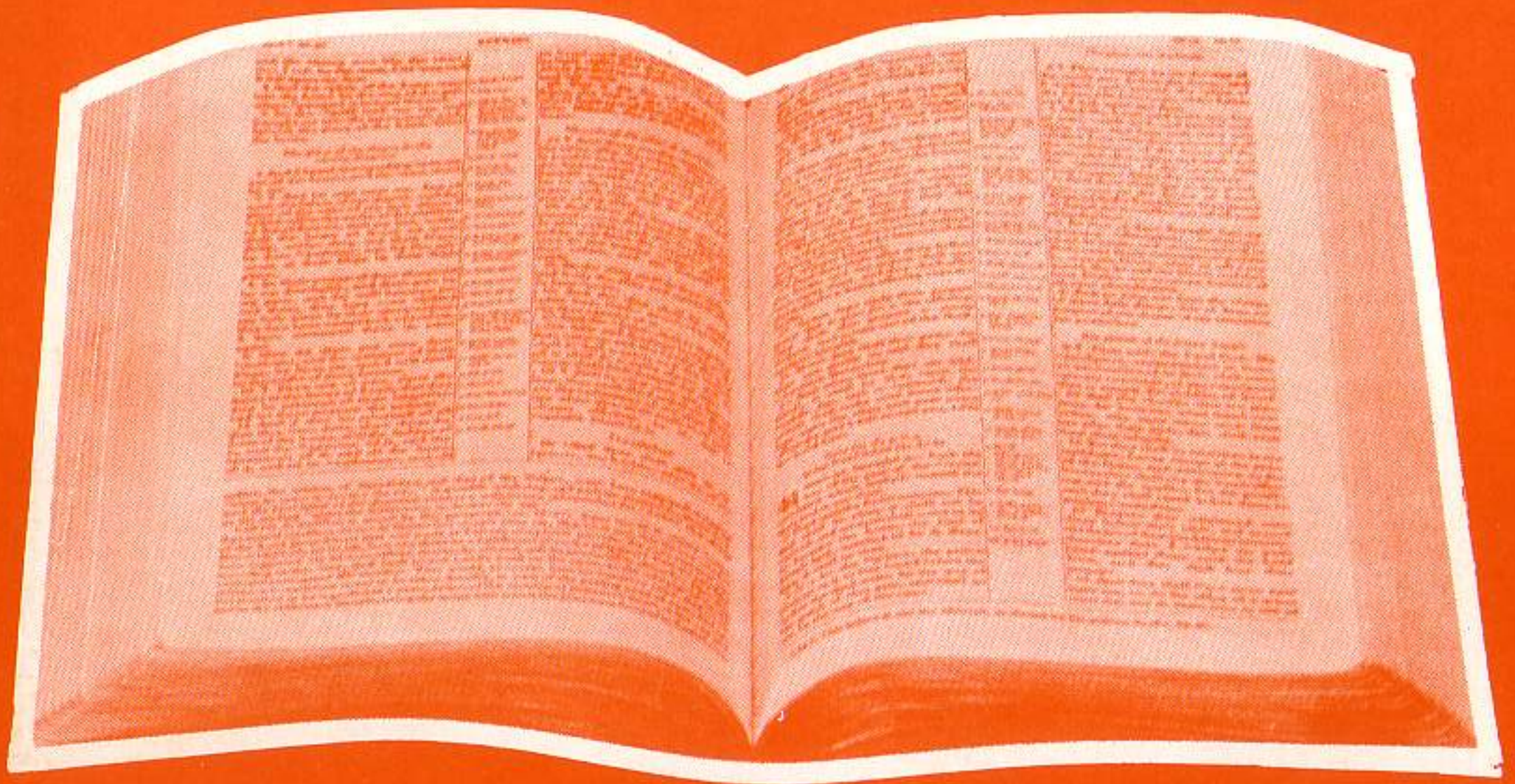


THE BIBLE AND CHRISTIAN GROWTH



BIBLE LESSONS FOR ADULTS

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR ADULTS

**Africa Coordinated Curriculum
for Bible Study**

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CHAPTER ONE

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO US

AIM: This lesson will help me understand that the Bible came to us directly from God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Exodus 24:3-18; 31:18; 34:1, 27-29;
Jeremiah 36; John 21:24-25;
Deuteronomy 10:1-4

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Exodus 24:3-8; Jeremiah 36:1-4;
Revelation 1:10-11

MEMORY VERSE: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Many people have seen the Bible in their homes since they were children. More people know about the Bible than any other book. It can be found in the houses of poor people. It is also found in the houses of rich people. The Bible can be found almost anywhere in the world. It is read daily by many Christians.

We often call the Bible the Word of God. How did we get the Word of God? It is possible for people to hear words spoken and then to forget them. If God had spoken only, his words might have been forgotten. God caused his words to be written down because they were so important. There is so much God wants us to know and remember.

In the next four lessons we will study how the Bible was written and why it was written. We will see how its message continues to be God's message for all men through all times.

This lesson tells us about the beginning of the Bible.

THE LAW

Read Exodus 24:3-8. The first five books of the Bible are called the Law. Moses wrote them. The Ten Commandments are part of the Law and were the first part of the Bible to be written. These commandments were written "with the finger of God" on "tables of stone." Exodus 31:18 says: "And he gave to Moses, when he had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

In the Law, God told Moses how the people should live. The people agreed that they would obey God's Word and his Law.

What did Moses do to show that both God and the people agreed on the laws? First, he built an altar at the foot of Mount Sinai using twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Upon the altar he offered offerings and sacrifices. Half of the blood from the sacrifices Moses threw against the altar. Then Moses read all the laws God had written. When the people agreed to obey God, Moses threw the other half of the sacrificial

blood upon the people. This blood sealed the covenant between God and his people.

THE PROPHETS

Read Jeremiah 36:1-4. Jeremiah was one of the prophets God used to write his message. Many other prophets wrote down the message God gave them.

The prophets probably wrote on animal skins which were joined together to make a scroll. These scrolls or rolls were very precious because there was only one copy of each.

THE BIBLE AND MEN WHO WROTE IT

There are 66 books in the Bible. Each book has a different name. These books were written by 40 different men. It took them more than 1,500 years to write them all.

The men wrote in different languages. Yet the writings give the message of God to all people of all times. The first 39 books were written before the Lord Jesus came to earth. Those books are the Old Testament. The following 27 books were written after Jesus was born. They are the New Testament. All 66 books fit together. This fitting together or unity of the Bible shows that God himself directed the writing of it.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Read Revelation 1:10-11. These verses tell that God directed men to write the New Testament just like he

directed men to write the Old Testament. In the book of Revelation God showed John heaven and told him to write down what it looked like.

