

Life's Challenges

12 Lessons

**Prepared by:
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2006

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Table of Contents

“Life’s Challenges”

LESSONS	TOPICS	PAGES
1 --	Facing Up To Life’s Struggles (Jas. 1:1-4, 12)	1-3
2 --	Facing Struggles When Friends Forsake Us (1 Cor. 12:25-27)	4-7
3 --	Facing Struggles When We See Open Sin in the Church (Acts 5:1-14)	8-11
4 --	Facing Struggles When We Are Tempted to Murmur (Acts 6:1-7)	12-14
5 --	Facing Struggles When We Face Group Pressures (Acts 5:14-29)	15-18
6 --	Facing Struggles When We Face Loneliness (Gen. 2:18)	19-24
7 --	Facing Struggles When Our Self-Esteem is Hurt”	25-27
8 --	Facing Struggles When We Face Discouragement (1 Kgs. 19:1-14)	28-30
9 --	Facing Struggles When Covetousness Raises Its Ugly Head (1 Tim. 6:6-10)	31-33
10--	Facing Struggles When I Have Doubts About My Salvation (James 1:5-8)	34-36
11--	Facing Struggles When I Want to be in Control of My Life (Rom. 6:12-18)	37-39
12--	Looking To Heaven Where There are no More Struggles (Rev. 21:1-4)	40-42



Lesson One

“Facing Up To Life’s Struggles”

(James 1:1-4, 12)

Struggles! We will all have them to some degree or another! What do we do with them? Do we face up to them courageously, or ashamedly, or cowardly, or give in to them and give up? Should Christians rightfully expect to live a life of ease, security, and happiness with no real trials to their faith to deal with? Is such realistic? Do you feel you have trials?

1. What is the difference between “Temptations” (KJV, ASV) and “Trials” (NAS, NKJV, RSV), and the “ordinary struggles” of life?

It should be obvious to all of us that there are a variety of trials that we must face in this life—no one is excluded! The Christians that James was writing to were facing not only the “ordinary challenges of living” but as well some great hardships and severe trials of the faith in Jesus as the Son of God! He wrote to them to encourage them to hold on to Christ and be faithful. (It is believed that James may have written his book around 48-50 AD). But later, around 63-65 AD, the Hebrew writer wrote to Jewish Christians that seems to be indicating that there was a very grave danger of many of them falling away because of the trials and temptations they were facing (Hebrews 3:12-19; 6:4-6). It is obvious to all that “ordinary life struggles” can be challenging, but often even more so the trials and struggles to be a faithful Christian.

2. When we face trials, what are the choices that we have?

- a) Ignore them?
 - b) Face them?
 - c) Expect them?
 - d) Be victorious over them?
 - e) Think of them as a strange thing for a Christian?
 - f) Others _____
-

3. What did Jesus say about such? (John 17:18-20) _____

4. What did the Apostle Paul say to New Christians? (Acts 14:22) _____

5. What did Peter say about such? (1 Peter 4:12-16) _____

The Challenges of life are often looked upon as trials because they are a means of testing or proving us—our faith in God, Christ, and the promises that they have made to us. They may test our faith in the goodness of God, or the justice of God, or the promises of His continual care over our lives. Abraham’s faith was sorely tested when God called upon him to offer his son as a sacrifice to God (Genesis 22:1-2). His response was of such a nature that he is referred to as the “Father of the Faithful!” When our times of trials and temptations come, may we not be ashamed of Christ, or ashamed to suffer for His Name, nor be afraid of teaching and holding firmly to God’s Truth—no matter what the consequences!

6. What were some trials or temptations of the early Christians?

- a) **James 2:5-10** _____
- b) **James 3:14-16** _____
- c) **James 4:11-12** _____
- d) **James 5:4-6** _____
- e) **James 5:9** _____
- f) **James 5:13-15** _____
- g) **Acts 4:1-3, 17-21** _____
- h) **Acts 5:17-40** _____
- i) **Acts 7:57-60** _____
- j) **Acts 8:1-4** _____

7. How are Christians told to deal with trials?

- a) **James 1:2** _____
Their joy was not over the suffering they endured, but over the results of holding fast to Christ. The Apostles Peter and John (Acts 5:40-42) were beaten and warned not to preach any more. Instead of stopping, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name of Christ. They just kept on preaching in spite of the trials.
- b) **James 1:3; 5:7-8** _____
The Christian is to bear up under all of life’s challenging difficulties. We are not to

give up, or murmur or complain (Philippians 2:12-16). We are to face up to them all with rejoicing.

c) James 1:12 _____

The devoted Christian is “faithful” to the end (Rev. 2:10). He is persistent in his efforts to serve the Lord Jesus Christ! He shows this by his perseverance!

d) Philippians 4:11-13 _____

The Apostle told Timothy that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6-8). One of the greatest dangers to Christians in America is a lack of contentment in whatever situation we are in. “Get, get, get” seems to be the motto of so many (1 Tim. 6:9-11).

8. What are some bad results of NOT facing up to trials correctly?

a) Hebrews 3:12-14 _____

b) Hebrews 6:4-6 _____

c) 2 Peter 2:20-22 _____

9. What are the good results of facing up to trials correctly?

a) James 1:4 _____

b) James 1:12; Matt. 5:11-12 _____

c) James 1:12 _____

d) James 1:12; Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Rev. 2:10 _____

e) 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 Jn. 5:4; Rev. 14:13 _____

Concluding Thoughts

1. Trials, tribulations, and the struggles of life will come to all!
2. The big issue is—how well we deal with them.

The Challenge Of
LIVING
In This WORLD

Lesson Two
**“Facing Struggles When
 Friends Forsake Us”**
 (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)

Friends! We all want them, but even more we need them! God’s statement in Genesis 2:18 shows clearly that man needs friends and this was one of the primary reasons for creating male and female. Possibly, the main purpose of friends is to help sustain one another in time of struggles, but as well to help make life not only bearable but even pleasant. One person has defined friendship as being *“Those who are interested in each other’s happiness and welfare; who rejoice in each other’s joys; who weep in each others sorrows; and those who counsel and cheer each other and are ready to aid one another.”* Tom Miller, in his lecture at the East Tennessee School of Preaching Lectureship (2005), put it nicely: *“They comfort us in times of sorrow; challenge us when we struggle; bring the best out of us; and never forsake us.”* It would seem evident that God has so designed the church to offer closeness and friendship to one another on our way to heaven (1 Corinthians 12:25-27; Galatians 6:2, 10, etc.). And the value of friendship is not so much in the numbers, but in their worth (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Suffering, Sickness, and Pain are a part of living! If we want to live, we have to accept and deal with these three things (Job 14:1). As one man expressed it: *“The whole world groans and all are born for torment and mutual death.”* Thus, life can be viewed as an empty and meaningless existence, or a challenging race to be run with many rewards (Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Which is it for you, dear reader? **We believe sincerely that God does not want us to live as victims, but as victors! (1 John 5:4).**

One of the sadnesses (trials) that we may have to face in life is the loss of a friend! This can occur through death or his/her turning their back on us—forsake us—especially when we need them the most.

1. **What did Jesus tell His Apostles before His death?** (Luke 21:16) _____

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

The Patriarch Job faced not only **SUFFERING, SICKNESS, and EXCRUCIATING PAIN**; but he was rebuked, bemeaned, accused, and virtually forsaken by those closest to him when he needed them the most. Without his faith in God, he would have given in to the advice of his closest friend (his wife)—**“Curse God and die!”** As a general rule, one’s mate should be his closest friend with whom he/she shares all! There is no closer relationship in this life than that of a faithful mate. It should only be superseded by our relationship to God (Matthew 10:37). The following passages we believe clearly show this closeness of relationship:

2. **To what is the closeness of the husband-wife relationship compared?** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

3. How is this closeness to be shown by both? (Ephesians 5:28-32) _____

4. What helps to guarantee this relationship? (Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:7; Proverbs 31:11).

JOB'S LOSSES WERE GREAT!

His Financial Losses (Job 1:14-17). The richest man in the East suddenly lost it all! Many men kill themselves when facing such losses. What would you have done?

His Family Losses (Job 1:14, 18-19). He did not lose one child, but all ten of his children (Job 1:2). Some parents so grieve over the loss of one that they become worthless to help themselves or anyone else! How would you have reacted to such a huge loss?

