Everything that means anything is in Christ! For this reason, the primary aim of this study is to enrich your experience as a Christian. In so doing, our adversary will be defeated and preparation will have been made for heaven. May God bless you in your noble pursuit of that which means everything in this world and even more in the world to come. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11).

-- Tony Mauck
Lesson #1: THE DAILY PURSUIT OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

Worship services are so beneficial and crucial to the life of the Christian, but the real trials of one's faith and commitment are outside the walls of the place of assembly. Worship services may inspire faithfulness, zeal and love, but the real challenge is to take those qualities out into the world with us daily. Very little of our time is spent in the corporate worship and activity of the church. Much more time is spent in day to day events and experiences. This is where faith is challenged. This is where the devil is confronted. This is where Christianity is lived. This is where we must fight valiantly and overcome.

The hardest thing about being a Christian is that it is so daily. Holidays, vacations and weekends provide a break from most secular jobs, but one cannot afford a day off as a Christian. Living as a disciple of the Lord pertains to every minute one is awake. While much different than a secular job and much better, being a Christian is a full-time job, "...we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ," (2 Corinthians 10:5). The purpose of worship services and Bible classes is to aid your diligent attempt to do this very thing.

Christianity begins with a "renewing of the mind." Our goal each day is Christian living - not mere respect for religion, acknowledging our belief in Jesus as the Savior, attending scheduled worship services, offering an occasional prayer, periodic reading of Scripture -to allow our belief to shape who and what we are, to govern our minds and, consequently, all of our daily pursuits and activities. This involves all of the aforementioned things and much more.

Living without thinking, without guidelines and purpose, is suicidal. Aimless living characterizes the vast majority of people in this world, "Surely every man walks about as a phantom; Surely they make an uproar for nothing; He amasses riches, and does not know who will gather them" (Psalm 39:6). The child of God lives purposefully. The Christian should avoid approaching a new day as just the same old, familiar routine. Each day is an opportunity and a challenge to really live for Christ and not for ourselves, to really serve God and others above ourselves. Let us say with Paul, "I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31).

We will be tempted to allow the topics of Lessons 2-18 to derail us from our purpose. Satan's attacks will be fierce against us. It's warfare, and the surest way to be victimized by the evil one is to be oblivious to the battle. But do not despair since victory is ours for the taking (1 Corinthians 15:54-58; 1 John 5:4). Jesus has enabled us to overcome which will be the topics of Lessons 19-23. May God bless us in this timely study.
Discussion:

1. In specific terms, can you describe what the Christian is consciously pursuing each day?

2. Find references in Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 which speak of the "renewing" of our "minds".

3. Can you think of some practical ways that Christians are to go about "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ?"

4. List as many different situations and circumstances that you can where your faith might be challenged in a single day.

5. What does it mean...To "die daily?" To "take up your cross" and follow Jesus? To "lose your life" for His sake?
Lesson #2: TEMPTATION

The major obstacle to the faith of the Christian is quite obvious...that which is opposed to faith. Since "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17), to refuse or neglect to follow the word of Christ is to succumb to temptation and sin. Faithfulness is not to be measured by attendance to worship services alone, but the ordering of one's heart and life after the word of Christ. The word of Christ warns of temptation. It explains where it originates {Satan, not God}. It reveals how it works. It alerts us to its deceitfulness. It cautions us regarding its destruction. Its limitation is declared.

Satan is behind every temptation, not God (James 1:13). Regardless of how the devil came into being (cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 20), what we know for sure is that we have an unseen adversary who wishes to destroy us. He is not a harmless creature in red tights with a long tail, beady eyes, thick black mustache and a pitch-fork. John warned, "...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Temptation will not leave us alone because we are Christians. It may even grow stronger against us.

Temptation makes its appeal through the flesh (James 1:14). It has three basic ends which it seeks to encourage, "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Its sensual rewards are purely temporal and short-lived, but its greatest appeal may be immediate gratification. Sin is designed to give you a rush, a thrill, instant excitement, but it leaves one desiring more, a bigger and better thrill than before. The tragedy of it all is that sin will not and cannot satisfy man's desire.

The approach of temptation is subtle and inviting (Genesis 3:1). Its very nature is both alluring and deceptive. It often portrays itself as what is best for us (Luke 15:11-20). It can even be disguised in a cloak of seeming goodness. The less we think of him and the more we minimize his ability in our minds, the better he likes it. This makes him all the more dangerous.

Ultimately, sin will ruin us. The end of Satan's temptation is catastrophic, cataclysmic calamity. Enough adjectives do not exist to describe the awful extent of the misery which Satan desires for all of us. He is not our friend, but our adversary and enemy.

Thankfully, temptation is not an irresistible force. The child of God can respond negatively to its strong and persistent appeals and positively to the will of God. It's a simple matter of choice.

The "way of escape" will not be apparent without some effort to find it. Running in the other direction away from temptation is encouraged more than once in the Scripture (Genesis 39:6-13; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22). The best advice to ward off temptation may have been given to Cain in the very beginning, "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7). Without question, temptation is a daily CHALLENGE!
Discussion:

1. Can you find five New Testament passages not used in this lesson which speak of the activity of the devil?

2. What can we learn from Jesus as He confronted temptation in Matthew 4:1-13 and 16:21-23?

3. Construct a list of all areas where one can sin and fall short of the glory of God:

4. How can we be alert to Satan and sin, recognizing the approach of temptation?

5. Is there such a thing as "gray areas" where sin is concerned?
Lesson #3: SELFISHNESS

At the root of temptation is selfishness. The basic philosophy behind sin which makes it so opposed to the nature of God is that it encourages one to cater to self. You have heard of "The ME Generation." These are the times in which we live and mankind generally has always lived. Not that everyone always serves self first, but the habitual practice of most people is to be preoccupied with and serve self, not God and others.

What is the solution to marital problems, physical abuse, separation and divorce? The Bible encourages an approach to marriage which is selfless - "Love does not seek its own...Husbands, love your wives... encourage the young women to love their husbands" (1 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4). Never a disagreement? Not necessarily. Describing the manner in which one is to conduct one's self in a disagreement and providing an avenue for a solution to problems? Absolutely!

What is the solution to any sin problem? Some believe only supernatural intervention can prevent it (i.e. the Holy Spirit living inside them literally, controlling them). What is needed is not some new and unique idea or special formula, but simple adherence to the Spirit's direction via the word and simple decisions to avoid sin. The example of Jesus provides us all the impetus we should need to "Just Say, 'NO!'" to sin. Not only did Jesus die for us, He demonstrated for us how to live righteously. Actually, His death on the cross was the culmination of a completely selfless life.

One aim of the gospel is to rescue us from self-oriented living (1 Corinthians 6:17; Philippians 2:3-4). As Christians, though we have made the choice not to serve ourselves any longer, we will be tempted to return to this pattern of living. This is the "old self" which we must constantly fight against and we must daily put to death (Romans 6; Ephesians 4:17-32; Colossians 3).

Before we can fight it, we must first recognize that eluding selfishness is a daily challenge. Attention given to any of the media will mean that we are being bombarded daily by messages to serve ourselves. Television commercials may be the worst offenders. Subtle messages guarantee, "Our product will satisfy you. Give yourself the very best. Don't you want the best for yourself?" While the product may be harmless, the appeal is to self. In addition to the visual media, the lyrics of many contemporary songs encourage such an approach to life. Most people in the world have been brainwashed into having this type of mindset, believing it will provide them the happiness and fulfillment they seek.