From your Memory Verse we learn that God spoke to the people through prophets. Then he sent his Son and spoke to us through him. We have the words of Jesus in the first four books of the New Testament. These books are the Gospels.

God used holy men who knew him to write down his words. His words are a message to us today. This is how we got the Bible.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

God created the sun, the moon, the fish, the animals and man. God created plants. He created the stars. He created bodies of water. He could have created a book in the same way he created the other things. But he did not.

God used men to write the Bible. These men may have lived ordinary lives, but God let them do something wonderful for all mankind. He let them write down his words.

How precious is the Bible to you? Do you read it every day of your life? Do you hide its words in your heart so that you will not sin against God (Psalms 119:11)? This precious book has been preserved through the ages to be a light for us today. How well are you using the light God has provided for you?

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

AIM: This lesson will show me that the Bible contains God's laws and his expectations of mankind.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 2 Timothy 3:1-17;
2 Peter 1:16-21

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Deuteronomy 6:1; Psalms 105:8; 2
Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:2-21

MEMORY VERSE: "...no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

Many years ago, there was a church whose pastor was failing to follow God's Word, the Bible. He was living like the people around him. It became known in the town that the pastor was breaking God's laws. Soon, the whole area knew about this pastor. Christians began to wonder why the church allowed him to preach in their church building every Sunday.

One day a man arrived from a far-away place. He heard the pastor preach. He talked to the people about the pastor's life. He saw that the church was wrong to let the pastor continue preaching when his life was sinful. The man knew that a man who preaches God's Word must obey God's Word. He asked the church if they would let him speak to them. They agreed to hear the man's words.

When the church was gathered together, the stranger spoke to them.

He said, "Your pastor does not measure up to the standards for a pastor given in 1 Timothy. By letting him act as pastor, this church is rejecting the Bible which is God's law. Since you reject God's law, you are throwing it away!" And with that, the stranger threw the Bible out the open window of the church. He was showing the church members that they had already thrown God's Word out of their church when they refused to obey it.

In this lesson we will learn what the Bible is and how important it is. We will learn why the Bible can speak to us today, though it was written many years ago.

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S LAW

God gave Israel these instructions: "And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

God gave men laws so they could live good and happy lives. We cannot obey laws we do not know. We must study God's Word and memorize many parts of it. Read Joshua 1:8. We must be careful to live according to the laws and requirements God has made.

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S COVENANT

Read Psalms 105:8. The Bible is God's covenant between himself and man. Most Christians do not realize that they have a covenant with God. They fail to live full and successful Christian lives because they are not aware of their covenant with God.

A covenant is a contract or an agreement between two parties. Both commit themselves to do what the agreement says.

God promised Abraham and his seed all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. This was God's side of the agreement. God could bring his part of the covenant to pass, and make a hundred year old man a father. He could give Abraham the land. But God could not fulfil Abraham's part of the covenant. That was up to Abraham.

THE BIBLE REVEALS GOD'S SON TO US

Jesus reveals himself through his word. He promised to manifest himself or make himself real to the man who kept his commandments.

Read John 14:21-24. Jesus taught his disciples that the man who heard his word and acted on it is the man who loves Jesus. The man who loves Jesus will be loved by the Father.

THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN BY MEN INSPIRED BY GOD

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Paul wrote these words. He told many people

about Christ. He wrote letters to people and to churches. Paul wrote to Timothy, a young preacher. What did Paul tell Timothy? As a child Timothy had studied the Scriptures. They were able to make him wise. They helped him find salvation through faith in Christ.

God inspired Paul to write much of the New Testament. Inspired means "breathed into." God breathed his thoughts into men, and the men wrote them down.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

The Bible is a divine-human book. Both God and man wrote it. It contains God's will. His word is supernatural and alive. The Bible is God's word, written for our benefit, not for his. We must read the Bible every day if we are to profit from it.

Do you remember lesson one? God puts a great value on his Book, the Bible. He took a long time preparing it. He expects Christians to value it, too. He expects us to read it and know it. Unless we do, we will not know God's laws and commandments.

If we love God, we will love his Word. If we love the Bible, we will study it. If we study the Bible, we will know God better. If we know God better, we will love him more. God expects no less from his chosen children.

CHAPTER THREE

WHY THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

AIM: Studying this lesson will help me understand some other reasons the Bible was written.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Jeremiah 26:1-6; Luke 24:13-27, 44-49;
John 20:30-31; 1 John 1:1-4; 5:13

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Jeremiah 26:1-3; Luke 24:44-47; John 20:30-31; 1 John 1:1-4

MEMORY VERSE: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Miriam had come to the city to visit with her children. She planned to stay several days. During her visit, a great revival meeting was held in the city. Miriam went to the meeting with her children. She did not know what to expect there.

Miriam listened very carefully to everything the preacher said. She heard all the words that the people sang. Her heart was touched deeply. She knew she had done some wrong things in her life. When the preacher asked if anyone there wanted to change their lives by turning from their sins, Miriam decided that was just what she wanted. She wanted a new Lord in her life. She accepted Jesus as her Saviour that day.

Miriam was very excited about what had happened to her. She wanted to know everything she could about Jesus and the Bible. She attended

some classes that taught her how she could lead someone else to Jesus. She memorized every Scripture she heard.

One day she returned to her home village. She left her boxes in her house, then she went to the village announcer. "Please go around and tell all the villagers that there will be a Bible study at my house this evening," she told him.

Everyone heard the news. Everyone came. They all knew Miriam could not read nor write. How could she teach? When everyone was present, she asked a man who could read to read the Bible. When he had read some, Miriam explained what he had read. They continued teaching in this way. Forty people accepted Jesus during the next month because of Miriam's Bible study classes.

The Bible was written so men might hear God's Word, believe their sins can be forgiven, accept God's way of salvation and have a new way of life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What wonderful, joyous news!

Last week we learnt that we study our Bibles to know what God expects from us. Today we will look at four more reasons why the Bible was written.

THE BIBLE TURNS MEN FROM EVIL

Read Jeremiah 26:1-3. Jehoiakim was king of Judah. He was the son of

King Josiah who had been a good king. The new king was a weak man. He was evil. He did not follow the laws of God. The people, therefore, did not follow God. They worshipped idols and did evil in the sight of God.

Jeremiah received his instructions from the Lord. He was to stand in front of the temple and announce God's judgement upon the people if they did not "walk in the law" which God had given them.

