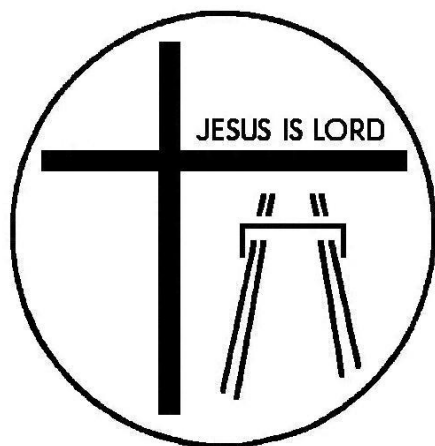


WHAT JESUS ACTUALLY SAID

12 Studies for Home Groups on the words of Jesus



Midrand Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION:

It has been my pleasure over more than half a century, to study the Bible, go to church, teach and preach, and enjoy the many blessings that the Lord has provided. For this I give thanks and give praise. But as time passes it worries me that we, as the great congregation of Jesus, are watering down the instructions that God sent His Son to give us many years ago.

Sure times change and social behaviour is forged by the events of the day, but the word of God doesn't change and until God gives us a new instruction, the old instruction remains paramount. It's almost uncanny, that as you read the New Testament, so many things written all those years ago, are really still the same. The blind are still blind, those who hold the purse strings still hold on, the political leaders of the day still do what they did then. Only the names and places have changed. The fabric of society hasn't really changed at all.

But let us state this very clearly. Because of the Gospel, we are moving from what is blatantly wrong, to the good of all mankind. Medical science has achieved the unthinkable. Civilized courts have brought about justice. Charities do all manner of kindnesses. The churches have brought reconciliation to families and nations. The list is huge and is growing every day, and with the help of God, we will go in to that future with this prayer, "May Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Keeping the last two paragraphs in mind, you will find, as you read the following chapters, items have deliberately been left out. These are primarily; the political and religious situation of the day; the time and place; and the actual

character names. The reason for this is simple .The Word of God is timeless, and although God’s geographical spot and timing was perfect when He sent his Son, our Lord Jesus, for the purposes of this study, we are going to illustrate that, “What Jesus Actually Said, “ is as true today as it was some two millenniums ago. It’s my belief, that by stripping down the framework of the day, we can get back to the basic truth, and apply the knowledge in today’s world, be it social, business, private or corporate.

May God Bless you, as you study, *“What Jesus Actually Said”*.

Dave Thorburn-Humphrey

STUDY 1

“If you deny me”

Bible reading - Matthew 10:32 -33; Luke 12: 8 -10.

I took a client to lunch the other day. It was truly a glorious summer’s day. Parking the car was easy, and I hurried to the restaurant. Today was important if I was to clinch the deal. I had to be on time, and the food needed to be good. This particular client was always punctual, and had a huge appetite. I was on time, in fact a couple of minutes early, and I knew that the cuisine was excellent. So all things being equal, this lunch was to be a pleasurable formality.

My client was his normal self, a little stuffy and straight to the point – Somewhat Old Boys’ Club - someone who guarded his space.

The lunch was excellent, and we successfully concluded our deal. The work would keep my company going for the best part of the year. Lunch over, I called for the bill, and felt that that had been an hour or two well spent. The waiter carefully and discreetly handed me the slip, and I reached into my jacket for my wallet. It wasn’t there. As my hand

dug deeper, my brain reminded me that I had left it on the dresser at home.

A two and a half million rand deal, and I hadn't got the money for lunch!

I made some weak excuse and said I needed the bathroom. Out of sight of my client, I made my way to the reception desk. The restauranteur was unsympathetic. "I don't know you. How do I know that you'll come back in ten minutes?" he insisted.

"I will vouch for him," came a rather bemused and cheerful voice from behind my shoulder. My wife's brother! I'll stop the story there. I was in trouble and my brother-in-law did not deny me.