Be on your guard every day. Be conscious and aware that the devil desires selfishness to reign. While selfishness may seem to be quite rewarding, it's result is emptiness, isolation and despair. Though being God- and others (particularly our own families and brethren)-oriented may seem to require too much effort and sacrifice, in reality, this lifestyle is the most satisfying and rewarding.
Discussion:

1. Give some examples from the gospels which evidence the selflessness of Jesus through both statements and actions.

2. From the admonitions of Colossians 3, make two lists...a short one which describes the old self and a longer one describing the new self:

3. Watch at least 5 minutes of television commercials. What percentage of commercials make their appeal to self? Try to list the primary appeal made by each commercial.

4. What incentives from Scripture motivate us to live selflessly?

5. Can you think of some practical ways to approach each new day that will help us to ward off a selfish approach to life?
Lesson #4: MATERIALISM

"The American Dream" is often equated with materialism, a preoccupation with the accumulation and possession of things. In some cases, both husband and wife must hold full time jobs to provide for their family. In many cases, however, full time jobs are maintained by both and overtime pay is even sought, because such an income is demanded by extravagant spending. Our culture seeks things and many of them. Nearly everybody has toys, not just the kids. Life in the United States is incomplete and inferior without at least two color televisions, a VCR, a nice stereo component system including a CD-player and a microwave oven. The goal is a large new house, luxury automobiles, all the latest appliances, the most recent stylish clothes. "Keeping up with the Joneses" is a far greater American pastime than baseball.

Material things are not inherently evil. Even the material part of man is not evil, but we must employ our bodies wisely, allowing the spiritual side of us to govern our bodies activities as it is ruled by God. Material things exists for our use, but they must not be abused or misused. One of the great men in Old Testament times, Abraham, was blessed richly with material wealth. In New Testament times, Timothy was instructed by Paul to "charge the rich" some of whom were obviously members of the Lord's church (1 Timothy 6:17-19). It is not money which is evil but "the love" of the material, and such an affection will alienate one from the faith and bring ultimate sorrow (1 Timothy 6:6-12).

On more than one occasion, Jesus encouraged a detachment from, a proper attitude toward and an appropriate use of material things (Luke 12:13-34; 14:33; 16:1-15,19-31; 18:18-30). Under inspiration, the Apostle Paul encouraged the same approach to the material (Philippians 4:11-12), and lamentably mentioned the love for "this present world" which had side-tracked his co-worker Demas (2 Timothy 4:10). Perhaps, the strongest words were spoken by James as he condemned spiritual adultery, defined as "friendship with the world," which is "hostile toward God" (James 4:4).

Thus, the aim of the Christian is to keep the material in the proper perspective. Paul encouraged our viewpoint of life to take on a spiritual rather than a temporal hue (2 Corinthians 4:17,18). The daily challenge which confronts us is to primarily pursue the spiritual, not the carnal. John's warning is strikingly relevant yet today, "Do not love not the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15,17). This world is a nice place for us to live, but it is not a good object for the affections of the heart.
Discussion:

1. List the material things you possess and indicate what your main purposes are for possessing those things:

2. Read Ecclesiastes 2:4-11; 5:10-19; 9:11 and briefly summarize some the wisdom of Solomon regarding material things:

3. Our possession of the material should be viewed more as stewardship Vs. ownership (Haggai 2:18; Matthew 25:14-30). Give examples of how one demonstrates good stewardship and give examples of how one could display poor stewardship:

4. When does the pursuit of material things become "covetousness (greed, NASB), which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5)?

5. Can prosperity or poverty indicate anything whatsoever about the righteousness or unrighteousness of a person?

6. Can one expect to reap an abundance materially from liberal giving toward God (See Proverbs 3:9-10; 2 Corinthians 9:6)?
Lesson #5: PRIDE

Our English word, "pride," has taken on a number of meanings all of which are not evil. Secondary dictionary definitions speak of pride as a proper respect of self, a sense of one's own dignity or delight or satisfaction in others' achievements. The Bible's use of this word is always in its most negative sense. Being rooted in selfishness, evil pride has to do with an attitude of mind which sees one's self as having a worth which is over-inflated and inaccurate. As has been noted many times, pride has an "I" in the middle. Pride is a peculiar disease; it makes everyone sick but the person who is infected by it.

The Bible condemns such an exaggerated esteem for self which defies God and His will. Synonyms for pride are arrogance, conceit and haughtiness. Arrogance is encouraged by Satan, because it will destroy us (Proverbs 16:18). Often times, pride will not allow people to admit the truth about themselves. Therefore, as the caricature indicates, pride is not always easily detected, especially by the one who displays it. All of us have experienced the nauseating feeling of hearing someone speak great, swelling words of pride.

A fair and honest representation of one's own achievements is not necessarily to be viewed as pride. Neither is confidence or leadership ability to be confused with arrogance (e.g. Numbers 12:3). Pride stems from a desire to exalt self higher than one deserves to be. Paul counseled against pride in Romans 12:3 and Galatians 6:3 where he recommended a proper evaluation of one's station in life. Thus, humility is the simple recognition of who and what I really am in light of who and what God is and others are.

Detecting pride begins with an examination of one's mind and motives. Always speaking disparagingly of others and seeing one's self as the standard for right behavior can be a form of self-exaltation. Furthermore, approaching God's word as a smorgasbord where we will pick and choose which commands we wish to obey and which one's we don't likewise demonstrates arrogance. Much of the false religion of our day caters to the self-willed pride of individuals who refuse to submit fully to the teaching of Scripture. Describing the last days in which we live, Paul warned of persons who would be "lovers of self...boastful, arrogant" and "conceited" (2 Timothy 3:2,4). Rejoice in achievements. Acknowledge your own talent and abilities, but temper them with a knowledge of your failures and limitations. Recognize all that we are and have comes from God.
Discussion:

1. Can you name at least three individuals in both the Old and New Testaments who were filled with pride?

2. Why must we be careful in attributing words spoken by others to the pride which is in their heart? How could you safely determine when one is proud and sinning before God?

3. Pride is most often evidenced in the things people say. According to Matthew 12:34,35, why is this so?

4. How would you respond to someone who says that since "pride" is never used in a favorable sense in the Bible, we should never say that we are "proud" of anything?

5. Can you locate a reference where Paul boasted? How could it have been justified?

6. What percentage of lost souls do you believe will result from displaying pride?

7. How might we be confronted with pride in our daily lives?
Lesson #6: ADDICTIONS

The Christian has been set free from the entanglements and defilements of this world (2 Timothy 2:3,4; 2 Peter 2:20-22). Yet, with one wayward act, one can be enslaved once more. Peter warned, "...for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:19). Satan's vices are not only wrong, they can control us. Particularly, ones which are addictive by nature are soul-threatening...drugs including nicotine and alcohol.

Drugs can have a positive medicinal use. They can be beneficial in fighting infections and disease or relieving intense pain. In the middle of a context dealing with sin, Paul encourages Timothy to take a little wine for his frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:22-25) which seems to indicate that Timothy avoided drinking wine. When drugs are used for other purposes (e.g. curiosity, thrill-seeking, to escape from problems, rebellion), it becomes nothing more than a pursuit to fulfill the lust of the flesh. Such behavior is opposed to the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

These addictive devices militate against such godly principles as sobriety, concern for others and faithful stewardship. Drugs alter and can cripple the mind. Once the mind is affected, one runs the risk of harming another and physically impairing themselves (if not immediately in an accident, later harming the body through habitual use). A recent health publication listed 8 physical effects from drinking with this preface, "There's a lot more going on inside your body while you drink than that warm feeling of relaxation you may be experiencing." The article was entitled, "Paying For Your Drinks."