God wanted the people to listen and turn from their evil ways. He did not want to punish his people, but he had no choice if they did not repent. That day Jeremiah spoke the words God told him to speak. Then he wrote the message down so people would know the right way to live.

THE BIBLE REVEALS THE SALVATION MESSAGE

Read Luke 24:44-47. All the Bible from beginning to end, reveals Jesus Christ, God's Son, as the Messiah. In Luke, Jesus told his disciples that everything written about him in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Jesus explained that suffering, dying and rising from death must come true for him to fulfil the Scriptures. He also told his followers that this message of repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations. With his power he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures.

THE BIBLE EXPLAINS THE WAY OF ETERNAL LIFE

Read John 20:30-31. Not all Jesus' works are recorded in the Bible, but there is enough to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. Enough was written to show us that faith in the Son of God leads to eternal life.

The Bible awakens faith in God in the hearts of men, then it develops that faith. The Christian life is a life of faith. "And without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). Every believer should desire to please God.

Our faith, not what we do, will lead us to eternal life. When you heard the good news, faith came to you to receive Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. When you acted on that word and confessed him as Lord, you were born again. God's powerful faith came into your heart to remain forever.

THE BIBLE MAKES OUR JOY COMPLETE

Read 1 John 1:1-4. John called Jesus "the Word of Life." The "Word" was with God from the very beginning of time. The Word came to earth as a man. John saw and touched the Word. He wanted others to share what he had experienced.

John wants the joy we have to be complete. This same joy is mentioned many times in the New Testament. This is the joy of our salvation.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

We see four reasons the Bible was written:

1. to turn men from evil.
2. to reveal the salvation message
3. to explain the way to eternal life
4. to complete our joy

We can add these reasons to the one we had in lesson one, that we will know God's laws and commandments.

We deceive ourselves when we say we know God if we do not read, study and meditate upon his Word, daily.

CHAPTER FOUR

IS THE BIBLE IMPORTANT TODAY?

AIM: I will study this lesson to learn how to let God deal with me through the Bible.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Psalms 19:7-14; 119:9-11, 105, 130;
Matthew 4:1-11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Psalms 19:7-11; 119:9-11, 105, 130;
Matthew 4:1-10

MEMORY VERSE: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

What does the Bible mean to you? What did it mean to your father? Does the Bible have any meaning for us today? Can it help us answer our problems?

Some people think the Bible is only a book to read, a storybook. In today's lesson we will find out how important the Bible is in the world we live in right now.

THE BIBLE GIVES US A LAW TO LIVE BY

Read Psalms 19:7-11. The "law of the Lord" spoken of in these verses means the guidance which God gives concerning human living. This law has as much meaning for people today as it did when David wrote the psalm.

God's law is perfect. It gives new life to people. We can trust the commands of the Lord. Following God's law will give wisdom to a person.

In this psalm God shows us how things work. Certain acts bring certain results. An agriculture teacher told his class: "You will find that you get the biggest crop from your coffee plants if you cut back all the shoots except five." Later, the students found by experience that the teacher's advice was true.

In the same way, people find by experience that following God's laws bring certain rich rewards. There is a certain order in God's creation. Paul

wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

THE BIBLE HELPS US OBEY GOD'S LAW

Read Psalms 119:9-11, 105, 130. The question is asked, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" The Bible gives us the answer: "by guarding it according to thy word."

How can one keep from sinning? The Bible says one can keep from sinning by putting God's Word in his heart. This instruction is just as true today as it was when David wrote the psalm.

Without God's Word we would be in the dark (not know what to do). It sheds light for us to see where we are going. Men today certainly need this guidance.

A man does not have to have education to understand God's Word. Even the uneducated "simple" man can become wiser than the educated if they know God's Word and obey it.

THE BIBLE HELPS US TO FACE TEMPTATION

Read Matthew 4:1-11. Today men face many temptations. Let us look at the way Jesus faced temptation to see if his experience can help us.

After Jesus was baptized by John, he was led by the Spirit of God into a desert to be tempted by Satan. The first temptation came when Jesus was hungry. Satan tempted him to turn

some stones into bread. Jesus knew that he had power to do anything he wanted to do, but he would not do what Satan told him. Jesus answered with the Word of God, "...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

A second time Satan came to Jesus tempting him. Satan told Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. What was wrong in this command of Satan? Would this be a way to show the people below in Jerusalem how great Jesus was? Jesus could not do this because it would mean that he was obeying Satan. Jesus said, "...Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God' " (Matthew 4:7).

A third time Satan tempted Jesus. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world. He promised Jesus all of them would be his if he would worship Satan. Again Jesus used the Word of God to overcome the temptation. "...Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve' " (Matthew 4:10).

Jesus had used the Bible to defeat Satan.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Today, Satan tries to get us who belong to God to sin and disobey God. In our own strength we cannot resist him. If we use the Word of God as Jesus did, we will be able to withstand Satan and obey God.

Are you studying the Word of God? Are you memorizing it? Only as we learn the Word of God can we defeat Satan. A good verse to remember is 1 John 4:4. Say the end of that verse over and over again. "...he (God) who is in you is greater than he (Satan) who is in the world." God is greater than Satan. If you are a child of God, the Spirit of God is living in your heart. As you ask him, he will help you overcome every one of Satan's temptations.

As long as God's Word is just a book, even a holy book, you will not act on it. Until the Bible becomes a way that God can deal with you daily, it will not be active and powerful in your life. Knowing what the Word says is not enough. You must act on that knowledge to get results. As truths are revealed to you in the Word, apply them to your situation. The principles in God's Word are just as true today as at any time in history.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SECRET OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

AIM: This lesson will help me to understand how much my Christian growth depends upon maintaining a close companionship with Christ.

BACKGROUND STUDY: John 15

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
John 15:1-11

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).

In the remainder of this book we will study about growing in the Christian life. Many become Christians, but they never grow. Why do they fail to grow in spiritual things?

Why do many remain as babies in their Christian experience?

The first lesson tells the secret of Christian growth. Look for the answer as you read the Scripture.

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

Read John 15:1-11. Did you find the secret of Christian growth? It is to let Christ live in us.

The Christian is pictured as a branch which depends upon the vine, Christ, for everything. Every time you see a vine with branches, remember that the branch is absolutely dependent on the vine. Remember, too, that the vine does the work, but the branch receives the reward of the work.

What work does the vine do? It send its roots out into the soil to get food from the soil. The food goes from the soil, through the roots and stems into the branches to produce the fruit. The branches depend on the vine and receive only what it gives. There is no other way the branches can get food.