5. What was Job's reaction to the loss of His children? (Job 1:20-22) _____

He Lost His Health (Job 2:5-8). He was helpless to care for others or in taking care of the "ordinary" business affairs of life—much less, to rebuild what he had lost! He was in misery, pain, and in a shameful looking condition. He needed someone to console him, to let him know that they were there for him. His condition described:

Job 2:8	_____
Job 3:4	_____
Job 2:5	_____
Job 3:13-14	_____
Job 19:17	_____
Job 21:6	_____
Job 30:27	_____
Job 30:30	_____
Job 2:12	_____

His Loss of Friends. So, Job turned to his closest friend (his wife) for consolation, but found only bitterness (Job 2:9)! He had three of his closest friends to visit him when they heard of his calamities (Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad). They came to offer comfort and sympathies (Job 2:11). However, when they saw him at a distance and were unable to recognize him—they raised their voices and wept, tore their robes, and threw dust over their heads—and sat down for seven days

and nights in silence because they realized the pain he was in (2:12-13). Don't you know that Job was thanking God for such wonderful friends as these! But.....it didn't last! When his friends did begin to speak to Job, they started with discussing his situation; then, it ended with them accusing him of great sin in his life that needed to be repented of. Instead of being kind comforters, they became "miserable comforters."

6. What were their remarks to Job about his condition?

- a) 4:7-11 _____

- b) 8:20 _____

- c) 11:5-6 _____

- d) 19:19 _____

In spite of this, Job's faith still kept him faithful to God! But, oh how wonderful to have friends who understand correctly, who can sympathized, and be a help in building our faith in God. God's word encourages us to turn to our "friends" in the church for needed support in times of distress (Hebrews 10:24-25; 13:7, 17). We need to turn to those who possess God's wisdom for insights and understanding. We need to look at their examples and follow them as they follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

THE GREAT VALUE OF FRIENDS

One of the great examples of friendship in the Old Testament is that of David and Jonathan. Their friendship illustrates what a great value that friends can be to one another. David said that their friendship actually surpassed that of a man and a woman (2 Samuel 1:26). Some of our greatest joys in life come from close friendships that last. The following Scriptures illustrate what friendship can mean to us.

- a) Job 19:21 _____
- b) Proverbs 13:20; 27:9 _____
- c) Proverbs 17:17 _____
- d) Proverbs 17:18 _____
- e) Proverbs 18:24 _____
- f) Proverbs 22:11 _____

g) Proverbs 27:6 (Galatians 2:11; Psalm 141:5) _____

h) Proverbs 27:17 _____

But true friendship has to be worked at if it survives. The following things are indicated as that which will undermine friendship between people.

a) Proverbs 16:28 _____

b) Proverbs 17:9 _____

c) Proverbs 27:14 _____

d) Proverbs 19:4 _____

e) Proverbs 6:3 _____

f) Job 16:20 _____

g) Job 17:5 _____

h) Lamentations 1:2 _____

THE GREATEST FRIEND OF ALL

Jesus defined friendship when he told His disciples that they were His friends if they did whatever He commanded them (John 14:15). But He also added that friends share even those secret things that others are not told (John 15:15). But this ultimate friendship is seen in Jesus laying down His life for them and us (Matthew 11:19; John 15:13).

Concluding Thoughts: Friendship is never one-sided, therefore we need to be a friend (Proverbs 18:24). The Golden Rule is a good rule to go by to make friends and be a friend. We also need to learn how to accept friendship from others. Most of all, we need the friendship of Jesus and constant access to him through prayer (Philippians 4:6-7).



Lesson Three

“Facing Struggles When We See Open Sin in the Church”

(Acts 5:1-14)

Open Sin! In the Church??? Are we saying that the church is made up of **HYPOCRITES??** How do you feel when you learn about open sin in the life or lives of one or more members of the church where you attend? Does it cause you to be sick and want to give up and quit? Just what should be one’s reactions to such a condition?

Unfortunately, every congregation will have problems in their midst that have to be dealt with—there seems to be no escaping of such! But should it be this way? And especially, should the church allow Open Sin or grave problems to continue to exist in the church? A fact that many fail to realize is that in the early church they not only had their problems, but some of the churches had open sin in their midst that had to be dealt with.

God’s Recognition of Such!

One of the first instances of such (Acts 5:1-14) came very early after the church had been established! Thousands of people were obeying the Gospel and making up the church in Jerusalem. A need arose very quickly in their midst for helping people financially. Many of the new Christians sold properties and brought the money to the Apostles to be used to help those in need. All was going well in solving the need until a “fly got into the soup.” A husband and wife contrived to lie about how much they sold their property for and gave to help the needy. They not only lied to the church, but to God, Himself. God took immediate action to solve the problem—they were struck dead on the spot! While this solve the problem temporarily, it did not keep all open sin out of the churches that were established all over the world. Read some of the following passages that show this:

1. What was the problem at Corinth? (1 Cor. 5:1-2) _____

2. What was the problem at Philippi (one of the better churches)? (Phil. 4:2) _____

3. What was the problem at Colossae? (Col. 2:18) _____

4. What was the problem at Thessalonica? (2 Thess. 3:6-11) _____

5. What was the problem Paul foretold would come? (1 Tim. 4:1-3) _____

6. What was the problem Peter foretold would come? (2 Peter 2:1-2) _____

7. What was the problem John said he would deal with? (3 John 9) _____

8. What was the problem Jude told about? (Jude 4) _____

9. What was the problem at Thyatira? (Rev. 2:18, 20) _____

The Ideal Congregation!

It is obvious that all of us would like to be a part of an ideal congregation where there are neither problems nor open sin in our midst. But this evidently will never be! As long as the church is made up of frail human beings, we will always have to deal with such to some degree or another.

So, why get discouraged over something that is an obvious fact of life??

Problems are not going to go away! The struggle with sin will always be in all of our lives as long as we live in the flesh. So, **what is the solution? What is the answer to our problems and even to open sin in the church?** We simply have to become **Overcomers!** The church at Thyatira had open sin in their midst! God's warning was given to such people to turn from such sins. However, some in the church had not gotten caught up in such sins.

10. What were some told to do in the church at Thyatira about Open sin in their midst? (Rev. 2:25-26) _____

But even though we do not get caught up in open sin and are able to be overcomers, is there nothing else that a person can do about such? Do we want to just leave open sin in our midst and do nothing about it?

God's Directions!

What if open sin continues, will it not hurt or harm the church's image in the community? Will such not invalidate the very purpose or God's design for the church? Please read the following passages to see what God has to say about such:

- 11. What instructions are given to the person guilty of such sin? (Rom. 6:1-2, 12-13) _____

- 12. What was the church at Corinth told to do with such open sin? (1 Cor. 5:4-5) _____

- 13. What was the church at Thessalonica told to do with such? (2 Thess. 3:12, 14-15) _____

- 14. What was the church at Rome told to do with such? (Rom. 6:17-18) _____

- 15. What did Paul say was to be done when elders are guilty of such? (1 Tim. 5:19-20) _____

- 16. What did Paul tell Titus to do about such people? (Tit. 1:12-13) _____

What Can I Do, Personally?

Since the church will always be facing problems, what can I do personally to help solve and keep down such problems to a minimum?

- 17. With what kind of spirit? (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-14) _____

- 18. How do I show my concern for the guilty? (2 Thess. 3:13; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20) _____

- 19. What should the preacher do? (2 Tim. 2:23-26) _____

- 20. What should elders do? (Acts 20:28) _____

- 21. Above all....what is the most important attitude to have? (1 Jn. 3:7, 11, 18; 4:7-11) _____

If everyone will work together in the right spirit, there is every reason to believe that our problems of sin in our midst will be kept to a minimum and we can certainly help one another!

Concluding Thoughts: It should be obvious to all that spiritual growth comes when we are forced to face and deal with problems in our own life as well as problems in the church. We will not grow if we just quit and give up! The very fact that the early church had problems (some were grave problems) should help us to realize we can just expect such; and, that we need to be prepared and encouraged to help deal with such.

*We need to be a part of the Solution,
not part of the problem!*

Life's Challenges will always be there and we need to be geared in mind and determination to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem!