Some attempt to justify social drinking by claiming that Jesus turned water into wine or that social drinking is not "drunkenness." Clearly, however, the Bible provides no justification whatsoever for the practice of consuming harmful and addictive intoxicants (e.g. 1 Peter 4:3,4; Hebrews 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:21,22). No one ever started as an addict to a particular drug. Addictions take place over time with frequent use. All alcoholics started with a social drink, and all chain smokers and drug users began with a single stick or dose. Additionally, even those who practice these things generally recognize them as a vice of which "good, Christian people" do not partake. Besides all of the evil association previously mentioned, ingesting these things is harmful to one's influence as a Christian. One can hardly be "a light to the world" while engaged in these activities.

Though many Christians know these things to be wrong, because of various pressures they may succumb to their destructive grip. Resolve to meet this challenging foe with steadfast determination to avert its clutches.
Discussion:

1. Obviously, food too can be addictive and certain foods especially (e.g. beverages containing caffeine). Can an addiction to a food be sinful? Is gluttony sinful (see Proverbs 23:21; Deuteronomy 21:20)? How might food be different in nature from alcoholic beverages and cigarettes (see 1 Corinthians 6:13)?

2. Does the Bible condemn social drinking? Why or why not?

3. What about a situation where alcohol is present and is being consumed by others but the Christian does not partake...Is the Christian violating God's will by being present in this atmosphere?

4. What are some alternatives to sinful addictions...When frustrated, discouraged, unhappy or seeking an escape from difficulty?...When spending time with friends?...When desiring a thrill or excitement?... When everyone else around you is doing it?

5. What is the most effective way to explain the fact that you don't drink to your friends and/or co-workers?
Lesson #7: IMPURITY

The message is being spoken loud and clear. Chastity is a thing of the past. The advocates? The majority of songwriters, movie producers, television programmers and even some religious teachers. This merely reflects the mood of our society. If the 1960's can be labelled as the "Sexual Revolution," how much more the 1990's could be labelled a "Sexual Free-For-All." "If it feels good, do it" has been the standard which has generally governed each generation since the 60's. Much of this, of course, can be tied to the influence of the media. However, all of this stems from a lack of respect for God and His will.

Is the New Testament the truth on relationships between people or is it nothing more than pious drivel to be disregarded if we so desire? Does it contain the wisdom of Almighty God or is it merely His opinion on human behavior? The answer is transparent. The immoral - the lascivious, fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals - will not reap heaven's reward. God's plan, one man and one woman for life in marriage, is the only one which works, honors God and ultimately will satisfy us.

Impurity may result, not solely from an illicit relationship, but also from improper thoughts toward those of the opposite sex. Job declared, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). Jesus warned of committing adultery in the heart by lusting with one's eyes (Matthew 5:28). Before purity ever characterizes one's actions, it commences in the heart (Proverbs 4:23). A decision must be made to pursue purity of mind.

Maybe, the greatest challenge to purity is the impure world which is all around us. To completely escape harmful influences is impossible apart from a life of seclusion which Paul did not recommend (1 Corinthians 5:10). We can, however, limit the number of evil messages bombarding us. Avoid activities which knowingly will challenge or could weaken the purity of your mind. For example, watching MTV for any length of time will not provide a spiritual boost. The longer the mind is allowed to dwell upon base things or even just be parked in neutral the greater potential harm can be done to us spiritually. The Christian needs daily to actively pursue good thoughts.

The pressure will be great to conform to the thinking and practice of the world around us. We might be tempted to justify evil behavior on the grounds that everyone else is doing it. In addition, we could convince ourselves that the temptation of impurity is so strong and so overwhelming that it is impossible to avoid. We know this is not the truth (1 Corinthians 10:13), but we may give up fighting impurity because it's lure seems so strong. "Now flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace" (2 Timothy 2:22).
Discussion:

1. In Philippians 4:8, upon what does Paul recommend that the Christian's mind is to dwell? Compile a "Think On These Things" list which enumerates specific things which are good fodder for the mind.

2. Is taking mental note of the beautiful or handsome characteristics of the opposite sex to be considered lust? How does one determine when "Look" crosses the line to "Lust?"

3. What is your attitude toward dancing? In what circumstances would dancing contribute to impurity?

4. What do you believe are some of the underlying causes promoting the rampant immorality of our day?

5. Sexually immoral practices obviously provide some momentary pleasure, but why are these practices foolish besides the fact that God says don't do them and that one will reap eternal condemnation?

6. What are some of the particular challenges to purity for the unmarried?
Lesson #8: EVIL SPEAKING

Rapidly becoming one of the most notable distinguishing marks of the Christian is unpolluted speech. By our refusal to speak with the same "colorful metaphors," people will recognize the value which Christians place upon holiness. Words are important. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21). With the tongue, a declaration of allegiance toward Christ should be made, resulting in salvation (Romans 10:9-10). Not just lip service, true confession emanates from the affections of the heart. Thus, a vow is made to God (Ecclesiastes 5:4,5). Confession of Christ should affect the way one employs the tongue.

Words should be chosen carefully which are consistent with one's confession (Proverbs 15:28). Note James 3:11, "Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?" The question demonstrates that both blessing of God and cursing should not proceed from the same mouth (James 3:9,10). Despite this, pure speech can be a daily challenge for the Christian.

When we are constantly subjected to any thing, we tend to be influenced at least in some small way. If we are around filthy conversation all day long, we will not go unaffected. Instead of allowing this to corrupt our speech, desensitize us to its evil or cause us to minimize it, the Christian's righteous soul should be distressed while being subjected to such filth (2 Peter 2:9). Always abhor evil (Romans 12:9; Psalm 119:104).

The tongue deserves much attention, because it can be used in so many positive ways and misused in so many negative ways. The tongue can be a powerful tool of blessing or it can wrongfully be a destructive instrument. One brief, thoughtful, timely word, can kindle friendship, edify and heal (Proverbs 15:7,23). One careless, thoughtless, disparaging word can kindle a destructive fire that brings wide-scale ruin and disaster (James 3:5,6). Daily, it's important to remember, "Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all" (Psalm 139:4). Even if another Christian is not present to rebuke us for words unbecoming of the Christian, know that God is listening to every word. The purity which characterizes our speech may be very instrumental in bringing a soul to Christ. Conversely, evil speech could very well destroy any opportunity to reach someone with God's saving truth.
Discussion:

1. How can one reconcile the two statements made by James 3:2 which speaks of one who "does not stumble in what he says...is a perfect man" and 3:8 which declares that "no one can tame the tongue?"

2. Why does the ability to control one's tongue enable one also to control the whole body (James 3:2)?

3. Can you think of any occasions in your past experience when words spoken by you or others did lasting damage or effected lasting good?

4. Read Ephesians 4:29 and Colossians 4:6. How is one to pursue purity of speech or how can it be attained?

5. What are some specific positive ways in which the tongue can be employed by the Christian every day?

6. One observed, “God gave us a mouth that closes and ears that don’t – which should tell us something.” According to James 1:19 and Proverbs 15:28, instead of using the tongue in some instances, we would be better advised to do what?
Lesson #9: DISTRACTION

The temptation to engage in immoral behavior certainly threatens the spiritual welfare of the child of God. On many occasions, however, a greater foe to our spiritual health may be nothing more than distraction. The things by which one is distracted may not be inherently evil, but by allowing these things to dominate our time and attention one becomes weakened in faith.

Have you ever eaten so much of a wonderful tasting dessert that you shortly thereafter became ill? Too much of a good thing often causes the thing to cease being good. Even things which are morally harmless can be harmful to us if we overindulge in them or allow them to interfere with spiritual needs and responsibilities.

Hectic schedules and meeting life's responsibilities are thrust upon us, consuming our time. Moreover, by overextending or overcommitting ourselves to various activities, we can unwittingly promote our own distraction. Some responsibilities are beyond our ability to control. For example, we could refuse not to possess an automobile which would bypass necessary maintenance, licensing, insurance and fill-ups, yet in our society, being without transportation would create a burden in itself.