Christ is the vine, we are the branches. We must depend on Christ when we have Christian work to do such as preaching, teaching, witnessing and serving others. Christ wants us to depend on him. He can do the work through us.

How does Christ do this work for a Christian? He sends his Holy Spirit who lives within a Christian. The nourishment (food) from the roots to the branches flows constantly without stopping. In the same way Christ wants to give help and nourishment day by day. For him to be able to do this work, the Christian must remain in Christ. The branch has nothing but what it gets from the vine, and we have nothing but what we get from Jesus.

HOW DO THE BRANCHES BEAR FRUIT?

Jesus repeated the word "fruit" often in this parable. He spoke of fruit, and then of more fruit, and then of much fruit. "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8).

In the beginning of the Scripture Jesus makes it clear that his Father is the Vinedresser. In other words, God the Father will watch over the

connection between Christ and the branches.

It is in the power of God through Christ that we are able to bear fruit. The life of the branch is a life of much fruit because it is a life rooted in Christ, the living and heavenly vine.

ABIDE IN CHRIST

The Christian's life is to be an abiding life. That means the Christian is to live in close communion with Christ, every minute of every day. We can do this only as we have fellowship with Christ in prayer. Take time to be alone with Christ every day to communicate with him.

We cannot be healthy branches, branches into which the heavenly nourishment flows unless we take plenty of time for communion with God. If we are not willing to take time to pray, he cannot give us the blessing of his unbroken fellowship. Jesus Christ wants us to live in close communion with him.

In verse 7, there is a promise with a condition. If we fulfil the conditions, Christ will fulfil the promise. "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." This promise has the condition, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you." God is in Christ and can be reached only by being in him. The only way to have our prayers heard is by abiding in Christ.

CHRIST LOVES US

In verse 9 Christ says that he loves us. He wants us to remain in his love. With this love, we can love other

people. By keeping God's commandments we show him that we love him. Jesus kept his Father's commandments and remained in his love.

Jesus found joy in obeying God. He wants us to have the same kind of joy. We can have that joy by letting Christ live in us and control what we do and say.

Read the Memory Verse again. What does it mean? To be crucified means to die on a cross. Our old sinful selves died on the cross with Christ. We are a new person in Christ, and he

is in us. We are ready to grow and bear fruit. This is the secret of Christian growth.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Why do farmers cut back coffee trees, tea plants and fruit trees? They do it to increase the amount of produce the plant will bear.

How does God prune the branch (Christian) that does not bear fruit? Do you think the difficulties that God allows into our lives could be God's pruning us so that we bear more fruit?

CHAPTER SIX

THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

AIM: This lesson will teach me that a Christian must grow. It will also help me to know about seven characteristics of a mature Christian.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; 2 Peter 1:3-11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 3:1-4; 2 Peter 1:3-11

MEMORY VERSE: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

When a baby is born we expect him to grow. If he does not grow, something is wrong with him.

A new Christian is a new baby in Christ. There is something wrong if a Christian does not grow.

Paul knew some Christians were not growing. He wrote them and tried to help them. His writings will help us today to see the need for Christian growth.

ADULTS OR BABIES

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. Paul knew the Corinthian Christians. He knew their weakness. He knew that many of them were still in a state of spiritual infancy. How did he know that they were not mature?

Paul knew the Christians at Corinth were not mature because there was jealousy among them. They were quarreling with one another. In plain language, Paul tells them that they are acting like children. They were

Christians, but their old natures still ruled their lives. They were acting like pagans, or people who knew nothing of God.

Paul wanted to teach the Christians deeper spiritual things (to feed them meat). He could not teach what he wanted to teach because the people could not understand him. They were acting like they did not even have the Spirit of God. They were not showing Christian love. Their faith was weak, and they were not serving each other.

It is evident that the Corinthian Christians needed to grow in their Christian experience.

One group liked Paul and wanted to follow him. Another group liked Apollos. Apollos was a new teacher in the church. The Christians fought over who was the better teacher. The Christians were just like the world.

GOD PROVIDES ALL WE NEED TO GROW

We have already seen that Christians need to grow. Now read 2 Peter 1:3-11. In these verses we will learn that God's power has granted us everything we need to grow and be more like him. It is through Christ that we receive the things God offers us.

God has promised Christians some things. If we learn about these promises and accept them, we can escape the evil in the world and become more like Christ. A Christian should try to grow and not remain a baby.

We become Christians when we have faith in Christ. We need to add some things to our faith if we want to grow.

1. **Virtue:** We must add virtue to our faith. Virtue is the goodness of God. If a person thinks he is good and tries to do good things, he is self-righteous. Self-goodness must be destroyed before a person can be made good in Christ.

The difference between the good which comes from the flesh and the good which comes from Christ is that the flesh always has self at its centre. A person can do good without trusting in the Holy Spirit, without being humble, without waiting on God and without praying to God.

To our faith, we must add virtue, which is God's goodness.

2. **Knowledge:** Another thing we must add to our faith is knowledge. This kind of knowledge comes by the Holy Spirit who lives in the Christian. Paul explains that we receive this knowledge through our spirit from the Holy Spirit. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you..." (Ephesians 1:17-18).

The knowledge we are to add to our faith is not the world's knowledge. It is God's knowledge.

3. **Temperance (Self-Control):** "...The fruit of the Spirit is...self

control..." (Galatians 5:22-23). God does not control a Christian. He gives the Christian the freedom to control himself. Proverbs 25:28 says, "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."

A Christian must control his mind. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "...take every thought captive to obey Christ." Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." We need to control our thoughts.

A Christian must control his body. 1 Corinthians 9:27 says, "But I pommel my body and subdue it..."

4. **Patience:** An important part of the Christian character is patience. "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him..." (Psalms 37:7). Many times we are impatient with men and circumstances that hinder us. We must learn to trust God and wait for him.

5. **Godliness:** Godliness comes only as we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives. Godliness would be a part of a mature Christian life.

6. **Brotherly Kindness:** In Christ we are all one family. Showing kindness to one another is a mark of Christian growth.

7. **Charity (Love):** The Bible charges us to love the brethren, and even our enemies. God wants us to love others for his sake. It is God's love that seeks the best for other people. With this kind of love, we do not think about ourselves first.

WHAT THIS MEAN TO ME

Are you growing in Christlikeness? A new Christian begins by drinking the milk of the Word. He gets stronger and eats meat. Ask God to help you grow spiritually.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES

AIM: I will learn that I can overcome difficulties through the light and power of God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:7-16

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:6-11, 16

MEMORY VERSE: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

There was a Christian family who had a two year old son. They were teaching him about God. The little boy liked to hear his father pray before family meals and before bedtime.