The Challenge Of
LIVING
 In This WORLD

Lesson Four

**“Facing Struggles When We Are
 Tempted to Murmur”**

(Acts 6:1-7)

Murmurers! Are you suggesting that there are actually murmurers in the beautiful and wonderful “body of Christ?” Why would anyone want to or even have a reason to murmur that has heard the wonderful good news of the Gospel and have availed themselves of the saving blood of Jesus? Three thousand on the Day of Pentecost responded to that great message by the Apostle Peter. They continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ teaching, in fellowship together, in observing the Lord’s Supper, and in Prayers. They even were meeting in each others’ homes and eating together. It was a great time, a great spirit among them, and who wouldn’t want to be a part of such a fellowship (Acts 2:38-47). Things were going so well that the spirit of the group was described as **“being of one heart and one soul.”** (Acts 4:32). Even persecution of the Apostles Peter and John did not dampen their spirit, but they were greatly encouraged. In such an atmosphere among wonderful people, how could Satan possibly find a way to get into this group to do his dirty work? But he did! He found that kink in their armor!

Murmuring

raised its ugly head to try to destroy the great work of God! But, since the church is composed of human beings, we should expect that sooner or later that will be problems. And God has had these events recorded so that we won’t expect perfection in the church and get discouraged when people do not do right.

1. What was the problem? (Acts 6:1) _____

What help to solve the problem? The Apostles did not “hope” that the problem would go away on its own, nor talk it to death, but they took action quickly. In the first place, why did such a wonderful bunch of people like this wind up neglecting to help the Grecian widows? The Grecian (or Hellenists) Jews were those raised and living outside of Palestine. The Hebrew Jews were those raised and living in Palestine (primarily in Judea). We are not told why these widows were neglected! It could have been a result of a long-held-prejudice on the part of the Hebrew Jews against the Hellenists or Grecian Jews. But, it is also possible that a lack of sufficient help had not been appointed to get the job done right. Whatever the reason, they had a problem that needed to be solved so that their complaining (murmuring) could be stopped quickly (whether legitimate or not).

2. What are some natural factors that can cause potential problems in the church and initiates murmuring? _____

As you can see from the list that was made above that there is much potential for legitimate complaints as well as illegitimate complaints that can be raised in any congregation. What can be done to deal with these problems before they do great harm to people and to the influence of the church in a community?

Solutions!

3. What kind of condition did Jesus pray for? (John 17:20-21) _____

4. What was to be done with “diligence?” (Eph. 4:3) _____

5. What kind of mental attitude did Jesus want His people to have?

a) Phil. 2:5-8 _____

b) Phil. 2:2 _____

c) Phil. 2:4 _____

6. What kind of spirit needs to be avoided?

a) Phil. 2:3 _____

b) 1 Cor. 12:15-16 _____

c) 1 Cor. 12:21 _____

Members often feel that they are not needed, wanted, or loved. While others feel they know more than anyone else and things need to go the way “I think!” The feelings of inferiority or superiority are out of place in the church. The church is made up of many members and all are needed to do their part. While there may be legitimate complaints that could be made at times, it is obvious that murmuring is not the solution to the problem.

7. What special admonition in this regard does Paul write to the Philippian church? (Phil. 2:14-16) _____

8. What does Peter state as a solution for this problem? (1 Peter 5:5) _____

9. What does Paul say will help solve the problem? (1 Cor. 12:25-26) _____

An Apostolic Solution!

Let's go back to our original problem in Acts 6 and see how the Apostles solved the problem of murmuring.

- 1. They first acknowledged (gave recognition) to the legitimacy of the problem (6:2).**
- 2. The solution was not for the Apostles to forsake their work of preaching in order to serve tables (6:2).**
- 3. The solution was in selecting a sufficient number of qualified men (whom all could respect) to get the job done (6:3).**

An interesting side-thought here that may be significant...The seven men who were chosen may have all been Hellenists Jews. If so, it showed the kind of spirit on the part of both groups that was remarkable.

Many problems have to be solved by turning to the "head" of the church (Jesus—not men) and let Him give us an answer and then be satisfied with what He says (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23). Where matters come up that are not matters of judgment, but doctrinal issues, it is critical that all let the Lord give the final word.

Concluding Thoughts: All of the letters to the early churches or to preachers were written to solve problems in their midst. Unsolved problems can fester and cause souls to be lost. Action needs to be taken, but PROPER ACTION!

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)

The Challenge Of
LIVING
 In This WORLD

Lesson Five

**“Facing Struggles When We
 Face Group Pressures”**

(Acts 5:14-29)

Pressure! Who wants it....and who needs it? Certainly, most, if not all, of us would like for pressures to go away....especially group pressures! Don't you know that the Apostles would have been very happy to keep preaching the Gospel and seeing people respond to it and not have to put up with the pressures placed on them by the Religious Leaders! Multitudes of people were obeying the Gospel. What a wonderful sight to behold day after day to see so many people concerned about their souls. Unfortunately, with great success in almost any thing, there will also come pressures from people who don't agree with what they see happening. And it was so here in Jerusalem—the Religious Leaders tried to apply pressure on these Apostles to get them to stop from their preaching. They forcefully imprisoned them, brought them before the Council to impress them, beat them as punishment, and warned them not to preach any more in the Name of Jesus. I would say that that is pretty good pressure from a large group of powerful men. So, what did they do with this pressure? We are happy to see that they not only did not cave in to it, but they openly rebuked those who were applying the pressure!

“We ought to obey God rather than man!”

What would we have done with such pressure? We have a simple choice between two things: (1) We either resist it, or (2) We cave in to it! And when we cave in to pressures, we usually try to find a way to justify or excuse our actions. One of the easiest excuses is very familiar to us all: *“The Devil made me do it!”* Any excuse is our way of saying: *“I take no responsibility for my actions!”* But God makes it very clear that our excuses are worthless and deceptive (Luke 14:16-24).

Why do we Cave in to Pressures?

1. To be accepted within the group—to be one of them. The Apostles had their own group that was far more desirable to be a part of that certainly helped them deal with this temptation. All that the Council, the High Priest, and the Elders of the Jews had were threats of punishment and death. The Apostles chose the better group and what it offered to them.

2. A lack of maturity to handle pressure. The Apostles did not cave in because of their growth in understanding. Peter did cave in just a few weeks before this to pressure that caused him to deny Jesus three times with an oath. But now, even with stronger pressure, he did not cave in. Why? Because his convictions about who Jesus really was and why He came was greatly strengthened and such enabled him to deal with the worse of pressures from outside his own group.

3. A Worldly outlook—emphasis upon this life. Group pressures are usually exerted by worldly-minded people towards spiritually-minded people. They want to get everyone to think and act like them. But since the Apostles had been able to get a much higher view of things (a spiritual outlook), such had far more to offer to them than the worldly-minded group. To obey God was far more important than obeying them. God deserved their reverence and awe more than men did.

We are constantly having to deal with a permissive society that pulls people into its group. Television, movies, looseness of dress (or undress), advertising, etc., are all contributing to the pressure to conform. Distorted gender roles and acceptance of homosexuality is having its effect on our worldly society, but as well as on the Religious society. So, the pressures are increasing as the groups become larger and more vocal (Rom. 1:18-28). The world in Noah's day was completely overwhelmed with such (Gen. 6:5).

How Do We Correctly Deal With Pressures About Us?

1. What was the answer that Paul gave in Galatians 2:20? _____

It would seem to be obvious that the extent to which we allow Christ to reign in our hearts will Determine how well we deal with the pressures of life.

2. What was Stephen's fortification against the pressures of the Jewish Leaders? (Acts 6:5, 8, 10) _____

Stephen did not cave in to the tremendous pressures—even in the face of being stoned to death. And his spiritual strength was so strong that he could pray for his murderers while they killed him (Acts 7:54-60).

3. Why did Peter not deal correctly with the pressures from the Jewish Christians (circumcision party) from Jerusalem? (Galatians 2:11-14) _____

Peter surprises us here by giving in to these Judaizers from James. Pressure made a foolish person out of Peter again by giving in to such.