More often than not, spiritual illness results when we willingly choose to participate in a multitude of optional activities and thus leave ourselves with little time reserved for the needful ones. Such distractions as these must be limited. Too many diversions from needful spiritual pursuit can dull our sensitivity to sin and weaken our love of righteousness.

How busy is too busy? This is a difficult question to answer and must depend on the judgment of each individual. Specific guidelines may be helpful in determining how many "optional" activities are too many. Do the activities interfere with me worshiping with the saints? Do I have time to pray and study God's word? Am I always feeling too tired to do what is needed in serving God and serving my brethren? Do I find my priorities leaning toward the material as opposed to the spiritual?

Maybe, a difficulty will arise trying to determine which activities are "optional" and which are "essential." Many things we might consider as necessary may in fact be unnecessary, but we view them as necessary since it seems everyone else is engaged in them. We must be careful not to put too much emphasis on "this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Many activities and events in this world are morally neutral, yet can become either quite beneficial or extremely harmful depending on our approach, our attitude toward those things. Avoiding detrimental distraction is unquestionably a daily challenge.
Discussion:

1. Consider the activities in which you have engaged in the past week. List as many as you can remember under the headings...
   "Optional"                     "Essential"

2. How can attending a movie, playing a sport or going shopping be a good thing or be a bad thing depending on our approach to them?

3. What indicators might be present which would tell us that we are being distracted from the things which really matter?

4. From a spiritual perspective, in what manner should we approach the obligations which are thrust upon us even if those things become burdensome?  {e.g. 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Philippians 4:6}

5. How can we keep from being distracted? What practical things can be done to keep our minds on the right track?

6. In a sentence or two, how would you define being on "the right track" spiritually?
Lesson #10: CONFLICTS

With immediate family members, relatives, spiritual family members, employers and co-workers, neighbors, even passing acquaintances...We've all experienced conflicts. Why? Obviously, sin is a reason, but is conflict always an indication of the presence of sin? While ungodliness of various kinds could precipitate a conflict and certainly be displayed in the midst of one, conflicts may result for other reasons. A partial list would include unrealistic expectations, disagreement in judgment, differences in upbringing, pressure and the influence of others.

Most people wish such conflicts never happened. They seek harmony and good-will. Yet, realistically, conflicts are predictable. Unless we isolate ourselves completely, conflicts will occur. For whatever reason, disagreements will come even in the lives of the best of people. One of the most notable conflicts in the Scripture occurred between two honorable men, Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15:36-40. Who knows what role God's providence may have played in this "parting of the ways."

The Bible is replete with examples of domestic conflict: Cain and Abel (Genesis 4); Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13); Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16); Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27); Jacob, Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29,30); Jacob's eleven sons (Genesis 37); Moses and Zipporah (Exodus 4:25,26); David and Michal (2 Samuel 6:20-23); David and his children (2 Samuel 13); Jesus and His kinsmen (Mark 3:21); Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). See also Luke 12:13-21; 15:11-32.

More numerous than these are the accounts of conflicts between nations (e.g., Israel and Assyria/Babylon) and individual conflicts between good and evil men (e.g., King Saul and David). Jesus was embroiled in conflict with the Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes during a large part of His recorded ministry. Paul debated unbelieving Jews on more than one occasion (e.g. Acts 9:29; 19:9; 23:3). Whenever truth meets error, conflict is nearly always the result. For this reason, we should not attempt to avoid conflicts over truth. In Acts 15:2,7, a debate arose among Jewish believers over God's acceptance of the Gentiles and circumcision.

One daily challenge is to know which conflicts to avoid and which ones are necessary. A greater challenge is to exhibit exemplary behavior, consistent with our profession of faith in Christ, during a conflict. Regardless of the context, in the midst of conflict, the Christian must display godly attitudes and not ungodly ones. Conflicts tend to provoke outbursts of anger, resentment, bitterness, hatred and strife. What an excellent opportunity to declare your allegiance to Christ and to influence others by your markedly different behavior than that demonstrated by most people.
Discussion:

1. Recall your most recent conflict. Could it have been avoided and if so how? What was your behavior during the conflict? Was it resolved? If you were to experience this again, what would you do differently?

2. Which attributes of Christian character are needed in the midst of conflict? Attempt to define each.

3. A loving rebuke is rarely a joyful experience which most of us would probably like to avoid. Think of some occasions when a rebuke is necessary. In these situations, are harsh words opposed to love?

4. Why and how do most domestic (family) conflicts occur? What are some important guidelines for handling these conflicts?

5. Explain how the following verses apply to conflicts:
   - Proverbs 15:1 -
   - Ephesians 4:26,27,29 -
   - 2 Timothy 4:2 -
   - James 1:19-22 -
   - 1 Peter 3:8-12 -
   - 1 Peter 4:12-19 -
   - Jude 3 -
Lesson #11: NEGLECT

According to Webster's Dictionary, "neglect" is defined, "to fail to care for or attend to sufficiently or properly; slight; leave undone; to ignore, disregard, not heed." Guilty...a word which describes most people regarding neglect. We all could plead guilty for being negligent about something. Maybe, we have not given the necessary attention to our house, the yard or the garden. Possibly, we failed to pass on important information which was entrusted to us. Neglect has many facets. Malpractice lawsuits against doctors and hospitals are often levied due to neglect. Many times, juvenile delinquents are the result of parents who neglected them. Failing to meet responsibilities, being lazy, willingly ignoring what is right and needed, is a foolish way to spend one's life. Neglect is foreign to the desire of a Christian. We are to pursue a lifestyle of unquestionable responsibility and good works (1 Peter 2:9-12; Ephes. 2:10).

Ignoring spiritual truth is the most serious case of neglect. Jesus condemned the neglect of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23. It's not enough to merely be religious. One must comply with all the truth. The Pharisees had not neglected the truth completely. They had simply failed to observe certain aspects of truth and the "weightier" ones at that. The Hebrew writer warns very sternly that there is no escape for those who "neglect so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3). Neglect of spiritual responsibility is sin. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Neglecting truth is as serious as rejecting truth.

Neglect may evidence itself in the life of a Christian in several ways. Forsaking the assembling of the saints for any worldly or material motive is an example of neglect (Hebrews 10:25). Yet, one may attend every assembly and still not give sufficient attention to the needs of the soul. Contemplating and applying the word of God must not be neglected. Failing to pray is a further indication of negligence. Being involved in teaching God's word, preparing for Bible classes, assisting those in need, visiting the sick and elderly, restoring the erring are examples of good works which are opposed to neglect.

Of Daniel, the inspired text says that "no negligence or corruption was to be found in him" (Daniel 6:4). "No negligence or corruption" was not just his work ethic, but his life ethic. Diligence, not negligence, characterizes all those who are loyal to Christ and who have submitted to His rule.
Discussion:

1. In what specific ways might one be guilty of doing what Jeremiah 48:10 designates as "cursed?" See also Mark 7:8.

2. What are symptoms or signs of negligence in the life of a Christian? In what ways might we be tempted to be negligent? Is it possible to neglect our physical bodies or appearance? How might spiritual problems be revealed in the neglect of these things?

3. What bearing does any of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 have on the subject of negligence?

4. How might one neglect his or her physical family?

5. How might one neglect his or her spiritual family?

6. Who suffers when one neglects or forsakes the assembling of the saints or when one does not prepare for his or her Bible class?

7. What are some specific, practical ways to avoid neglect?
Lesson #12: BOREDOM

Picture sitting in a comfortable recliner. Six feet away is a 25-inch color television set. In your hand is a remote control device which allows you to flip through 36 different cable channels at remarkable speed. Visual paradise! Or is it? "There's nothing to watch. How boring!" Does this sound familiar to you?