One day the boy became very sick and died. The family were very grieved. In times like this, time of trouble, sorrow and difficulties, how does a Christian behave? God has promised to help his people face troubles, sorrows and difficulties and be victorious over them.

God does not promise Christians easy lives. We will have troubles. In fact, Jesus told us, "...In the world you have tribulation..." (John 16:33). God's Word also tells us what to do when we have troubles.

OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES IN THE POWER OF GOD

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Paul said that he came preaching the simple

gospel message to the Corinthians. He had not used words they could not understand. He did not use speech or wisdom of a highly educated man to tell them the good news. Paul was well educated and wise. He could have used big words and clever thoughts, but he did not do that.

The most important thing Paul told the Corinthians about is Jesus and his death on the cross. This message continues to be the most important that preachers should tell today. All Christians should talk about Jesus.

Paul said he felt weak and afraid as he preached to the Corinthians. He was totally dependent, then, upon the Spirit of God and his power. Paul did not depend upon his own knowledge and ability while ministering to the people.

Paul was afraid that the people would put their trust in men rather than in the power of God. He knew that when difficulties came, the people would need God's power to overcome them.

We can learn from Paul's teaching that the only way to overcome difficulties is through the power of God. All Christians are weak and afraid, just as Paul was. We must depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to provide what is needed for victory.

OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES WITH THE LIGHT OF GOD

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6-11, 16. God created light when there was only darkness. See Genesis 1:3. This same Creator of light has brought light to us. We share this light with others when we teach them about Jesus. The light we have is the glory of God seen in Jesus.

Verse 7 speaks of a treasure. What is the treasure? It is the light of God that shines to men's hearts. The "earthen vessels" are our bodies. God commits the treasure of the divine light to us. The light is not of inferior value, but the earthen vessels are like cheap pots made of dirt or clay. We have a great power and a great light within us.

Because we are weak we can never overcome difficulty by ourselves. We must depend on God's power and his light. God gives his power to his children as they depend on him. Anything that is accomplished for God is done in his strength, not ours.

Paul went on to explain that because we are just like clay pots, we are constantly exposed to danger and death. On the other hand, we must remember God's power to help us. Troubles can be all around us, but they cannot beat us down. God gives us the strength to stand.

We are persecuted by men many times, but we are never forsaken by God. Jesus was persecuted by men. They put him to death. Many early Christians were killed because of their

faith. Paul was always in danger. He was not afraid of death because he knew Christ lived in him.

We shared in Jesus' death. We also share in his life. It is only the life of Christ in us that keeps us safe.

Paul did not give up, although he had many troubles. Our bodies may grow weak and die just as Paul's did, but our inner nature grows stronger every day as we overcome difficulties with the light of God. God gives us inner strength to overcome all difficulties. He makes our spirits strong.

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES WITH THE ARMOUR OF GOD

Paul in his writings has helped us with many problems of living as Christians. He urged his readers to walk in the light of Christ, to live above the world, to speak the truth in love and to be alert against temptations. In Ephesians 6:10-17 he taught about Christian warfare. The Christian is in warfare against evil. What is the armour for this war?

Truth is man's mightiest weapon. The truth makes men free. Every Christian should use the gospel of Christ which is truth.

Righteousness is the breastplate which is undefeatable. A good life is a man's best defense. It is not man's righteousness but God's righteousness that shines through him.

Paul called the Christian's shoes the gospel of peace. The Christian should wear these in battle.

One of the deadliest weapons of that day was a dart with the point dipped in tar. This was set on fire, and the dart was thrown. The soldier carried a shield to protect himself from these darts. The shield of faith prevents the fiery dart of temptation from doing harm.

The helmet protected the head. Salvation represents deliverance from past sins and future temptation.

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God which is our defense and weapon of attack. Read Hebrews 4:12.

By wearing and using God's armour, a Christian can overcome difficulties.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

We cannot escape the frustrations and difficulties of life. They are everywhere. We meet them in whatever we do. It is a challenge for the Christian to face life in today's world with a faith that is well founded and secure. The Christian's faith is in Jesus Christ. If we are to overcome, we shall have to grow as Christians through the conflicts we meet.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN GROWTH

AIM: The Holy Spirit is my teacher as I grow spiritually.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
John 16:12-15; Romans 8:26-27;
Galatians 5:16-26

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
John 16:12-15; Romans 8:26-27;
Galatians 5:16-26

MEMORY VERSE: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

In God, there are three Persons: God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit. All three Persons have always lived and will always live. At creation, all three were present and active.

The work of the Holy Spirit is of several kinds. John 16:8 tells us that the Holy Spirit "convince[s] the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement." The Holy Spirit prepares the human heart to believe in Christ as Saviour.

Besides giving new life to believers at the time of conversion, the Holy Spirit continues to abide in a believer's spirit. We can see that it is the Holy Spirit in our spirit who causes us to grow in Christian experience.

THE SPIRIT TEACHES US

Read John 16:12-15. In these verses we see the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. He leads into all truth. This does not mean only scientific truth, but the full knowledge of the

truth of God. This is a wonderful promise.

The statement, "He will guide you into all the truth," means that it is a gradual and progressive work. One could not learn all the truth at one time. It must be a process as one seeks the truth, the Holy Spirit will teach him. Every believer is at a different point or level in his knowledge of spiritual truth.

The Holy Spirit teaches with God's authority, not his own. He will speak only those things God directs him to speak.

The Holy Spirit represents both the Father and the Son. All things that are the Father's are the Son's also. Both have the same plans and desires.

THE SPIRIT MAKES US STRONG

Read Romans 8:26-27. Because we are weak, we do not know what to pray for. The Holy Spirit prays the prayers we ought to pray. He prays for us. When he comes to our assistance, we can pray with power.

Why are we too weak to pray? Many times we do not know how to pray because we cannot know the future. Since we do not know what is going to happen, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to pray for us. He knows the future and teaches us how to pray.

Another reason we are weak in our praying is because often we do not know what is best for us. Sometimes we cannot know what God's will for our lives is. The Holy Spirit knows

God's will. He can pray for us in perfect union with God.

This is great encouragement for the Christian who finds himself bowed down by his sin and weakness. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid. "And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). The Spirit who searches the human heart and works within us directs our prayers and brings them into agreement with the perfect will of God.