4. What enabled Paul to handle correctly the pressures from these Judaizers? (Galatians 2:1-9) _____

*Practical Suggestions
To prepare us to face pressure correctly!*

For Youth:

1. Help Children to grow up, mature, have a structured, disciplined lifestyle that gives meaning and satisfaction to them.

a) Proverbs 22:6 _____

b) Proverbs 23:13 _____

2. Warn them of the dangers of being influenced or pressured by the wrong group.

a) 1 Corinthians 15:33 _____

3. Help children to develop strong relationships with the right teens and adults. Adult role models are extremely important.

a) 1 Corinthians 11:1 _____

For Adults:

1. Adults need wholesome activities to replace the inviting and sensual activities that are all about us.

a) 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 _____

2. Openly, but kindly, speak out against the things that are destroying the desirable values by which to govern our lives.

a) 2 Peter 2:5 _____

b) 2 Peter 2:6-8 _____

3. Provide proper role models in the church that honors God's arrangements in the church and in the home.

a) Ephesians 5:22-33 _____

b) 1 Timothy 4:12 _____

4. Uphold and enjoy the simple things of life. Slow down and smell the roses.

a) 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 _____

5. Look to the example of Christ for strength and direction.
- a) **Jesus loved His Father and always did His Will (John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10).**
 - b) **Withdrawal from society is not the answer. He got in and reacted with the crowd in order to influence them (Matt. 11:19; 9:11; Lk. 4:1-3).**
 - c) **He did not compromise, but called things what they were (Lk. 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24). Satan wants to accuse us of being unkind or impolite when we deal truthfully with a situation. To say nothing only allows evil peer pressure to have a free hand to do its evil work.**
 - d) **He had time for “real” people, but only rebuke and condemnation for hypocrites (Jn. 4:1-42; Matt. 23:1-39). To be involved with receptive people helps to encourage us in doing right.**
 - e) **Jesus was a servant! In serving, we uphold the truth: “It is more blessed to give than receive.” (Matt. 20:20-28; Acts 20:35).**
 - f) **He was great even though He had nothing of this world’s goods. All the things that the crowd clamors for, Jesus lived without. (Lk. 2:1-20; Matt. 8:20; Jn. 7:14-15).**

Concluding Thoughts: The Apostles had been with Jesus, observed His life, and had His example to inspire them. They show us the **power** of such a life that is worth emulating. Let’s use group pressure for good—to influence people to do right (Heb. 10:24-25). Working together gives strength to all and a potential to impact others for good.

The Challenge Of
LIVING
In This WORLD

Lesson Six

***“Facing Struggles When We
Face Loneliness”***

(Genesis 2:18)

Loneliness! A person was asked by a counselor to make a list of fears that she had in her life. Then, she was requested to circle the one most feared (dreaded). She circled the fear of being alone. In a class situation, quite a few people were asked to do the same thing. They also circled "being alone," or indicated that it was a root of their most dreaded fear. The pain of loneliness is more wide-spread than what most people imagine. In fact, loneliness is experienced by all at different times in their lives to varying degrees.

Loneliness knows no social, economic, or age boundaries. Both adults as well as teens admit in surveys that they have experienced feelings of loneliness. It is not just a feeling that nobody is around, but that nobody understands, cares, knows the real me. It afflicts people in isolation as well as people who live with crowds.

God gives us the first insight to this concept in Genesis 2:18, ***"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him."*** So Eve was created as a compliment and companion for Adam. Mankind has been created and designed to live with others in fellowship and relationships.

Indications of Loneliness

More, but less. The population of the world is growing rapidly. We are thrown into association with more people. But forces are at work that seem to separate us, rather than pull us together. Many live in loneliness with people all around them.

The Crave for more amusements. Many experts feel that our society's mad craving for more and more excitement, amusements, diversions are an indication of the loneliness felt in their lives. They are trying to fill a vacuum or a void in their lives.

The High Divorce Rate. Such indicates several factors that are wrong in our society. And one of those is loneliness. Two people live in the same house together as husband and wife; and yet, they are distance apart! The place where the ties should be the closest, they are not there!

Suicides. Suicides are the highest among those who are single or single-again. Singleness is generally considered a more lonely way of life. So, a rise in suicides is indicating more loneliness.

An age of loneliness. Writers are consistently identifying our age as one of loneliness. It plagues more people than any other malady. A Psychiatrist calls it: *"The most devastating malady of the age."* A Physician says: *"There is no human condition so acute, so universal."*

Diagnosing Loneliness

The following list may be of help in letting you see indications of loneliness in your life. Put a check mark beside each statement that you identify with. Answer quickly....give your first impression.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes hurt inside. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes year to be with another person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often feel empty inside. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes feel restless and bored. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes feel "I don't belong here." | <input type="checkbox"/> I frequently do not feel accepted by a group I am with. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I wish I could be more outgoing. | <input type="checkbox"/> I belong to few clubs or organizations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I frequently worry that others may not accept me. | <input type="checkbox"/> Nobody really knows who I am inside |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I spend a lot of hours alone. | <input type="checkbox"/> I occasionally suspect that other people avoid me. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often withdraw into daydreaming. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes feel that others are smarter than I am. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't feel I really need friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes feel that others are better-looking than I am. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often feel desperate for friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes feel that others are more confident and talented than I am. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have many physical aches and pains. | <input type="checkbox"/> Even though I belong to one or more groups, I don't really feel a part of them. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often feel very guilty. | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel abandoned, misunderstood, or unsupported by people in my church or my family. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often feel angry or sad. | <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes do not feel that God is close to me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often feel put down by others. | <input type="checkbox"/> My friends have no idea of the problems I'm going through. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am often preoccupied with my looks. | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't want anyone to know that I feel sad or lonely. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I wish I were more popular. | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that no one can ever really know another individual. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have not dated much. | <input type="checkbox"/> I often enjoy my inner fantasy world more than being With people. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes have trouble trusting others. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have had few friends all my life. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have often felt inferior to others. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I hate it when people criticize me. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often criticize others. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that being a leader is a lonely job | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel awful when people reject me. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I seldom associate with people my own age. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was not very popular in high school or college. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often help others, but others rarely help me. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would rather talk about theories, issues, and intellectual subjects than talk about real feelings. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes use humor to avoid facing my own loneliness or sadness, or to keep others from knowing how much I hurt inside. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I wish I could be more open about my emotions. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I rarely confront people who have hurt me; I would rather withdraw. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I'm alone, I sometimes do things I shouldn't—binge eating, drinking, take drugs, watch too much television. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I often think about mistakes I've made; I frequently focus on regrets. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am often preoccupied with work, achievement, and success. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was not very active in social activities in school. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have sometimes used alcohol or drugs to escape from feeling bad inside. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I work hard so I can forget my feelings or so I don't have to be home alone. | |

- ___ My relationships with others are often stormy and unstable.
- ___ I sometimes feel rejected, even by my closest friends.
- ___ Others seldom come to see me or call me.
- ___ People have told me I'm aloof or "stuck up."
- ___ I have trouble forming lasting relationships.
- ___ I would like to be around people, but I'm afraid they won't like me.
- ___ I don't really want to be around people very much.
- ___ I would rather vacation alone than with friends or family.
- ___ I often worry about my relationships with others.
- ___ When I am with other people, I feel anxious and uncomfortable.
- ___ I have sometimes felt so lonely that I had little reason to live.

It is suggested that if you checked 20 or less, you are probably not lonely very often. A score of 21 to 29 indicates that you experience loneliness at times, but probably do a fair job of tolerating, managing, and emerging from your loneliness. A score of 30 or more reflects a definite struggle with feelings of loneliness. Carefully evaluate these thoughts.

Examples of Loneliness in Scripture

Genesis 45:1-3. Joseph had been forced from his brethren many years ago and sold by them into slavery. He was taken into a strange new world knowing no one....no family....no friends.

1. How did he show the extent of his loneliness? _____
2. What would be a similar situation for us today? _____

Psalms 142:4. The Psalmist is expressing a period of loneliness in his life. What expressions did he use to express this loneliness?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

1 Kings 19:10. God's prophets had been slain. Elijah had survived and was still trying to teach the people correctly. How did he express his loneliness?

1. _____
2. _____

Have you ever felt:

1. "Lord, I've done all I know to do, but to no avail."
2. "I've given everything I can give and all I get is criticism and misunderstanding."
3. "Nobody is on my side....I'm going to quit."