The time will come when we are put to the test. Not in the simple way of my near disastrous lunch, but in a far more subtle manner. We are going to be in a meeting, at a conference, at a game, at home with relatives, and somebody is going to say something derogatory about Jesus. I'm not talking about taking Jesus' name in vain. The question is: What is your response going to be? You've got a couple of choices.

You could come out all guns blazing and defend him with every ounce of knowledge that you have at your disposal. Or sadly, you could do what most of us do. We just keep quiet. That's the easy way out, the line of least resistance. "I will go to church next Sunday and pray, 'Lord please forgive them for saying those things about you.'" But what have we actually done? We have denied Jesus.

What did Jesus actually say about this? "If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven, but if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32&33)

This is truly an awesome statement. How easy it is to fall into this trap! But that is what Jesus said. One small mishap, possibly an error of judgement, but the consequences are too terrible to contemplate. Imagine the scenario. You are standing before the Lord on Judgement Day. You have led a good life, and now it is your turn to take your rest and live in eternity with your Father. You face the throne, and your name is read out. "Who is this person?" "I'm sorry," says Jesus, "I don't know him. He is not one of mine." You are ushered away. All those years wasted. The dream shattered.

It's just not worth it. Stand up and be counted. Let's not fool ourselves. We are either Christians or we are not.

Here's a simple example. If we work for Coca Cola, and someone questions us about our employment, we proudly say, we work for Coca Cola. We don't keep quiet. Or worse still, if someone should say they don't like the product, we don't suddenly say we work for another company. No not at all. We feel offended and defend our product. Why then is it so difficult to stand up and say, "Hey, I'm a Christian. This is my C.E.O. and if you find the product not to your liking, let me help you. Let's discuss it, and if you are still not convinced, we will agree to differ."

The point here is clear, you have not denied Jesus, and if the other party doesn't agree, that is his or her problem. You have done what Jesus asked.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever been with other people and chosen to keep quiet when asked what your association is with Jesus?

2. If you stated clearly, "I'm a Christian," then good, but if you kept quiet, why did you?

3. Explain an occasion when you did stand firm and declared your allegiance to Jesus.

4. Do you find it difficult to talk about Jesus in a non-church environment?

5. Assume that you are at a party and a Christian friend is being questioned about his or her association with Jesus. What would be your stance?

6. Are you embarrassed when others talk openly about Jesus? Say at the office? Would you join in?

7. Would you, or can you, talk openly about Jesus within your family circle?

8. If you missed the opportunity to speak about your allegiance, how would you react if the same circumstances rose again?

9. How would you advise your friends and family to stand up and be counted in Jesus' name?

10. If you do stand up for Jesus. Explain to the group how you would do it.

Once you have completed the study, go back and reread the Bible passages.

Homework for this week - Search the Bible, and identify and find names of people who denied knowing Jesus. What were the consequences? How did Jesus react?

STUDY 2

“I am the way to Heaven”

Bible reading - John 14:1-6

Over centuries, this statement made by Jesus, that He is the only way to heaven and thus to the Father, has caused all

manner of conflict. These conflicts have divided families, communities and even countries. Just take a look around at today's world, and you'll find that one of the underlying disagreements between religious groups and in fact nations is, in fact, this basic statement of Jesus.

I suppose the real question is what do you think? On what side of the fence do you sit? I know that you've given it some thought. Like many of us, have you decided that you will leave the question to someone else? After all, that very close family member doesn't believe in Jesus, and he or she is really a good person, and we can't imagine that family member not joining us in heaven one day.

And what about your friends down the road? They are a lovely couple, who are always doing work for charity. They worship their god. Surely they will get a place too? But Jesus was quite clear, unless you believe in Him, and not only believe, but carry out His commands and way of life, the door will not be open.

All the other major religions cover the aspect of heaven or paradise after their members have passed on, and they all claim entry as a goal to look forward to. They state that they have authority to make this claim. In fact they say that members who comply with some deed or other will gain instant access to a place hereafter.

Some sects teach that only a limited number of their members will qualify, and that only those have a right of admission.