When we admit we are weak, we are able to depend on the Holy Spirit within our spirit to utter his prayer. The Holy Spirit makes us strong as we depend on him to pray for us and to teach us to pray.

THE SPIRIT LEADS US

Read Galatians 5:16-26. In these verses we see a contrast (total difference) between a life controlled by the flesh and a life controlled by the Spirit.

If a person is walking by the Spirit, he is being guided by the Spirit. He is then in God's will.

The flesh means man's sinful nature which stays with us even after we become Christians. Our flesh or earthly nature is prone to sin and is opposed to God.

The desires of man's hearts and the Spirit are opposed to each other. They are at work against each other. Many of us live a confused life. We obey one

nature (the desire of our heart), then we obey the Spirit. Our only hope is in the Holy Spirit. When he is in control, he will overthrow the power of the flesh and magnify (make great) Christ in our lives.

How do we know that the Spirit lives and works in us? We know by the fruit in our lives. We know by the results that are seen in our works.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These characteristics are easily recognizable in the life of a person controlled by the Holy Spirit.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

If we belong to Christ, we put to death all desires of our lower nature, the flesh. This is a daily act. We put our flesh to death every day. How do

we do that? We can imagine that our lives are a circle with two doors. One door leads to the flesh (our lower nature, our desire to sin) and the other door leads to the Holy Spirit. Each morning we can pray and tell God that we are closing the door to the flesh for that day. We kill the flesh in that way. Then, we can tell him we are keeping the door to the Holy Spirit open so that his Spirit can commune with our spirit.

The Spirit gives us new life if he is in control. Only the Holy Spirit can help us have his fruit in our lives.

When God's life enters a human spirit, that human spirit is made alive. We call God's life within us the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot know God nor the Lord Jesus. With God's life within us, we can grow spiritually.

CHAPTER NINE

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

AIM: This lesson will help me know that if I use prayer and Bible study as resources, I will grow in joy, forbearance, peace, meekness and other Christian virtues.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Philippians 4:4-9; Colossians 3:1-17

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Philippians 4:4-9; Colossians 3:1-17

MEMORY VERSE: "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).

One area of Africa was having a bad drought. People asked the government to do something to bring water to them. A large dam was built across a river. Just after the dam was completed, a heavy rain came. A large lake was formed. Fish began to live in the lake. People had water.

The dam produced new life in the area. It was a resource for water for all the people there. A resource is something that helps us.

What resources does a Christian have to help him grow in his Christian life? We all need to grow. Where can we find help? This lesson will tell us what our resources are.

PRAYER IS ONE RESOURCE

Read Philippians 4:4-9. Paul was in prison when he wrote these words to the Christians at Philippi. He should

have been sad, but he was filled with joy.

Paul told the people to rejoice. Christian joy does not depend on our circumstances, because Christian joy has its source in Christ.

As we grow in patience and understanding, joy should be a part of us more and more. Joy should become a habit for the follower of Jesus.

Paul told the Philippians that they should rely on prayer. Prayer would remove their fears and bring them joy. Continual prayer would be the source of their strength. They were to combine their prayers and supplications with thanksgiving. A man cannot petition God for something until he has given thanks for the things God has already given him. Without thanksgiving we cannot really pray.

When a person arrives at that point in his life where anxieties are cast away and he can pray with thanksgiving, he experiences the peace of God. This peace guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. God's peace will be ours when we trust in him as we know him in Jesus Christ.

GOD'S WORD IS ANOTHER RESOURCE

Read Colossians 3:1-17. Verse 16 is the key to these verses. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all

wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

If we dwell in his Word, we will set our minds on heavenly things, not on things of the earth. It is easy for the Christian to continue to live on the world's level. What a difference it would make if we could live with our minds on things above.

Paul says that a Christian has died to the world. No one can separate us from the love of God.

In verse 12, Paul says we must grow in patience and understanding. He names those qualities which are necessary for good relationship between men. He says we should have compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience. We should forbear one another and forgive one another. These are qualities that every Christian should develop.

Above everything else we should develop love because it binds everything together. It is a spiritual love, like the love God has for us.

In the last verses of our lesson today we see three pleas which Paul makes to the minds and consciences of the Christians at Colossae. The first of these pleas is, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart." Many people are tortured by daily fears. We can cure those fears by the peace of God ruling in our hearts. We need to seek the fellowship of those who also believe in

Christ. There we will find assurance and spiritual support.

Paul's second plea is to let the Word of God dwell in us. The Word spoken of here is the teaching of Christ.

Paul ends with a third plea by saying, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." We are to bring every area of our lives into submission to the teaching of Christ and to the power of his will.

When we set our minds on things above (things of God) and when we live richly in his Word, God will help us grow spiritually.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Everyone has anxieties. It is how we handle our anxieties which shows how mature we are in spiritual matters.

All people have sickness either in their own bodies or in their family. Everyone has to face the death of a loved one. Everyone fails once in a while. Everyone is embarrassed at times. Everyone gets tired and weary of this world.

How do you handle things when these anxieties come to you? Do you pray, taking them to God? Do you open his Word and meditate upon it? Do you spend time thinking about God and his plan for you? Think about these things.

CHAPTER TEN

TENSIONS AND CHRISTIAN GROWTH

AIM: I will learn in this lesson that testing strengthens my faith and helps me grow spiritually.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 12:1-13; James 1:2-15; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 2 Corinthians 7:5-13; Revelation 2:9-10; Hebrews 12:7-11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 12:1-2, 12; James 1:2-4, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Hebrews 12:7-11

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).

What are tensions? Tension is pressure that is put upon something. You may have seen someone fill their bicycle tires. They put air in the tires, increasing the tension. The right amount of tension will give them a safe ride. Too little tension can cause a tire to go flat quickly. Too much can cause the tire to "blow-out" or tear.

We have tensions in our lives. The right amount of tension will help us grow and mature. Too much tension can cause a blow-out in our lives. Our lesson today is about the way God tests us. He applies tension to our lives and watches to see how we do.

BEING TRANSFORMED

Read Romans 12:1-2 and verse 12. Christians who are growing are being

transformed. Transformed means changed. Christians are being changed into what God wants us to be.

When a Christian is saved, he has not become perfect. He has just begun his journey with God. After he accepts Jesus as his Saviour, he starts being transformed. If he is willing and obedient, he will continue to be changed all his life.

A Christian's goal is to be a living sacrifice. Jesus was our sacrifice so we could become God's children. Now we are to offer ourselves, not to be killed for Christ, but to live for him. We give ourselves to this purpose. That is what a sacrifice is, to give.