"I'm bored!" Every young person in the land knows these words before they ever get to first grade. "This is boring!" Who knows how many activities or events have been labelled this by a disgruntled participant or onlooker? When something is "boring," it does not produce an excitement we are expecting or desiring. To many, life is boring by nature. While this may seem harmless, this attitude among Christians could indicate spiritual weakness. My intention for this lesson is otherwise, but you may be bored studying this lesson on boredom. "He's boring!" This is not an uncommon expression to be heard about a Bible class teacher or preacher.

Why do people become bored? People who are self-centered are most likely to become bored. People who are concerned about God's will being done on the earth and who are looking to the interests, concerns and needs of others (Philippians 2:4) can always find some fulfilling activity with which to occupy themselves. When one's main pursuits in life centers around self, true fulfillment will be elusive. Self will never get enough, thus boredom will eventually ensue. According to Jesus, finding life begins with denying and losing self (Matthew 16:24,25).

Boredom begins when mind and body are put into idle. We all tend to believe that being acted upon is easier and more enjoyable than doing the acting. Therefore, when we cease to be acted upon in a way that satisfies us or we cannot find some worthwhile activity with which to occupy ourselves, we get bored. Boredom says that I'm looking for something which I am not presently experiencing and that my present circumstances are inadequate. Regardless of how creative you are with the use of your time, some occasions will be less eventful than others.

Though not a verse in Scripture, the saying is true, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." The results of boredom can vary from simple nonproductivity and waste to experimentation in evil and the pursuit of harmful things. Why did David even entertain the idea of committing adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-3)? Could it have been boredom resulting from his failure to engage himself in the right direction? Do not allow idleness to rival your fidelity to God. When boredom confronts you, take positive action combating it. Remember, killing time is not murder, but it may promote spiritual suicide.
Discussion:

1. Read carefully Proverbs 6:6-11; 13:4; 21:25. What application might these verses have to the subject of boredom?

2. Solomon's experiment in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 (the result of boredom?) provided excitement and entertainment, but eventually it was not fulfilling. Why?

3. Undoubtedly, Jesus did not struggle with boredom. Comment on Jesus' words about idleness in Matthew 20:6,7 and John 9:4,5?

4. What should be the Christian's approach to rest, recreation and entertainment {examine attitude, purpose, time spent, purity}?

5. Television can be a crutch for lazy, bored people. What did people do before television to cure their boredom?

6. What are some "good works" (Titus 2:14) which you can perform, providing a solution for the problem of boredom?
Lesson #13: WEARINESS

In the United States, the amount of hours spent on the job has decreased in the past few decades. Considering vacations, holidays and personal leave, the work week for the average American consists of slightly more than 35 hours a week. Americans have more "free" time than ever before. Yet, a hectic, fast-paced lifestyle is lived by most. These days, it's run, run, run! Additionally, Americans generally are getting less and less sleep. Staying up late and getting up early is the routine in many households. The result is weariness.

"I'm tired!" is probably more common than "I'm bored!" 168 hours seems like a lot, but people are trying to cram so many activities into each week that necessary rest is sacrificed. Besides, the body was not made to run without rest which refuels and refreshes. Activity will wear on the body (At this present moment, I can identify with Solomon's words, Ecclesiastes 12:12). Mental strain is often as tiring as physical activity.

For the Christian, weariness can obstruct an ample investment in spiritual pursuits. We will all be tempted after a difficult day at work or school to neglect a spiritual task that we know needs to be accomplished. We will rationalize too much effort is demanded, at least, more than we are willing to give.

Jesus recognized the need for rest when we are weary. In Mark 6:30-32, the Great Physician prescribed some rest for His disciples (For some, "Come WORK for a while" might be more suitable). On occasion, however, work may be demanded even though we are worn out or fatigued (John 4:6,31-36). Doing the Lord's work may even be rejuvenating. Prayer, study of God's word, teaching truth, aiding the suffering and encouraging the weak are all refreshing endeavors.

Maybe, part of the problem with weariness we can blame on ourselves. Wearing ourselves out by our involvement in so many secular activities can also contribute to our exhaustion. Getting adequate rest so that we can accomplish the Lord's work should be a priority. For some, doing some planning would help resolve the problem of weariness.

Is it possible to even become weary of spiritual pursuit? Unfortunately, some do and leave the faith. Tired of fighting the warfare against Satan and sin, some give in to weariness and give up. Paul encouraged the Galatians to avert this, "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary" (Galatians 6:9). Remind yourself daily of the location of your citizenship (Philippians 3:20) and the affections of your heart (Colossians 3:1-3), and fight weariness so you will reap in "due time."
Discussion:

1. Think of as many factors as you can which contribute to weariness:

2. Maybe, you've heard someone say, "I'm tired, but it's a good tired." Is being tired necessarily bad?

3. When people experience trouble trying to staying awake during services, what are some of the causes and solutions to the problem?

4. How is one's mood or disposition affected when weary and what effect can this have in relationships with others, especially family?

5. When weariness can't be avoided, for whatever reason, what course of action can be taken to make the best of a bad situation?

6. When engaged in our favorite activities, weariness is usually not a problem. We tend to find energy for these things. Why? Is there something we can learn from this about weariness and spiritual pursuit?
Lesson #14: PEERS

One of the greater hindrances for many Christians has been the influence of peers. When you consider that Christians hold a minority view regarding ethics, this means that the majority of people with whom we come in contact will not hold to the same standard of behavior. Increasing the difficulty for the Christian is a desire to be liked, appreciated and accepted. This is not an errant wish, but we must keep in mind that it's God's acceptance that matters ultimately, not the world's. "If anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (1 Corinthians 8:3). Nevertheless, standing alone or in a minority is not easy. The people of God were warned long ago, "You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil" (Exodus 23:2).

This does not make the pressure go away, however. Satan will often use those closest to us to preach his deceitful message. What sounds like friendly concern may be the evil one's tool of compromise. We will be challenged again and again to go with the crowd rather than to remain true to our convictions. Like most sinful behavior, once you give in, the difficulty of resisting increases on the next challenging occasion to go with the crowd. If we've listened to the voice of peers before, we're likely to do it again unless we take action in preparation for it.

How does peer pressure work? Its message is one of conformity, "Everyone else is doing it." Remember, everyone else is not doing it. Faithful Christians are saying, "No!" "If it feels good, do it," we're persuaded. What feels good presently may not feel so good later. "One time won't hurt anything" we convince ourselves. Consequently, a pattern of sinful behavior often occurs.

A common misconception is that peer pressure is something that only young people, particularly high school and college age, experience. But the pressure to conform to the ways of others does not end in those early years. Co-workers and friends may encourage us to participate in one evil or another. Since isolation from lost humanity is not a practical possibility nor is it encouraged by the Scripture (1 Corinthians 5:10), everyone must confront the challenge of peer pressure. Limiting our association with non-Christians may be an important step in defeating it (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Are we helpless in the face of peer pressure? The Christian ought to pursue doing the influencing rather than being influenced. Rather than succumbing to temptation, reverse the pressure by encouraging them to do right. Real friends will respect your allegiance to Christ. Affirm your convictions to them. Reason with them about the wisdom of righteousness. Invite them to study God's word with you. Challenge them to consider the needs of the soul. God will bless you for the effort and your friend might just save his or her soul.
Discussion:

1. Barnabas partook in evil because of peer pressure from another apostle, Peter (Galatians 2:11-14). What might have been the thinking of Barnabas? What else do we learn from this incident regarding where peer pressure to do evil can come from?

2. Can you locate two instances of people succumbing to peer pressure in John 9 and John 12?

3. What role might peer pressure have played in these three Old Testament accounts: Exodus 32; Numbers 13 and 14; 1 Samuel 15?

4. In what areas, do you feel pressure to conform to your peers? Also, indicate several persons who have the most sway over your behavior.