The Gospel states clearly that all are invited and welcome. The only requirement is that you accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. It may seem elitist, but these are the facts, and while Jesus would prefer that you commit your life to Him now, the Parables show that even at the last minute of one's life, the offer still remains and will be upheld no matter what.

Have the other religions got it wrong? I can only state what Jesus actually said. The door is narrow and, "Whoever believes in me, will have eternal life."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that people of other religions will go to Heaven?

2 Do you think that Christians are the only people that qualify for eternity?

3 Have you been to the funeral of a person from another religion? Share with the group what was said about that person "entering" the afterlife.

4 If a family member of yours was not a committed Christian, how would you go about telling them that they could not enter the Kingdom when the time came?

5 How do you feel about someone declaring that they are a Christian at the last moment of their lives?

6 Do you think that this whole debate is too complex, and that you would rather leave the question to God? (See Romans 1:18-19)

7 Do you feel that you are ready if Jesus called you today?

8 If a non Christian challenged you on this subject, what would be your reply?

9 Do you believe that this claim by Jesus is elitist?

10 Explain how you would, if you were able, to ensure that all go to heaven.

Home work for this week.

Find out what other religious groups have to say about the life here after.

STUDY 3

“If you do it to the least of these, you do it for me.”

Bible Reading - Matthew 25:40-45

It is so easy to look down at others and think that they are less than we are. It doesn't seem to make any difference if we are rich or poor; upper, middle or lower class; we will always find someone whom we consider to be at a lower station than we are.

We fall into the trap daily. It's a prejudice in some form or another. Male or female, black, white or brown, old or young, it doesn't matter. We put ourselves in a lofty position and compare ourselves to someone else. And of course, we will go to all sorts of lengths to justify that our position is right.

Armed with this mindset and our inherent lack of caring for other people, we find it difficult to accept that others do have needs. When one thinks of needs, the tendency is to think of the financial needs of others. True, this is often the case, but needs go deeper than that. Food may be a hungry man's plea. Medical assistance is a sick man's plea. Companionship is a lonely person's request. Security is the plea of a frightened child, and so the list goes on. Each one of these people, and many others, are, 'the least of these.' Each has a priority in their life, and Jesus is saying that we must identify that need, and do something about it.

Now we all know that we cannot sort out the needs of all people, no matter how concerned we are. Governments and social services can only do so much. We all agree.

But herein lies the secret. Someday, when you least expect it, God is going to put you to the test. It may only be once in your lifetime, or it could be twice in one day. Who knows? But will it happen? The answer is a resounding “Yes.” God will present someone’s situation at your doorstep, and ask for your help. As we discussed earlier, a person can be poor in many different ways. It’s not necessarily a money related matter. The person standing in front of you could have all the worldly goods, for example, but suffer from deep depression. In his or her life, this is the greatest need. Equally, a slice of bread may be the lost child’s request. The question remains. God has presented you with one of these problems. Why? Because Jesus knows that you have the means to fix the situation. How you handle it is going to answer Jesus’ statement.

But it’s a little more intriguing. Jesus goes on to say that, “You do it for me.” Now it’s a whole new ball game. The individual takes on a new face. Here is Jesus asking for a slice of bread. Here is Jesus saying, “My depression is so great I cannot carry on.” Dare you turn Jesus away? The sad truth is that we have. Maybe we were too busy at the time. Maybe we were indifferent. The point is we failed when we were given the opportunity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Who do you believe are “the least of these” in your neighbourhood?

2 If some total stranger came to your door asking for a slice of bread, what would be your immediate reaction?

3 Do you believe that well off people also have needs? If so, what might these needs be?

4 Is your nature such that you are able to identify others' needs?

5 Have you ever missed someone's plea for help and regretted it afterwards?

6 Imagine for a moment that you had a desperate need and no one was concerned. How would you feel?

7 If you have spontaneously been able to help someone, explain how you felt.

8 Do you believe that it is unreasonable for Jesus to ask you to help others, considering that you have needs of your own?