Elijah said: *"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."*(1 Kings 19:4)

Jeremiah 15:15-18. Jeremiah is called the "weeping prophet" because of the terrible things he had to endure, as well as what was and would happen to the people of God. How does he express his loneliness in these verses?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How do the following verses express Jesus' loneliness:

Matt. 26:56 _____

Matt. 26:36-40 _____

John 6:67 _____

John 16:31-32 _____

Matt. 27:46 _____

How do the following verses express Paul's loneliness:

2 Tim. 4:16 _____

1 Thess. 3:1 _____

2 Tim. 4:9-10 _____

Loneliness can often be recognized by the feelings that it produces: "Nobody understands," "Nobody cares," "Nobody needs me," "I do not belong," "I do not fit," "I am of no value to anyone," "I am a failure while everyone else is succeeding," etc.

There seems to be two major sources of loneliness: from without and from within. (1) It can come from situations in which we find ourselves: loss of a loved one, moving, sickness, divorce, being tied down at home with small children, retirement, old age, etc. (2) From within we can experience feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, fear of rejection, inability to be honest and open about ourselves with others, aloneness because no one understands me, feeling of isolation, etc.

Loneliness basically is a state of mind! A person can allow his circumstances or his feelings to so control him that he is lonely. But we still have the choice when we get up in the morning what our mindset will be, if we so choose. We can choose to try to deal with our feelings of loneliness or our undesirable circumstances or give in to them and feel sorry for ourselves and have a continual "pity party."

Kinds of Loneliness

Someone has observed that there are three kinds of loneliness: Isolation of space, Isolation of the Spirit, and separation from God.

Isolation of space. To be far away from home, longing for home. "Homesickness" is a form of loneliness. This can become quite acute. Letters, calls, and visits mean so much to overcome this form of loneliness. Memories are a means of keeping human ties alive and strong.

Isolation of the spirit. This is loneliness in the midst of the city or crowds. It is to look at others and get a blank stare. It is to reach out to touch others and they pull away. We try to talk to others but the communication is little and shallow. A person can very easily get the feeling, "no man cares for my soul." Teenagers who feel misunderstood and unloved by parents are lonely. In many marriages there are feelings of estrangement, loneliness, aloneness. And there are the aged who feel useless and unwanted. A feeling of being cut off from other people, deserted, and banished. There is little or no emotional give and receiving between people. People need the

support of friendly relationships. And when people withdraw to themselves, there can be hundreds of people about them and they will still be lonely.

The greatest loneliness is separation from God. Life has no real meaning or purpose apart from God. Life becomes empty with no real purpose for existence. Man's soul cannot find rest and peace apart from a close relationship with God. What man needs is not escapism in drugs, drinking, lustful indulgences, worldly success, etc.; but, he needs to return to God to heal his loneliness and give them the peace they seek. (Isaiah 59:1-2,8)

SURVIVING LONELINESS

Loneliness does not have to be permanent...it can be coped with and one can survive even the worst that loneliness can bring. Signs of loneliness are indicating that your emotional needs are not being met. It is important to identify what these needs are and strive to satisfy them in the right way.

The following suggestions on how to cope with loneliness have been offered as avenues to pursue.

1. **Recognition.** It is important to realize that loneliness attacks the lives of every person to some degree or another. Even Christ experienced those moments of being alone (John 1:11; Matt. 27:37-39). He was misunderstood by the masses and only partially understood by His close disciples. His disciples slept while he agonized over the fate of the world in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). His aloneness was also foretold by Isaiah 63:3. And possibly his greatest sense of aloneness was when he cried out from the cross: "***My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?***" (Matthew 27:46).
2. **Keep your guard up.** There are special times when we are especially vulnerable to loneliness: when we are forced to be alone, or isolated, or beset by trials, troubles, and calamities. There is danger of self pity and a feeling that no one cares, so why should I care. A person is in grave danger of sinning when lonely. We must be prepared in mind and heart for such moments (Luke 21:34-36).
3. **Learn from others.** Watch the lives of others and see what they do to cope with loneliness. Identify with those who have gone through loneliness and been triumphant: Christ, Elijah, Peter, Paul, etc. Talk with and ask questions of people you know who have successfully dealt with loneliness. Learn how to assess your own emotional needs and see how others have satisfied those needs.
4. **Enhance your self-worth.** The feeling of worth comes from two sources: What the Word of God says about our worth, and our relationship with others. We need to know who we are and to whom we belong (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 2:5). Jesus knew who he was and too whom He belonged, and so did the apostle Paul. But this understanding needs to be deep down inside of us to help in trying times!
5. **Build Healthy Relationships.** The opposite of loneliness is a feeling of value, a sense of belonging, a closeness or intimacy with others. Loneliness is a breakdown in the emotional giving and receiving between people. We need healthy relationships with others as badly as we need food. Loneliness comes when a person withdraws into self and builds walls to separate from others. Example of a bed-ridden elderly lady can illustrate how she dealt with

loneliness. She wrote letters each day to cheer others up. What do you think it did for her? It is important to reach out to others to build relationships. Relationships in which one can open him or herself up with confidence. We must let down the walls and let people into our lives. One needs to be a good listener and a good friend to others. We need to become involved in other people's lives. To take interest in others can encourage them to take interest in you. Ask people about themselves, their children, their concerns, interests, hopes, their faith, how they became a Christian, etc. **Sharpen your social skills.**

6. **Reach out to lonely people.** Place yourself in their situation and see what you can do to help them. Show a sincere interest, ask them out to lunch, get to know them well. Don't forget to smile. Be warm, open, friendly to people you do not know. You may have to turn off the TV, but it will be worth it. TV can help to keep us lonely if we are not careful because it cuts us off from being with people. Find value in reaching out to others (Matthew 10:42). But deeds alone may not satisfy. It is when we offer acceptance or receive acceptance and relationships that we feel loved and not lonely. Let them know that someone does care: both you and God (1 Peter 5:7).
7. **Most of all...seek friendship with God.** On the night of His betrayal He told His disciples: *"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."*(John 16:32). The key to dealing with extreme loneliness is: *"the Father is with me."* (Rom. 8:31; Ps. 142:5). Isolation from God comes because of: (1) A wrong image of God; (2) Sin in one's life. The Lord wants to have intimate fellowship with us, but we must want it also (Rev. 3:20).

Concluding thoughts

Loneliness is a terrible condition to come into and stay in! It must be dealt with or it will have a devastating effect upon our lives! *"The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence."* (Thomas Wolfe). So, in the midst of all of our loneliness, let's never forget that God is there and we need to place our confidence and trust in Him. *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."*(Psalm 43:5)



Lesson Seven

“Facing Struggles When Our Self-Esteem is Hurt”

(Luke 18:10-14)

Self-Esteem! What is it? Should we use this term since it is not found in the Bible? Is it an appropriate term that Christians can use about themselves? Do you know what your self-esteem is? Is it high or low or just right? Why should we be concerned about our self-esteem being hurt?

The term “self-esteem” is generally used by professional counselors to describe how people value and perceive themselves—a sort of barometer to measure the confidence one has about himself. A general definition might be—“*How one feels about himself after evaluating his own self-image (how he feels after trying to see the real person).*” The term has often been used in a context that seems to be promoting selfishness or promoting one’s own selfish interests.

1. What is the Christian told about how to view himself? (Phil. 2:3) _____

Components of Self-Esteem

One’s self-esteem would seem to be base on two other concepts: “self-worth” and “self-image.” (a) **Self-Worth** is how one values himself; (b) **Self-Image** is how one perceives himself.

2. Upon what is a worldly self-worth based? (Luke 12:16-21) _____

3. Why did Jesus condemn the Rich Man? (Luke 12:21) _____

It is so easy to be impressed with people who are rich. Wealth can be exciting and it can offer many advantages in this world. When a person compares his puny wealth with the rich, his self-worth can go down hill!

4. What is the problem with this standard of measurement according to Jesus? (Luke 12:15) _____

This is the great mistake that the world makes—using the wrong standard of measurement to determine their self-worth!

Self-Worth

5. By what standard does the Christian measure his self-worth? (Prov. 3:3-8) _____

6. What makes us complete in Christ and therefore of great worth to God? (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

7. How does God indicate our worth in His sight?
a) Gen. 1:26-27 _____
b) 1 Pet. 1:18-19 _____
c) 1 Pet. 2:5, 9 _____

These and other Scriptures should help us to have a proper self-worth and thereby a proper self-esteem.