5. While it cannot be avoided completely, what are some ways we can limit the strength of influence our peers have upon us?

6. What are some specific areas where you have struggled with peer pressure in the past and why did you succumb to it?
Lesson #15: WORRY

Medical researchers have confirmed what many have believed for a long time. Being "stressed out" or worrying lowers one's resistance to the common cold. Even more serious, not only can worry be harmful to our physical health, it can be damaging to spiritual health. The Bible is the best counselor for the heart of mankind, providing within its pages a prescription for worry.

Worry is not to be confused with a healthy concern for serious matters. Worry is an excessive concern which distracts one from the right direction one's thoughts and life should be taking. It is opposed to faith. When we allow worries to control us, little is affected except our productivity. The Greek word often translated "cares" is the noun, merimna, which means "drawn in different directions." In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus spoke of "cares of the world" which choke the word of God, making it unfruitful (Mark 4:19). An excessive concern for this world militates against the proper direction for the affections of the heart.

Job said, "Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil" (Job 14:1). Without exception, every person will have cares and concerns. Anguish and distress will come to us all. Notice Paul's comments in 2 Corinthians 2:11 and 11:28 as well as his concern for his "thorn" in chapter 12. So what did Paul do? Philippians 4:6 gives us the answer as he writes while imprisoned, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." The inspired Peter urged, "...casting all your anxiety upon Him (God), because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Concern for important matters, especially spiritual ones, is not sinful. Some are continually in a state of turmoil about something, refusing to depend upon God for the solution to their concerns. So encumbered by worry, if another bad thing happens, it will be another six months before they can worry about it! The saying goes, "Worry is like an old rocking chair. It can keep you busy and take up a lot of your time, but it doesn't get you anywhere." Another says, "Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrows; it only saps today of its strength." As a Christian, meet the challenge of daily concerns with faith!
Discussion:

1. One said, “Worry is interest paid on trouble before it is actually due.” In what way does worry cause you to pay ahead of time?

2. In what way does worry “give a little thing a big shadow?”

3. Locate a songbook and look at the lyrics of "What A Friend We Have In Jesus." What specific problems are addressed and what Biblical solution does the songwriter suggest?

4. What concerns have you contemplated this week, even "minor" ones? How did you resolve them?

5. Read Matthew 6:24-34. About what things are we not to be anxious and why? What prescription does Jesus give for worry?

6. What are some things people tend to worry about?

7. When does appropriate concern become sinful worry? Should we ever say "I'm worried?"
Lesson #16: HATRED

Enmity and its associates can certainly threaten our spiritual well-being. Galatians 5:20 categorizes hatred as a "work of the flesh." Its companions in the list are "strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions and envyings." In defining enmity, one must only look to its opposite. Hatred is the antithesis of love. Love is kind and seeks the best for its object. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is a detailed description of love. Hatred is not kind and does not seek the best for its object. Love unifies, heals and improves. Hate alienates, hurts and destroys.

Not all hatred is condemned in Scripture. Various degrees and types of hatred are described in God's word. A strong, intense dislike of sin is not consistent with righteousness. Even hatred of one's self and family is demanded by Jesus in Luke 14:26. However, this is a relative hatred. Contextually, Jesus is recommending that we love ourselves and family less than we love Him (Matthew 10:37).

Emanating from love for God is a love for one's neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). One cannot consistently claim to love God and hate his fellow man (1 John 4:20). Believers ought even to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44). Furthermore, we are warned that "friendship with the world is hostility toward God" (James 4:4). Every person is called upon to make a love/hate choice...Love God and hate the world or love the world and hate God (Matthew 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17). It has been suggested that there is a fine line between love and hate. Biblically, this is not without foundation. One's disposition toward God, this world and others can change rapidly. Due to challenging circumstances, the pendulum can sometimes swing in matter of moments. The habitual practice of the Christian must be dedicated to loving God, brother, neighbor and even enemy.

Envy and jealousy may be hatred's most subtle disguise. Degrading others, wishing them harm, gloating over their misery, begrudging their good fortune and coveting their belongings is not right behavior for the Christian. In addition, gossiping, backbiting and snide remarks are usually efforts to build up one's self at the expense of another. Vengeance is also a further indication of the hatred within one's heart. "I don't get mad; I get even," the popular slogan contends. Actually, getting even means both parties lose. The devil and hatred are the victors.

We've all been on the receiving end of misrepresentation, gossip, lies, evil treatment and injustice. When we are the recipients or the object of this wicked behavior, we will be tempted to strike back with an attitude of hatred. Our daily challenge is to eradicate such an attitude from our minds and pursue love (1 Corinthians 14:1).
Discussion:

1. Romans 12:14-21 provides a powerful antidote for hatred. Why are the things in this list often so difficult to do?

2. What constitutes hatred toward God and hatred toward fellow man?

3. Make an "I hate..." list (things you despise) and put a check by those things which should be hated (you will probably discover that we use the word hate to mean various things and that there are varying degrees of your hatred). In what specific ways can you rid yourself of the hatred directed toward wrong things or persons?

4. At what point do words spoken about others become gossip?

5. Is an angry response to someone necessarily an indication of hatred?

6. What can be learned from each passage listed below about hate:
   Proverbs 6:16-19 -
   Proverbs 8:13 -
   Luke 6:22,27 -
   John 15:18-25 -
   Jude 23 -
   Revelation 2:6 -
Lesson #17: DISCOURAGEMENT

In the lives of us all, "a little rain must fall" and sometimes it's a steady downpour! Discouragement comes in many shapes and sizes, almost too numerable to count. Discouragement can be disillusioning, confusing and frustrating. It can promote an unhealthy anger, resentment and deep depression.

A child usually learns to cope with disappointment at an early age. Parents who instruct and discipline their children will have to discourage certain behavior. One of the first words a child will learn will be the word, "No!" While the child may dislike the restrictions, fuss, kick and scream, most children will not be upset for long. They will find something else with which to constructively occupy themselves. Maybe, therein is a lesson for adults who face discouragement. Moreover, a good parent will balance discouragement with encouragement. To totally crush the spirit of a child can be quite harmful. Likewise, when adults face discouragement, instead of being immersed in sorrow and self-pity, some avenue whereby we will receive encouragement should be pursued.

The question is not, "Will I get discouraged?" The question is, "When?" Financial burdens, physical maladies, hassles, inconveniences, unfortunate circumstances, people problems/relationships, unfulfilled dreams, dashed expectations - you name it! If we allow them to, these things can send us on a downward emotional spiral toward spiritual demise. My mood or attitude can be harmfully affected and consequently, resulting actions can be less than desirable.

Being a child of the living God in a wicked world may mean more possibility for discouragement. Sin all around us is discouraging. Having our teaching efforts rejected by some loved, lost soul is disheartening. The family of God, comprised of forgiven sinners, may also disappoint us when they do not act consistently with their professed loyalty to Christ. Some brother or sister in Christ might sin against you.

Things don't always go our way or the way we expect them to. We would certainly like to, but it is impossible to always control the circumstances around us. Unpleasant experiences are a part of life. But do these things have to be approached negatively? Hebrews 12:5-11 speaks of the Lord's chastening and how it ultimately makes us better people. Who knows how this all happens? One thing is for sure. All of the sorrow we experience is not bad. It can be beneficial and helpful. If we learn from discouraging situations - grow in attitude as Christians, influence others for good and remain strong - they may ultimately be good for us. The challenge - don't allow less than favorable circumstances to discourage faithful service to God.
Discussion:

1. What application do 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 have on the subject of discouragement?

2. What are signs that one has allowed discouragement to bring harm spiritually?

3. What things most recently have discouraged or disheartened you in some way? What can be done about those things?

4. Can you think of at least 5 examples of discouraged people in the Bible? How did each handle their discouragement?

5. How might a Christian get discouraged about his or her own service to God? How can these discouragements be remedied?

6. Construct two lists to provide help in a time of discouragement:

   Things Not To Do                         Things To Do
Lesson #18: PERSECUTION

Death by crucifixion. Burned at the stake. Devoured by lions. Stoned. Beheaded. Beaten with rods. Thirty-nine lashes. Imprisonment. The reality of first century discipleship. The brevity of life took on a completely different hue in those times. Can you imagine the cloud which must have hung over Christian families? To say the least, the constant threat of persecution must have made life difficult. At any moment, a family could be deprived of a husband and father or wife and mother. It's hard for us to appreciate, isn't it?