9 Have you ever offered help to someone and been turned down in a harsh manner? Explain how you felt.

10 Have you ever met, or known someone who has the knack of helping others at just the right time?

After answering and discussing the questions, go back over the Bible readings for this lesson.

Homework for this week.

Go out and find someone with a real need. See to the need without telling anyone else what you did.

STUDY 4

“The first will be last.”

Bible readings - Matthew 19:30; Matthew 20:16; Luke 13:22-30

I was standing in the queue at the bank the other day. Of course, anyone who goes to the bank at month end must be crazy. Anyway, there I was, and the queue was long, and soon five minutes became fifteen and we were getting nowhere fast. Then, a young lady, dressed in bank uniform, walked along the line of customers asking if she could help with items that didn't require the bank official sitting at his desk. To my surprise, there were a number of people who had minor enquiries, and this young lady directed them to another, less busy official. Suddenly the queue shortened by more than half, and many folk, who were well behind me in the line, conducted their business and were on their way. At first I was amazed, but then as the next few minutes passed, I became more and more angry. I was, after all, ahead of those people. Was my business not as important as theirs? After all I've had my account with this bank for

more years than I care to remember! By the time it was my turn, I was not the most likable person in the bank.

But you know, that's what the queue will be like when we take our turn at Heaven's door. And strange as it may seem even at this time in our lives, we started standing in the queue from the day we were born.

Let's take a look at life's queue: Where are we in the line, and who are the other folk standing along side of us?

We shall assume for the moment, that we consider ourselves good, solid Christians, and that to a more or lesser degree, we have conducted our lives in a fashion that we believe is in accordance with God's will. That makes it easy, because we are the exact people that Jesus is referring to when He states, "The first will be last." We are the ones that are going to be envious when others jump the queue for reasons I will come to later. We are the ones who will get angry, and ask the question, "But, Lord Jesus, I have served You faithfully all these years. I've been the one who has gone to church regularly. I've put you first. I've made numerous sacrifices," and so it goes. "Lord, why must I stand and watch others pass me by?" And, "Lord, You even say that the gate at the other side is narrow, and that all in the queue won't necessarily get in anyway. Quite frankly, this really isn't fair!"

Fortunately for us, God understands our human side, and encourages us to stand firmly in the queue. First, let us thank Jesus that we are in fact in the queue at all. Let us realize that only Jesus knows how long we will have to stand, and let us take heed, that it is incumbent on us to work at our faith every day, to ensure that we stand in line.

And as for the folk that will jump the queue, let us humbly give Jesus the right to conduct His business in the way He knows best. Let us trust His judgement. After all, there is

ample space for all, and when we get there, time won't really matter anyway.

Our task is to simply stay firmly in the queue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain how you feel about queues, particularly when you are in a hurry.

2. What do you feel about people who jump queues, especially in the traffic? Have you ever done so? Be honest.

3. Are you a patient person?

4. In stating that the first shall be last, etc, to whom do you think Jesus was referring?

5. Do you think that it's fair for folk who have spent all their days avoiding Jesus to give their lives to Him at the last minute?

6. If you knew someone who was avoiding acknowledging Jesus, how would you get them to change their mind before it was too late?

7. How would you ensure that you kept your place in the queue?

8. If it were up to you, how would you explain to folk that it is very important to commit your life to Jesus, and thus ensure your place in the queue?

Have you reread the text?

Homework for this week.

Choose a friend or an acquaintance whom you feel should be in the queue, and pray silently for them.

STUDY 5

“Love God and your neighbour.”

Bible reading - Matthew 22:36-39

First I'm going to deal with loving your neighbour, because in my opinion, that is the harder of the two. Loving God is a book all on its own.

The whole statement however, is the most important statement that Jesus ever made, and it's this statement, which is the glue that holds the Gospel, and all that Jesus taught, together. Without it, nothing that Jesus did or said would make any sense.