Self-Image

Self-image is based on how one perceives or sees himself. The biggest problem we have is to truly see ourselves as we really are. Jesus used the story of two men to help illustrate this.

8. Upon what did the Pharisee base his self-image? (Luke 18:10-14) _____

9. Upon what did the tax collector base his self-image? (Luke 18:10-14) _____

A key question could be asked: “Which man built his self-image on his view of himself before God?” It should be obvious to all that our self-image should be based on how God views us! Our inability to see our true self (at times) makes it important to have God’s help to see as He sees (Heb. 4:12). It is easy to go to two extremes: (a) Over-value ourselves, or (b) undervalue ourselves. God’s view can keep us from going to extremes. We need to measure ourselves, not by how many talents, abilities, or gifts we possess, but on the inward qualities of purity, righteousness, sincerity, and godliness. The greatest damage that a worldly self-image can do to us is to destroy our confidence we need in God to help us run the race of life successfully.

Building Proper Self-Esteem

1. Matt. 6:33 _____

2. Matt. 20:26-27 _____

3. Rom. 8:28 _____

4. Phil. 4:8 _____

5. Matt. 7:21 _____

6. 2 Tim. 3:12 _____

7. Rom. 12:2 _____

8. 2 Cor. 12:9-10 _____

9. James 1:2-4 _____

10. 2 Pet. 3:18 _____

Concluding Thoughts: Man was designed for greatness by God. But sin is man's downfall. We must get up, see our value to God, see what we can do through His help, and set about the task to fulfill our destiny!

The Challenge Of
LIVING
In This WORLD

Lesson Eight

***“Facing Struggles When We
 Face Discouragement”***

(1 Kings 19:1-14)

Discouragement! All of us have to deal with it to some degree or another!

How well we deal with it will determine a lot of factors in our lives. Have you ever wondered why elders resign, preacher move, members fall away, marriages fail, or teens run away from home? Is it possible that discouragement could be an underlying problem? While many other factors could be the chief source for the above things happening, I believe that all of us can easily see the possibilities of discouragement being at least a minor factor—if not a major factor. And an interesting fact—it seems that the more involved a person becomes in something, the more likely that he will have to deal with discouragement at one time or another.

What Causes Discouragement?

There are many things that could help to bring on discouragement in a person's life. It is not possible to look at all of them in this lesson, but we can look at several that are the more obvious to us.

I. Failures: *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* (Rom. 3:23). The committed Christian wants to deal with sin in his life. He needs to see progress and eventual victory over his “besetting sins!” (Heb. 12:1; 1 John 5:4). Sometimes the struggle is hard and long and continual failure rears its ugly head time and again. The temptation comes often through discouragement to quit and give up. Or, we can commit a “terrible sin” at one point in our life and look upon ourselves as failures.

1. Who vividly illustrates this concept? (Matt. 27:3-10) _____

There are other failures that can be involved, of course: (a) Failing to achieve personal goals; (b) Falling short of our best; (c) Bad judgments; (d) Wrong Decisions, etc. Any failure that effects our lives negatively could lead to discouragement.

II. Continual Pressures: *“The inability to see relief from financial, relational, or social pressures can easily bring on discouragement!”* When things look dark and futile—discouragement sets in. If something isn't done soon to change this picture, drastic things can happen. Often, physical ailments are a constant challenge for some to deal with. Also, when the seeming uselessness of all the efforts put forth does not seem to make a difference—discouragement can come.

2. Who illustrates this concept very well? (1 Kings 19:1-14) _____

III. Unappreciated: All people need some recognition and praise or expressions of appreciation for their efforts. When such fails to come time and again, there is a danger of discouragement! A Christian must not desire the praise of men over the praise of God; but, still there is a need for feeling useful and to have our efforts appreciated.

3. Who illustrates the wrong attitude about the praise of men? (John 12:42-43) _____

IV. When Big Changes Need to be Made: The need for change comes to all in one way or another in life. New Christians are especially faced with “uphill battles” to change their lives to conform to God’s Will. This can be financial debt to be taken care of (Rom. 13:8), remaining unmarried because of a previous unscriptural marriage (Matt. 19:1-2), or trying to rebuild a marriage broken by unfaithfulness that requires time to rebuild trust and respect, etc. Any condition that is long-standing (especially where change is needed) can face discouragement.

4. What was the Apostles reaction to the hard decisions and challenges that Jesus said His followers would have to face as Christians? (Matt. 19:25-26) _____

5. What did Jesus indicate that some may have to do in order to be saved eternally? (Matt. 19:29) _____

V. Fear of the Future: All have the challenge not to worry about what the future holds (Matt. 6:34). For some, the future (physically, health wise, and socially) may not look good. And if the person continually dwells on the negative possibilities, they can eventually wind up in deep discouragement and depression. Older people have many fears to deal with before they pass from this life. Unless properly dealt with, drastic measures may be taken to end their life.

6. Why do people fear the future? _____

The Damage Discouragement can Bring!

- 1. Elders will resign.**
- 2. Preaches will move on or just quit preaching.**
- 3. Members will fall away.**
- 4. One’s performance at work will suffer.**
- 5. One’s responsibilities as a husband or wife will suffer—as well as parental responsibilities.**

- 6. A marriage will end in divorce.
 - 7. Our faith can be sorely tried.
 - 8. It can cause us to become negative, critical, and discouraging to others.
 - 9. We can get a distorted view of our situation.
 - 10. The decision making process will be greatly effected.
 - 11. It can lead to depression and isolation.
 - 12. It can cause us to devalue our opinion of ourselves and/or our opinion of others.
 - 13. It can lead to spiritual death for an individual Christian or for a whole congregation.
- ETC.

Facing Up To Discouragement!

- 1. Gal. 6:1-2 _____
- 2. 1 Kings 19:15-16 _____
- 3. Ps. 51:10 _____
- 4. Rom. 12:2 _____
- 5. Phil. 4:6-7 _____
- 6. Phil. 4:19 _____
- 7. 1 Pet. 5:7 _____
- 8. 2 Tim. 4:8 _____
- 9. Matt. 18:15-17 _____
- 10. Matt. 5:23-24 _____
- 11. Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24-25 _____
- 12. Prov. 17:17 _____
- 13. Prov. 17:22 _____
- 14. Prov. 24:6 _____

Concluding Thoughts: Some of God’s greatest servants had to cope with discouragement. This is one of the values of so much being recorded in the Old Testament in particular for us to read about—so we can be encouraged by them. Let’s remember that if we feed the negative feelings that help to produce discouragement—it only makes our job bigger! Let’s also remember: ***“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”*** (Ps. 46:1).

The Challenge Of
LIVING
In This WORLD

Lesson Nine

***“Facing Struggles When
Covetousness Raises its Ugly Head”***

(1 Timothy 6:6-10)

Covetousness! In Jesus’ story of the rich fool...why was he condemned? Why was he called a fool? Did Jesus condemn him because:

- He was so successful in farming?
- He was an energetic man?
- He knew how to take care of his goods?
- Or, because of a Wrong Attitude towards money?

The indication is given in verse 21: ***“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*** Also, why did Jesus say in Matt. 19:24: ***“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”***

- Is He saying it is wrong to have money?
- Is He saying that a rich man can’t go to heaven?
- Or, is the problem with a wrong attitude towards money?

The problem is not so much with having money, but (1) How we gain it; (2) How we use it; and (3) Our attitude towards it! ***“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”*** (1 Tim. 6:10). We must understand the dangers and avoid the mistakes! If the Love of Money is where our trouble is, then (1) How can I know if I love money; and (2) How can I be sure that I have the right attitude towards money? We want to suggest some things that might help us to evaluate ourselves.

Indicators of the Love of Money!

When it is acquired in the wrong way! ***“Let him that stole, steal no more...”***(Eph. 4:28). Stealing can be done in various ways—LEGALLY or ILLEGALLY. It can be taken at gun point; it can be taken when no one is looking; or it can be taken by fraud, exorbitant interest, extortion, bribery, etc.

When we idolize wealth. ***“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry...”*** (Col. 3:5). Several terms can help identify covetousness:

- “Greedy of gain”
- “Pursuing dishonest gain.”
- “Unhealthy desire for possessions”
- “An inordinate desire for money.”
- When we want to hoard it all for ourselves. (Lk. 12:21)
- When we want it for wrong reasons.