Verse 12 tells us that we are to rejoice and be patient during this changing or transformation. We are to pray that God's will can be done in our lives. We accept tribulation because we know it will help us become what God wants us to be.

ENDURING TRIALS

Read James 1:2-4 and 12-15. The trials that Christians face will help us strengthen our faith. Our faith produces steadfastness which will help us face more tests so that we can again increase our faith.

The reward for our steadfastness is the crown of life that God will give us. We will become stronger and stronger as we face testing and temptations.

PREPARING FOR ETERNAL GLORY

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Christians should not lose heart and become discouraged when trials come. These trials (verse 17 calls them slight momentary affliction) will last for a short time only. They serve, though, to help us be changed into what God wants us to become.

Our old nature, the one we had before we became Christians, does not vanish when we accept Jesus. Instead, it is worn away gradually as we accept testing and tension from God. The old nature is being renewed every day.

Our goal is an eternal glory that is so great that nothing on earth can compare with it. This is the reason that we keep our eyes on God and not on the things of the world.

DISCIPLINE IS FOR OUR GOOD

Read Hebrews 12:7-11. The trials, testing, tribulations and temptations that we face are the disciplines that God puts into our lives.

A good father disciplines his son so that he will recognize authority and live a good life. Our heavenly Father disciplines us for the same reason. He wants us to share his holiness. We

cannot do that with sin and a carnal nature. We must be continually changed to become worthy to share his holiness.

As we face the tension God puts into our lives, we may think, "This is painful and I do not want to have to go through it." Later though, we will be able to see that we were being trained and taught. Testing gives us the fruit of righteousness when we have safely passed the test.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Is God testing you? If he is, remember that it is for a short time only and that it is for your good.

God will never test us beyond what we can stand. It is like a runner who sets out on his first run. The first day, he may run only 100 metres. The second day, he may be able to run a little further. Every day he tries to increase his distance. He pushes himself a bit further. Finally he is able to run long distances without pain. God tests us like that. He pushes us little by little so that we can stand the pushing.

The Christian's reward is too wonderful to imagine. That is why we face testing with joy, knowing that it is making us stronger and better.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

AIM: I will learn to relate to people like Jesus does.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 12:9-21; 14:1-15:6; 1
Corinthians 13

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 12:9-12

MEMORY VERSE: "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9).

We live in a world filled with people. They are everywhere and they are of every kind. There are good people and there are bad people. There are young people and there are old people. There are educated people and there are uneducated people. People, people, people.

How do we relate to all these people? The Bible tells us how to do this sometimes difficult job.

CHRISTIANS SERVING ONE ANOTHER

Read Romans 12:9-13. Paul is teaching about how a Christian relates to others. Each member of the body of Christ (the church) has certain duties and functions which he owes to the whole body. The first quality a Christian should possess is love.

Paul begins with love because love is basic to a church. A church without love is no longer a church. Love

should be completely sincere. There can be no pretending to love one another. The love must be real.

If love is genuine, then we can hate evil and hold tightly to whatever is good. When God fills us with his love, we will hate evil. We will quickly turn away from it.

In the church, each member has a duty to love his brother. The church is the family of God. Each member is to love the other. "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3). In all relationships between members of the church family we are to see that others are respected and recognized.

We should not be lazy, but should do the Lord's work with enthusiasm. We must never forget that, as Christians, our main concern is to serve, not to be served. It is easy to think of what the church should do for us rather than what we can do for the church. We serve the Lord as we serve men. The church has a mission to the world. We ought to be busy.

Paul says to rejoice in hope because God's grace is sufficient for all things. He is strong when we are weak.

We are to be patient in tribulation. Suffering is part of our lives. If we can

willingly accept it, we can help others who are suffering.

Paul also reminds us to pray constantly and to share with those in need. Inviting others into our homes for food and fellowship is an important part of our relationship with others.

CHRISTIANS AND THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Read Romans 12:14-21. Paul gives us some rules to help us live with people who are not Christians.

The Christian is to pray for those who persecute him. If we would be like Jesus, we will follow his example. He prayed for those who were killing him. Stephen died praying for forgiveness for those who stoned him to death.

We are to share both joy and sorrow with those who are experiencing such emotions. Our love will show as we share with others.

God expects us to live in harmony with others. When strife enters into any relationship, the hope of doing any good work is gone. Humility and meekness are basic to the Christian life.

Christians will try to avoid all pride and conceit. Nothing we can ever do is in our own strength. Why then should we ever be filled with pride or conceit?

We are to make our conduct fair to all and live in peace with all men, keeping ourselves from all thoughts of revenge. Paul gives three reasons for that. First, vengeance does not belong to us. It is God's. Second, to treat a man with kindness rather than vengeance is the way to touch his heart. Thirdly, to stoop to vengeance is to be ourselves conquered by evil.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Romans 12 teaches us many things about how to relate to others. None of us lives alone in the world. We have to relate to others. As Christians we want to become more like Christ in our relationships. This results in Christian growth.

Think about your own relationships. Start first with the person you are closest to. This may be your husband, your wife, your son or your daughter. It may be someone else. Think about your relationship in the light of these verses. Is your love genuine? Do you rejoice with them? Can you feel their sorrow? Consider each point in these verses. Are you happy with your relationship with that person? If not, how can you change it?

Continue this exercise with other people with whom you are in contact constantly. Start today to improve your relationships to make them more Christian.

CHAPTER TWELVE

GROWING AS A WITNESS

AIM: I need to grow in my ability to witness about Jesus to those around me.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:13-16; Acts 4:13-16; Acts 8:4-8, 26-40; Romans 1:14-17; 1 Peter 3:13-16

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: Matthew 5:13-16; Acts 8:4-6; Romans 1:14-17

MEMORY VERSE: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

There was an accident on the road. Two cars ran head-on into each other. People came running from every direction. Some had seen the accident, others had only heard the sound of the crash and had come to see the damage.

The police arrived and asked who had seen the accident. Two people stepped forward, saying they had actually seen the accident. The others had not. The two who had seen the accident were witnesses to what had happened.

As soon as a person becomes a Christian, he becomes a witness to what Christ has done for him. He can tell others of what he has actually experienced.

Our lesson is about growing in our ability to witness about Jesus to other people.

CHRISTIANS ARE LIKE SALT AND LIGHT

Read Matthew 5:13-16. Salt is very important to people. It can be used to preserve food for long periods of time. Food tastes better if a little salt is added during the cooking. At times salt has been poured into bleeding wounds to stop the flow of blood. Salt is a good thing to have.