Also, for the purpose of this chapter, I'm not going to unpack the various definitions of love, because I believe that we all know the true meaning of love deep within our hearts. After all, greater people than I have written volumes on the subject, and all will claim that theirs is the true answer. So I'm going to take a leaf out of the Master's book, and know that we all really do understand the word love.

I believe that the difficulty we have is defining the word "neighbour."

Some years ago I was asked to preach on this very subject, and as I sat in my study overlooking the lake at the bottom of our garden, my eye shifted towards my neighbour's swimming pool. There she was. A lady, I guess about in her late twenties, preparing to dive into the water. Man oh Man, this was going to be the easiest sermon I had ever written. What could be easier than loving my next door neighbour? But we all know that Jesus had more in mind when he uttered those words.

So many sermons have been preached, and books have been written on the subject, that it's difficult to come up with a new concept of the neighbour that Jesus was talking about.

Recently, I've heard folks say the following, and sadly believing it to be true. "Jesus says I must love him/her, but I sure don't have to like him/her." What absolute rubbish! I

can't find anywhere in the Gospels, where Jesus made a distinction between liking someone and loving someone. What Jesus actually said, is that if someone does

something that hurts you in any way, pray for them, turn the other cheek, and forgive them. And who are these people He is referring to? These are the very neighbours we are trying to define. People we hardly know, but who affect our lives; people who cut us off in the traffic; people who take the last bottle of strawberry jam off the shelf at the shopping centre. And more seriously, those who would wish to harm us or our family members. They are more difficult to love, but by definition, they share the same space as we do, and are therefore our neighbours.

Like all things, this coin has two faces: There are people who don't like us. It doesn't matter how good you think you are, some folk don't have the same opinion of you as you may have of yourself. Now put the shoe on the other foot. Wouldn't you prefer that these people prayed for you and forgave you? After all, in their eyes, you are the neighbour that Jesus spoke about.

Surely this world has progressed enough to understand that we all occupy this globe. In our own eyes we are equally important. We are all neighbours in one form or another. If each of us took the trouble to look beyond others' weaknesses, and pray for one another, then there would be no debate about loving or liking. We could all be neighbours as God planned.

Love God. There is absolutely no question about this statement. Only a fool would not take heed of this command. The Lord God is everything there ever was, and everything there ever will be. He is the Creator of all that exists, the Provider of all there ever will be. He has the last say, and in very simple terms, He is Everything. But this same Almighty God, who controls every aspect of the universe, still has the love and time to take a

deep interest in each and every one of us. He knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows our happiness and sorrows. He knows our joys and pain, and in knowing all of this, He loves each of us as if we were the only person on this planet. We are extra special to Him, and He cares for us. So much so, that He is prepared to forgive us all the wrong that we do, and still through the Grace of kindness, allows us to join Him one day in Paradise. How can we not love the Lord, when He is simply everything?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you get on easily with your neighbours?

2. At some time in your life, you must have come across a difficult neighbour. Explain why this neighbour made you angry, and how you dealt with the situation.

3. Do you think that God sometimes puts you in the company of neighbours to see how you deal with the situation?

4. Be honest. Have you ever said to yourself that you would tolerate someone, because that's what God wants, but you really cannot love that person?

5. Do you believe that a neighbour can be your friend? Or are neighbours and friends different in your mind?

6. Put the shoe on the other foot. With all the problems we display, how would you like to be treated, if in this case, you were the neighbour?

7. Considering that God loves you, do you love God because He commands you to do so, or do you love Him because you want to?

8. Explain what you do to prove to God that you love Him.

9. When things are not going well, do you get angry with God and question His love for you?

10. Share how you have enjoyed God's love.

Remember to go over the Bible reading before closing in prayer.

STUDY 6

“Do it now.”

Bible reading - Matthew 24: 36-44

Probably the most used, and sadly the most accepted excuse over the millennium, has been, “I will do it later.” We all do it. And let’s be fair and practical. There are times when we have to delay doing something, purely because we are doing something else. The trouble though, is that too often we finish what we are doing and don’t get around to doing the thing that we said we would do later.