- When we think that life consists in possessing possessions. ***“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.”*** (Luke 12:15)

When we let Possessions make us high-minded. ***“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded.”*** (1 Timothy 6:17). There are terms that help us to identify this outlook:

- Arrogance, looking down on others, elevated feeling of greatness over others.
- A false sense of importance. ***“Money has never made a man, but the love of it has destroyed many.”*** ***“But you shall remember the Lord your God: for it is He that gives you power to get wealth...”*** (Deut. 8:18).

When we are willing to trade our souls for possessions. ***“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Matt. 16:26). The following ideas can help us to identify this condition:

- It is to neglect or outright be indifferent to the soul’s welfare in order to obtain or keep possessions.
- To allow obtaining possessions and not be a fruitful Christian. ***“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”*** (Matt. 13:22). Job expressed it this way: ***“If I have made gold my hope, or have said to fine gold, You are my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much---this—where an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.”***

When we are insensitive to the needs of those about us. ***“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?”*** (1 John 3:17). Some thoughts that can help to identify this idea:

- Jeremiah’s condemnation—You grow rich by oppressing the poor. (Jer. 5:26-31)
- Amos’ condemnation—You indulge in the riches of life and are not grieved for the affliction of your neighbor. (Amos 6:1-6)
- James’ condemnation—You kept back the wages of the laborers by fraud. (Jas. 5:4)

The Sadness About the Covetous:

Those guilty—rarely recognize their guilt.

- When have you heard of someone openly confessing the Love of Money?
- When has a church withdrawn fellowship because of covetousness?

Jesus warned that we cannot serve God and Mammon. (Mt. 6:24). A choice is called for. A fly landed on a nice strip of gooey, sweet-smelling fly-paper. Seeing no one else, he happily announced, ***“My fly-paper!”*** He dined sumptuously—and then took a nap. After awaking, he decided to leave...but was unable to. The paper announced, ***“My fly!”*** It is often this way with man and money. The man proudly says, ***“My possessions!”*** The possessions knowingly wink at each other and whisper, ***“Our man.”*** Covetousness says: ***“You have opportunity to make extra money Sunday. You need it. Don’t go to church!”*** Man replies: ***“Yes, Master!”*** Covetousness says: ***“You will have to compromise your convictions and be a shade dishonest in this business transaction. But that’s business. Everyone’s doing it these days!”*** Man replies: ***“Yes, Master!”***

Covetousness says: *“Living expenses are high. You deserve a nice vacation. You’ll have to cut your contribution to the church!”* Man replies: *“Yes, Master.”*

Concluding Thoughts: We are warned not to trust in money, not to love it, nor to desire to be rich for the wrong purpose. We must realize the dangers of seeking and possessing money. With God’s guidance we can have the right attitude towards money; and, as well be successful in the use of what we have!



Lesson Ten

“Facing Struggles When I Have Doubts About My Salvation ”

(James 1:5-8)

Doubts! About what? We can have doubts about a lot of things, some of which it really doesn't matter one way or another. But there are areas in which we can entertain doubts that can be critical or crucial. The one in particular is when we question or doubt that we have been saved by the blood of Christ. Oh, I know....there are people that are absolutely sure they are saved who haven't even obeyed the Gospel of Christ! It is people like this that ought to have doubts about their salvation! But for one who has obeyed the Gospel and come into a saved relationship with God, why should he have doubts about that relationship? Why should he wonder if he would go to heaven right now if he were to die? Why can't such a person be sure of their salvation as the Apostle John said in his 1st letter (3:19-21).

What does it mean to doubt? It could be defined as a showing of uncertainty, or a distrust, or a suspicion about someone or something. It would then be the opposite of being definite, sure, or certain about something or someone. The Greek word “diakrino” is the words used in several places and is translated “doubt.” But James (1:5-8) seems to be indicating that it is not so much a weak faith as it is a lack of faith in or about certain things or actions.

Examples of Doubt!

1. **What did God tell Peter not to doubt? (Acts 10:20)** _____

2. **How did Peter show that he no longer doubted that the Gospel was for both Jew and Gentile (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:39; Acts 10:20; 10:34)** _____

3. **Who is the person doubting that James is addressing in James 1:5-8?** _____

4. **How does James describe the person who doubts? (1:5-8)** _____

5. **Why are people “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine?” (Eph. 4:14)** _____

Is Skepticism & Perplexity the Same?

It is one thing to doubt the existence of God, but quite another thing to doubt that He will carry out His promises. The new Christian is to grow and develop spiritually to the extent that his faith is grounded and strong in God (Col. 2:6-8). But in the midst of life some complicated problems can arise that often leaves the Christian questioning or perplexed on which way to turn. It is not a question of doubting God's existence, His power, or His promises as it is a need for guidance to help decide what to do.

6. Was Abraham's faith weak when he was promised a son in his old age? (Gen. 12:3; 15:2, 4; 16:1-6; 17:18; Rom. 4:19) _____

7. What does it mean that the people on the Day of Pentecost were "confounded" or "confused?" (Acts 2:5-12) _____

Are the words "confounded" or "confused" the same as unbelief or doubt, or would a better word be that they were perplexed—not knowing how to explain what was happening? These Apostles spoke in some 15 different languages at least. The crowd knew that these men were Galileans, so how could they do this? When Peter explained that it was a fulfillment of Joel's prophesy, it began to make sense to them.

Is it Ever Right to Doubt Something or Someone?

The events and people connected to the resurrection of Jesus can help solve this question! In Luke's account, he tells of the women who came to the tomb early on Sunday morning with additional spices hoping to finish the burial procedures (Luke 24:1-11). But when they arrived at the tomb, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. It said that the women were "**greatly Perplexed**"(NKJV). An Angel appeared to them and told the women that Jesus had been raised as He had foretold. The women went immediately to tell the Apostles and their words "**seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.**" In other words, they doubted their testimony. Why would they doubt these women? They were good and honest people and were just as concerned about Jesus as the Apostles were! It was not until Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus that the two were convinced of His resurrection. They had to have evidence to believe, and doubted the words of the women. Even when Jesus appeared to the group of Apostles (Thomas being absence), they were terrified and frightened and supposed they had seen a spirit (Luke 24:32-48). Jesus helped their doubting by having them to handle Him and actually ate food in their midst. They still had some reservations about all of this, but later were fully convinced after a period of some 40 days that Jesus appeared to them and taught them about the kingdom (Acts 1:1-3). There are various reasons for doubting and having reservations about people's testimony or even hard evidences. But once a person is convinced, there should not be any further reason for doubting.

Should We Call Him Doubting Thomas?

Certainly, we should! Why? Because he doubted the testimony of eye-witnesses (John 20:24-31) just like the other Apostles had done to the women’s testimony. Why single Thomas out and make him the “bad guy” when they all were “bad guys!” His doubting turned to faith when he had sufficient evidence to convince him of the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus. He exclaimed: **“My Lord and my God!”** Jesus’ next statement to Thomas is very important for us today: **“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** That refers to everyone else besides those few Jesus appeared to during the 40 days after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-10). We have to base our faith upon the testimony of those recorded in the New Testament, but as well, evidences from fulfilled prophesy and the effect of the preaching of the resurrection on the world at that time (1 Pet. 1:8).

The Basis for Being Sure of My Salvation!

Being sure of my salvation is not the same as “once saved, always saved!” I can be assured of my present status or relationship with God based on proper evidences or reasons from the Scriptures. But that doesn’t mean that I can’t turn away from God and be lost (Heb. 6:4-6; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). The following Scripture statements should help us to be assured of our relationship with God:

- 1. Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38 _____
- 2. 2 Tim. 4:6-8 _____
- 3. Hebrews 3:12-14 _____
- 4. 1 Peter 1:3-9 _____
- 5. 2 Peter 1:10-11 _____
- 6. 1 John 1:7-9 _____
- 7. 1 John 2:4-5 _____
- 8. 1 John 5:9-13 _____
- 9. 2 John 9 _____
- 10. Rev. 2:10 _____

Concluding Thoughts: If we doubt our salvation, what is the basis or reason for my doubting? Is it:

- _____ 1. I don’t trust Christ to save me?
- _____ 2. I don’t trust God’s promises?
- _____ 3. I haven’t obeyed the Gospel from my heart?
- _____ 4. I am not living a diligent, faithful life before God?
- _____ 5. Other? _____

I don’t know of another reason at this point, but maybe you do. But we ought to discover the reason for our doubting and do something about it!