What is the taste of salt Jesus was talking about in these verses? It is the Christian's influence in the world. Just as salt can lose its flavour, a Christian can lose his good influence in the world.

It is the spiritual Christian who is influential and who is a witness. A spiritual Christian strives for holiness in his life. This makes him a happy person who is able to influence others. Christ in us, like the taste of the salt, can make us good witnesses.

Like salt, light is necessary for life. A light on a hill can be seen from many miles. Christians light up the world for God.

What is the candlestick a Christian can use for his light? In Revelation 1:12-13 the candlesticks represent churches. There is no better place for a Christian to exert influence than through the church. We can witness through our churches.

WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS DO?

Read Acts 8:4-6. Many early Christians lived in Jerusalem. They met together and helped one another. They talked to others about Christ. The Jewish rulers did not like for so many Jews to become Christians. They went into the houses and took many Christians away to prison. Other Christians left Jerusalem.

When they were scattered abroad, one of them, Philip, went to Samaria. There he was a witness. He is an example for us today. He proclaimed Christ to the people of Samaria. This was an amazing thing for Philip to do. The Samaritans had lost their racial purity and that, for a Jew, was an unforgivable crime. Philip was showing that Christ is for the whole world.

WHAT DO WE OWE OTHERS?

Read Romans 1:14-17. Paul said that he was under obligation to Greeks and barbarians. He meant two things. First he was in their debt because of their kindness to him. Then, he was a debtor to them because of his need to preach the gospel to them. His obligation was to the wise and the simple, the educated and the uneducated.

Paul said that he was not embarrassed or ashamed to share the gospel. He hoped to deliver the gospel to Rome.

WHAT THIS LESSON MEANS TO ME

We should pray for more witnesses or labourers. Luke 10:2 says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

How are we to be witnesses? Acts 1:8 says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." We need the power of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses.

Where are we to witness? We must go into all the world. First, we need to tell those near, then those far away.

Jerusalem was the city in which the people lived when Acts 1:8 was spoken to them. Judea was the area around, and Samaria was farther away. After they had witnessed in these, they were told to go further unto all the earth.

A true witness uses not only words but his life and actions also. We must be willing to forsake all and be loyal to Christ no matter what the cost.

We can witness for God by living a good life. We can witness by telling others what God has done for us. Think about a person who needs to know about Christ. Ask God to show you the best way to witness to him this week.

Either we are witnesses for Christ or we are witnesses against him. If our words and actions do not witness for

Christ, then our influence is against Christ. Has anything happened in your life that is worthy of sharing with

others? If you are a Christian, you are a witness of what Christ has done for you.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE TO GROW

AIM: I will be challenged in this lesson to make a commitment to grow spiritually.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:43-48; 2 Timothy 1:3-2:7

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON: 2 Timothy 1:6-10; 2 Timothy 2:1-7

MEMORY VERSE: "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7).

Learning requires effort. Have you ever learnt to ride a bicycle? How many times did you fall? How long did it take you to learn? Did you hurt yourself when you fell? If so, you had to try again if you learnt to ride a bicycle. It was a challenge to learn, but you accepted the challenge and you learnt!

It is the same in spiritual growth. There is a challenge for every Christian to grow. There is a reason to grow spiritually, to be like Jesus. There is hard work for all who accept the challenge of growing spiritually.

REKINDLE GOD'S GIFT

Read 2 Timothy 1:6-10. Paul, writing to Timothy, urged him to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you." The spark was still there. Paul said, "Timothy, stir the fire a little until it blazes into a bright, glowing flame." Paul was telling Timothy to work at improving his gift. He could do this through constant service to God.

Through public worship, through prayer and through service we develop our spiritual gifts. Every Christian has a gift or an ability he can use in God's work. We must make a special effort to develop our God-given abilities. By putting our gifts to work, we can grow.

Timothy had some reasons to be timid and afraid. He had seen Paul beaten and bleeding. He had seen him stoned. Also, he remembered that his Lord Jesus had been crucified on a Roman cross.

It is the same today. We have fears of many kinds. The only way to overcome our fears is to put our confidence in God. God has not given us a spirit of timidity or fear. We

become afraid when we see our problems better than we can see God.

Paul teaches us that God gives his servants courage that they could not develop on their own. He gives power, love and self-control. Power enables Christians to do the work to which God has called us. Love enables us to love others as Christ loved them. Self-control brings the sinful nature of man under the control of God.

Although Paul was in prison at the time of this letter, he told Timothy not to be ashamed of bearing testimony for his Lord. He must not allow his fear of being imprisoned to keep him from preaching the gospel boldly. He must not fear to suffer as a result of his preaching.

Timothy had already been saved and had received a holy calling. This salvation was not the result of good works. Neither was the holy calling the results of good works, but because of God's purpose. Christians are called to fulfil the "holy calling" by being holy as God himself is holy. This purpose was in the heart of God since the beginning of time.

God's purpose was "...manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus..." (verse 10). He conquered death and brought everlasting life through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Christ died, but rose again. His victory over death brings victory for all Christians.

BE STRONG AND TRAIN HARD

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7. Paul told Timothy to be strong. Christians are

to find strength in the grace that is in Christ.

Timothy was in debt to Paul and to others who had brought him to Christ. His duty was to give the Christian message to other faithful men who would accept the call to service. Constantly he must give himself to developing the members of his church. All of us have the responsibility to pass on this message.

First of all, Paul reminded Timothy that the experience of a soldier is to suffer. If he is to be a good soldier of Christ, he must take his share of suffering. A good soldier of Christ must be loyal and devoted to the kingdom of heaven.

In the fifth verse, Paul emphasized that although athletes must work hard to succeed, yet they are not awarded with winner's crown unless they complete according to the rules. If this is true of an athlete, how much more important is it for one who seeks a heavenly crown. All Christians should live by the rules God has set up for us.

Paul uses another example of the hard-working farmer. The farmer who has done hard work is the one who should have the first share of the crops. In the same way, a good Christian must toil diligently to grow and develop.

These three examples may be summarized as follows: As a good soldier, the Christian must suffer hardships. A good athlete or a good Christian must play according to the rules. A good farmer or a good

Christian must work hard from early until late if he is to gain the harvest.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

If we accept the challenge to grow, we must recognize that God has given us certain gifts. We must begin to use those gifts. We must be strong and train hard. We must never give up, but remember that "...God is at work in

you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Christians have a wonderful job. Our job is to grow like Christ and to serve God. It is not easy, but the prize is great. Thank God for calling you. Thank him for his strength that helps you grow.