Not out of the realm of possibility, such physical harm being brought upon us is highly unlikely. We live in a time when religion is respectable. Faith is fashionable. We would do well, however, not to forget the words of the Apostle Paul spoken to the young evangelist, Timothy, "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). This is a truism for the simple fact that the truth creates enemies - those who wish to remain in and propagate error. Just living the truth declares condemnation upon those who are not. Righteous lives are a declaration of the standard by which all men and women shall be judged.

Martyrdom for the cause - the potential is minimal in our lifetime. While no one relishes the thought of its return, the threat would probably strengthen churches, increasing faith among disciples and weeding out those who are not serious about serving the Lord Jesus. Despite this nation's laws regarding separation of church and state guaranteeing freedom of religion, do not believe for one second that Christians today do not suffer persecution.

If the world is allowed to stand long enough, Satan will probably bring physical persecution back in vogue, but until then, he will continue to use subtle means, mounting his assault upon Christians through ridicule, insult, isolation, rejection and denunciation. How many Christians who have attempted to teach others the way of truth have been asked to leave having doors slammed behind them, been belittled for living by principle or has been the object of mockery? How many Christians have endured the pressure to conform or be cast off? Christians have lost jobs, been denied promotions, had property damaged, been threatened and laughed at because of their allegiance to the living Lord. If not today, in the near future the Christian will pay a price for his or her faith. It's simply the nature of discipleship. When such persecution arises, Christian living will be challenged. Some will opt for the path of least resistance. Seeking the world's approval, they will sacrifice faith. In such adversity, may we hearken to Paul's words to Timothy, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of..." (2 Timothy 3:14).

Discussion:
Lesson #19: OVERCOMING - You Can Do It

1. Can you think of a specific occasion when you experienced some form of persecution? How did you react?

2. In the following references, find the subject/nature of the persecution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Type of Persecution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 4:1-8</td>
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<td>Genesis 37; 39; 40:23</td>
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<td>Exodus 17:1-4</td>
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<td>1 Samuel 18:10-12</td>
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<td>2 Chronicles 18</td>
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<td>Esther 3; 4</td>
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<td>Job 19:1-5; 22:5</td>
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<td>Jeremiah 20; 32; 38</td>
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<td>Daniel 6</td>
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<td>Matthew 26; 27</td>
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<td>Acts 4:18-21; 5:17-42</td>
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<td>2 Corinthians 11:23-28</td>
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3. What should be the Christian's attitude toward persecution?

4. In the midst of persecution, can you name some specific things which might be helpful to remember?

5. Is persecution a good or bad thing and why?
After examining the challenges of lessons 2-17, one might begin to think that heaven is the impossible dream and that living the Christian life is only for superheroes with extraordinary ability. The daily challenges which confront the disciple of Christ are severe. A cause for despair? Can only the most gifted people meet those challenges and arrive at the judgment day unscathed? The illustration to the right suggests otherwise. Christianity is not a religion for the super saint, the extraordinary individual. It is for everyone who is willing to allow Jesus to reign, to be King in one's heart. What is needed is not incredible ability, but unrelenting desire and commitment. Should we strive to whip every challenge set before us? Definitely. Will we struggle with one or several of these challenges? Probably. Remember, it was due to our imperfections, our sin that Jesus had to die. The goal of the Christian is to avoid sin, but even the inspired writer, John, recognizes that it will most likely be a struggle (see 1 John 1:5-2:6; 3:1-10).

Paul speaks for every true believer in Christ when he said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Quoting this verse all day long will not alone be sufficient to accomplish the "all things" which Paul had in mind. Bringing Scripture to mind is one way which Christ strengthens us, but there are others. The remaining four lessons on overcoming will detail weapons which are at our disposal to use in the fight against the devil. Young or old, mature or new in the faith, you CAN DO all that God expects from you. God has never asked and does not now ask the impossible. He loves you and wants you to succeed. He has helped you in times past and desires to help you even now.

Salvation isn't earned. We could never do enough (Luke 17:10). But a demonstration of "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6) is what God is looking for. He searches for those who have hearts which completely belong to Him (2 Chronicles 16:9). God will reward sincere, diligent effort to accomplish His will and to render "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). God has made assurances to the devoted Christian, and "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). Perfect performance is the goal, but steadfastness is the key (1 Corinthians 15:58). When it comes to religion, one important question must be grappled with -Is my heart really in it? If so, "Let your light shine..." (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15).

Discussion:
1. What do you see as the most difficult thing about living as a Christian?

2. Do you believe you will go to heaven? According to Hebrews 6:9-20 and 2 Peter 1:4-11, what does God demand of us?

3. In 50 words or less, describe what the Christian life is all about?

4. What motivation is there to overcome the daily challenges which confront us?

5. What specific things can you do to be a productive member of the local church of which you are a part?

6. Overcoming the daily challenges may not mean that we never stumble. If we stumble, what should we do? What was Simon told to do when he stumbled in Acts 8?

7. What is your definition of a sincere, diligent, committed Christian?

Lesson #20: OVERCOMING - Study Of God's Word
"Give me the Bible, holy message shining; Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way..." - Are these just idealistic words or do we really mean this? Once being a nation dependent upon the word of God for guidance, we have now become a self-sufficient people. Comparatively speaking, the Bible has fallen into disuse. God's people have always been known as "a people of the Book." Now, unfamiliarity with the contents of the greatest book ever written is more common. Even more serious is the fact that many are relying upon preachers for their knowledge, lacking the desire to study for themselves or not knowing how to study the Bible.

For the fight against the enemy, God calls His book, "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). Contrary to the thinking of some, the Bible is not merely an explanation of what's right and wrong in religion. The Bible declares the way of salvation, but in so doing it serves as a tool for living. It's more than just a storybook about great men. The word of God is a source of strength, help and direction for the Christian.

Christians do not worship the Bible. They worship the God behind the Book. The Bible is an explanation of who God is and how one is to approach Him. The written word is not to be praised and appreciated alone. From the incredible depths of God's wisdom, the Scripture is designed to transform the mind, govern it, resulting in a change of life. Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians because they received the word of God's message "not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also perform its work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). If we are willing, the word will accomplish in us all which God desires. Our understanding of and familiarity with its contents will be invaluable in overcoming the daily challenges which confront us.

How does one study the Bible? The question sounds so simple. The answer is not. In many ways, the Bible is succinct (cf. John 21:25), but the amount of material is still extensive. Since we live in "the last days" and we are amenable to the new covenant, it logically follows that we should concentrate our study in the New Testament though the Old Testament should not be neglected (Romans 15:4). A systematic study will be the most beneficial. Not just reading, but diligent study is the answer (2 Timothy 2:15). The quantity of material read is not nearly as important as the quality of one's reading - comprehension, memorization, application.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes...The judgments of the Lord are true, they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes than much fine gold...In keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11).

Discussion:

1. For what reasons is the Bible often neglected and not studied?
2. In what ways will study of the Bible be beneficial to you?

3. God wants us to use the Scriptures, not just read them as a way of obeying Him. How can the Scriptures be a tool in daily living?