The Challenge Of
LIVING
In This WORLD

Lesson Eleven

***“Facing Struggles When I
 Want to be in Control of My Life”***

(Romans 6:12-18)

Self-Control!!! Do I have it? Do I want it? Do I see a need of such? People who have self-control are admired or hated—admired because of the ability to bring their lives into the control of their will; or, hated because they can do something that I cannot and I don't like to be around them! Our society is showing more and more lack of self-control and are indulging in more things that will bring unhappiness and destruction for their soul. This is certainly a subject that needs to be discussed and applied to our lives. We over-eat, over-indulge, and resent efforts at restraints or self-control. Self-control is not just something that Christians see a need for, but the world about us as well can see the need and are capable of exercising self-control in their lives.

The expression “self-control” is translated from the Greek word “*egkrateia*” that emphasizes that one is in control of him or her self. The following expressions will help to get at the idea of self-control:

- a) “*One who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.*”
- b) “*Self-government.*”
- c) “*One who conducts himself temperately.*”
- d) “*To have power over self.*”
- e) “*Curbing or restraining one's self.*”

The word carries with it the idea of strength, power, or mastery. Every athlete, whether a Christian or not, has to exercise self-control if he ever expects to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:25). The person of the world does it to win a perishable reward, but the Christian is interested in an eternal reward with God. Thus, a worldly person can be self-disciplined or self-controlled, but his purpose would generally be different from that of a Christian. The non-Christian wants to bring his life into control of what he wants, likes, and plans to have or enjoy. While the Christian wants to bring his life into the control and direction of Christ. He recognizes that he does not know how to direct his life correctly without help from God in order to win an eternal prize—thus he determines to bring his life into the control of Christ (Prov. 3:3-5; Jer. 10:23). He belongs to Christ, he has been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). Thus, when a Christian and a non-Christian talks about “self-control,” they may be talking about two different approaches or at least two different purposes for self-control in their lives.

Biblical Concepts of Self-Control

1. To what is person compared that does not have rule over himself? (Prov. 25:28) _____

2. What were the three points of emphasis of Paul’s preaching to Felix? (Acts 24:25) _____

3. How can Satan find a way of tempting us? (1 Cor. 7:5) _____

4. To whom did the Apostle say: “It is better to marry than to burn?” (1 Cor. 7:9) _____

5. Why is self-control listed as a fruit of the Spirit when non-Christians can exercise self-control? (Gal. 5:23) _____

6. In what way does the Spirit help us to exercise self-control? _____

7. Is a lack of self-control a sin? (2 Timothy 3:1-5) _____
8. Why is it important for an elder (bishop) to under self-control? (Titus 1:8) _____

9. Why did the Apostle say that he disciplined (self-controlled) his body? (1 Cor. 9:27) _____

How to Develop Self-Control

1. I have to be motivated properly (1 Cor. 9:25)! _____
2. I have to develop and establish good habits! We have to keep doing the right things long enough that they become habitually. Any Athlete realizes this! You abstain from those things that are harmful to your body in order to get the most out of your body.
3. I have to keep on working at it (1 Cor. 9:24) _____
I must practice and then run to win....don’t give up....persevere (Gal. 5:23).
4. I have to know what it is all about (1 Cor. 9:26). _____
I do not run my race blindly—I know why I am running. I have a good teacher, Jesus! I have a Good example in Him to follow (Matt. 4:1-11). I have the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
5. I have to have a purpose (1 Cor. 10:31) _____
I belong to Christ, I have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). I treasure my relationship with Christ. I die daily with Christ to my own will so that I, too, can do the Father’s Will.

Concluding Thoughts: Self-control in my life is not just a selfish desire to do my own thing and attain to what I want. Rather, it is submitting to God in all things. It is becoming a servant of the Most High God so that I can bring glory and praise to His Name on the lips of my fellow human. I have a responsibility to God, others, and to myself to humbly seek after God's ways. Jesus is my master and Lord...who has been given control of my life.



Lesson Twelve

“Looking to Heaven where there are no More Struggles”

(Revelation 21:1-4)

Heaven! *What a very desirable thought!* Why???? Heaven to the Christian represents several things: **Victory, Reward, a Crown of Righteousness, a Place where there will only be the Righteous, etc.** It is the goal, the vision, the epitome of what Christianity stands for! To get to Heaven is worth whatever it takes to get there—no matter how challenging the struggles are here that we have to face. Heaven represents to us the concept of **Peace, Comfort, and Desirability**—not **Troubles, Trials, and Tribulations!**

Without hope of a future reward the Christian life loses its luster, its desirability, and its purpose! **“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” “If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’”** (1 Cor. 15:19, 32). The HOPE that Christ holds out to man is the greatest one that has ever been offered to mankind: **“Great is your reward in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:12). **“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven....”** (Luke 6:23). It is this HOPE that motivates us to live right and makes it possible to bear our burdens, resist temptations, deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, nurse our sick, bury our dead, and gather up a shattered life and build again. The greatest benefit of being a Christ is the HOPE he has from God!

Our study has been dealing with Life’s Challenges! Obviously, there are many more that we could have listed, but these are basic and are faced by all of us. If we can successfully deal with the Challenges of Life in a way that pleases God, we have a promise of inheriting a place where there will be no more struggles!

1. What are some of the struggles mentioned that mankind has to face?

- a) Rev. 21:4 _____
- b) Rev. 21:25 _____
- c) Rev. 21:27 _____
- d) Rev. 22:3 _____

2. What are the three ways that the term “heaven” is used in Scripture?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

The Attractions of Heaven!

3. With Whom will I associate in Heaven?

- a) Matt. 6:9; Rev. 7:15; 21:3 _____
- b) John 17:24; 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17 _____
- c) 2 Pet. 3:13 _____
- d) Matt. 19:14; 2 Sam. 12:22-23 _____
- e) Matt. 25:31 _____
- f) Heb. 11 _____

The Very fact of being with all the above makes Heaven a very desirable existence for re-deemed mankind.

4. What makes Heaven a desirable place in which to exist?

- a) 1 Cor. 2:9 _____
- b) Rev. 22:1 _____
- c) Rev. 22:2 _____
- d) Rev. 22:5 _____
- e) Rev. 21:5 _____
- f) Rev. 21:6 _____
- g) Rev. 21:11 _____
- h) Rev. 21:12 _____
- i) Rev. 21:18 _____
- j) Rev. 21:19-20 _____
- k) Rev. 21:21 _____
- l) Rev. 21:24 _____
- m) Rev. 2:7 _____

There is no way that Heaven can be adequately described in earthly terms so that we can fully understand. Heaven is a different realm of existence and it requires that we shed this earthly tabernacle so that we might put on the new spiritual tabernacle prepared and “fit” for an eternal existence (2 Cor. 5:1). Heaven is for all eternity and we need to be given a new body for such an existence (2 Pet. 3:13).

5. Why is Heaven described as a place of “Reward?” (Matt. 5:11-12; 1 Pet. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10) _____

The Population of Heaven!

6. Who are the kinds of people who will go to Heaven?

- a) Matt. 7:21 _____
- b) John 14:6 _____
- c) Rev. 2:10 _____

- d) 1 Jn. 1:7-9 _____
- e) Rev. 22:14 _____
- f) Rev. 2:7 _____
- g) Rev. 7:9-10 _____
- h) 2 Pet. 1:10-11 _____
- i) 1 Pet. 4:18-19 _____
- j) 1 Jn. 2:17 _____
- k) 1 Jn. 3:22 _____

Concluding Thoughts: *“Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people!”* Jesus has assured us of this fact. We can trust Him, Count on Him, depend on Him, for He cannot lie! God has shown His tenderness and love for man in order to turn us from disobedience back to obedience to Him. The Atonement through Jesus is God’s grand specimen of His love for His creatures. But at the same time He has also shown His righteous severity and anger for sin in the terrible death that His Son had to go through in order to atone for our sins. He has also warned man of the terrible consequences of rejection of His offer of salvation. We must not allow the struggles and challenges of life to turn us away from our vision and goal of Heaven!