5. According to 2 Timothy 3:16,17, what does the inspired word do for the man of God?

6. For someone starting at square one, where would you recommend that one begin the study of the Scripture?

7. How do we know which commands in the Bible apply to us? Is every statement in the Bible meant to be followed? What are some important rules for Bible study?

Lesson #21: OVERCOMING - Prayer And Meditation

We live in the communication age. Technology has allowed us to communicate like
never before. The use of satellites, cable, telephone lines and remote devices have all brought communication to its peak in our times. Sadly, we also live in an age when children can't communicate with parents. Husbands and wives aren't communicating well with each other, and as one writer noted, "...and hardly anybody, it seems, can get through to God." Christians often speak of prayer and encourage the practice of prayer, but I wonder...How much are we praying? Do we think God really answers prayer? Are the prayers which are prayed what God wants them to be - are they selfless or self-serving?

In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Linus says to Lucy, "I think I've made a new theological discovery." Lucy queries, "What is it?" Linus exclaims, "If you hold your hands upside down, you get the opposite of what you pray for." A "Family Circus" comic revealed Billy's prayer before bed one evening, "Listen to this, God, here's an offer you can't refuse." Cartoons are designed to get people to laugh, but similar shallow and unbiblical thinking characterizes the approach of many to prayer, detracting from effectual praying. God is not a vending machine to be used to satisfy our whims.

Prayer is communication directed to God, by thought or by word, in the form of praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession and petition, and is a means by which God gives us what He wants and what we need. Prayer is a lifeline for the Christian. Closely linked to prayer is meditation. The two are often inseparable, one leading to the other. Reflection on God and His word will often precipitate prayer.

Since God knows everything, why does God want us to pray to Him about our needs? Because He said so may not seem like an adequate answer, but it's a good enough reason. God wants us to include Him in our lives. He wants us to rely on Him about everything - our goals, dreams, disappointments, anger, joys, fears, hurt, loneliness and struggles.

How does prayer change things? Again, we must be content with God's assurance that it does. God hears, attends to the prayers of the righteous (1 Peter 3:12) and these prayers "can accomplish much" (James 5:16). Obviously, God will only do some things in response to prayer. Some blessings are contingent upon the prayers of righteous men and women. Furthermore, He is always present to aid us (Philippians 4:5,6).

God is looking for intimacy, fellowship with man. This underlies His entire scheme for redeeming man. He wants to be your friend and help in defeating the challenges which come your way.

Discussion:

1. What do you consider to be some hindrances to effective praying?
2. What can make prayers more effective?

3. Find and examine at least five recorded prayers in the Bible. What can be learned from each?

4. How does God answer prayer?

5. What is meditation and how will it help us to confront the daily challenges to our faith?

6. For what specific things or people is the Christian to pray?

7. What constitutes a prayer? Must the words, "in Jesus name, Amen," be verbalized?

8. Of the five types of prayer mentioned in the lesson, which do you spend the most time doing?

Lesson #22: OVERCOMING - Teaching And Edification

One fortunate aspect of being a Christian is that we do not struggle alone. Not only is there help from God (the greatest source of help), the local church will provide spiritual support as well. As was mentioned in the very first lesson, the corporate worship of the church
is not the totality of Christian living but one significant facet of it. Worship services have as their primary objective to honor God. In so doing, another objective is accomplished. The members of the church are edified. Additionally, members are to pursue edification beyond worship assemblies. Paul told the church at Thessalonica, "Therefore, encourage one another, and build one another up, just as you also are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

The church is to be "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). By providing Bible classes and materials, supporting preaching and teaching of God's word, its mission is fulfilled. If we are to overcome the challenges which beset us daily, we must take full advantage of the help at our disposal. Our involvement in the worship and work of the church is essential to our growth as Christians. Time spent being edified and edifying is time well spent. Concentrating on how we can help build up each other will distract us from thinking on and engaging in things which can be harmful to our souls.

From the standpoint of one who is employed in the teaching God's message, I have also received encouragement to overcome from my efforts in teaching. Taking advantage of opportunities to teach God's truth, whether privately or publicly, can only have a positive effect upon us. Being a Bible class teacher demands an investment of time and thought in the word of God which will be good for us. Attempting to influence and teach a friend who is lost will likewise be an venture which will only encourage your walk as a Christian.

Christians are in the business of service. “Life is like tennis,” one observed, “the player who serve well has a good chance of winning.” The more time spent serving, and the less concern we have for being served or serving ourselves, the better quality of life we will live. It goes against the grain of our culture to suggest that serving is better than being served, but Jesus affirms that it is (Matthew 20:26-28). Everything God has legislated including serving others is for our benefit. In addition to what is done for us by the church, one answer to overcoming is for us to serve.

Discussion:

1. How do worship services provide encouragement? How could they be conducted to make them even more encouraging? Have you ever been to service which was discouraging and why?
2. How does teaching others affect the teacher positively? How can teaching sometimes be discouraging and what can be done to avoid being discouraged?

3. What opportunities for service are open to you as a Christian?

4. What persons have been instrumental in strengthening your faith? How have others edified and built you up?

5. How will this lesson change your outlook on worshiping and your role in the church? How will it help you to meet the daily challenges which confront you?

Lesson #23: OVERCOMING - An Unwavering Hope

Jesus endured the greatest challenge that a man has ever known. He faced ridicule, rejection. Alone, he was crucified despite His innocence of any wrongdoing. How did He do it? The Hebrew writer in 12:2 says that He endured the cross for "the joy set before Him." While on earth, He longed for the glory which had been His from eternity (John 17:5). These words give us a glimpse of heaven's treasure.
Heaven - the word itself conjures up beautiful thoughts in the minds of most people. Yet, all of our beautiful thoughts combined would pale to the actual experience of the redeemed in God's presence. No words are sufficient to describe what's beyond description. David marveled, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand are pleasures forever" (16:11). Peter declared, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

Jesus encourages us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven and tells us why we should, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:19-21). This may be the most important task to ward off Satan's challenges. The world is a good place for our hands, but not for our hearts. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). The Christian must avoid feeling too comfortable in the world. We are aliens and strangers here (1 Peter 2:9-11). We are to cling tenaciously to our hope which is the anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19).

What's so appealing about heaven? No more tears, pain, suffering or dying. Immortality. Beauty beyond measure. Perfect peace, joy and rest. And foremost, the presence of God. Worship and service of Him forever. When we get to heaven, we will not regret having lived as a Christian nor having fought against sin. The judgment and heaven may seem so far away, but keep in memory that "in due time" we shall reap heaven's incomparable reward (Galatians 6:9).

When the going gets tough, bring to mind your hope. Heaven is to be a powerfully motivating force giving us reason to live righteously. Our lives are but vapor (James 4:14), and with each passing day, our "salvation is nearer to us than when we believed" (Romans 13:11-14). We're Christians and with good reason. Being a child of God is the richest, most ennobling and fulfilling life. This is life as God meant it to be. With all of your might and your heart, pursue the blessed hope. Heaven will surely be worth it all!

Discussion:

1. Do you remember what mental image you had of heaven as a child? What mental image do you now have?

2. Those who are older tend to have a greater appreciation of their hope. Why might this
3. What impact did hope have on the life of Abraham (Romans 4:16-22; Hebrews 11:8-10)?

4. What are some temporal aspirations or hopes that you have? How should these compare with your hope of heaven?

5. How can our hope benefit us as we face daily challenges to our faith?

6. How does an intense desire to go to heaven evidence faith (Hebrews 11:1; 1 Peter 1:8,9)?

7. Do you believe you are capable of overcoming? As a result of this study, write five resolutions concerning your most difficult areas:
   I resolve
   I resolve
   I resolve
   I resolve
   I resolve