Dozens of people make lots of money with courses that teach us how to manage our time or how to run our lives, squeezing out the last second of time before we fall asleep utterly exhausted. In today’s world, time is money, and we, therefore must get the most out of each day. Very often, simply to get through each day, we work ourselves to the bone, and then ask ourselves, “What did I really achieve today?” At a lot of these courses, and I’ve been to some myself, the lecturer will even spend time on prioritising the hours of the day so that the important items get the lion’s share of your effort, and the lesser, not so important things, get shuffled to the end of the queue. But in all of this, little or nothing is said about the time we should spend preparing

ourselves for the day when Jesus will come knocking at our door.

Surely, that is the most important day of our lives! But we put it off. After all, we can always think about that day tomorrow. In writing this, the last thing I want to do, is to be gloomy, but let's face it honestly. If something should happen to us, or if Jesus should decide that He is returning to Earth this day, would we be ready?

Would we have forgiven that person of the wrong they had done to us? Would we have committed our lives to Jesus? Would we know the Gospel? Would we have told our friends and family that we love them? So many "would we haves"!

Jesus makes this point so many times it must have been important. And yet most of us don't put these items at the top of our agenda.

By putting something off we are saying to ourselves, "It's not important." But if we said we would do it for someone else, then what we are actually saying is, "Your request is not important to me. Your request, my friend is of no concern to me."

Jesus' request is not to be put on a back burner. Jesus is deadly serious. He is saying, "I control your destiny. Your time clock is in my hands, and one day, maybe in the next ten minutes, I'm going to call you. Then if you are not ready, it's too late."

It almost seems silly writing something like this. It's so obvious. If you or I were going to catch a flight to our dream holiday destination, we would be at the Airport two hours before takeoff, bags packed, passport in hand. Why don't we offer Jesus the same courtesy?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Be honest with your self. How often are you late for an appointment?

2 Let's assume that you arrived at an appointment in good time. Does it make you angry when the other party is late?

3 Are you one of those terribly "organized" people, or are you just a little bit disorganized?

4 Let's assume that you have fourteen hours awake time each day. How do you divide your time into say, work, leisure, eating and spending time with God?

5 Have you read your Bible from cover to cover?

6 When you go to sleep each night, can you honestly say that you have really forgiven the person who did you wrong that day? And someone who wronged you in the past?

7 It may be a thorny issue, but have you said you're sorry for something you know was wrong?

8. In taking stock of your life, can you honestly say that you have explained to at least one person, the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

9 If you feel that you are not prepared for Jesus' coming, explain what remedial action you are going to take.

10. If you believe you have done everything possible to prepare yourself, share how you feel.

In the light of your discussion and answers, reread the Bible verses once again

STUDY 7

“I will return.”

Bible reading - Matthew 24: 29-31

Jesus has promised to return. It's a simple statement to which so much hope and thought has been added. For centuries scholars have puzzled over the date; have made wild predictions; and have passed on, only to find their predictions wrong. Why are they all wrong? There's an easy answer. Jesus told those who were listening that only The Father knows the time and the place. He also said that before He comes there will be signs and false prophets.

So we don't know the time or place, and that's that. But it doesn't take away the excitement of anticipation, the pure spectacle of His arrival, the hope and relief that His coming will bring to the world. These are what are really important. But it is also a disappointment for those who have passed on, and who didn't get to be there at the time. Or is it?

We are so good at leaving out bits of the Gospel, that we confuse what Jesus actually said. Jesus stated, that when He returns, He will judge "the quick (living) and the dead," and that He will "raise up", all those who believe in Him on that day. Now this is where it could get confusing. Does it mean that when we die we go into a state of limbo and don't go directly to Heaven? (Try telling that to a person who has recently lost a loved one.) Or, do we go to Heaven, and that is where we will see Jesus' second coming? Or have we not considered one of God's greatest gifts --- time?

Time, as we understand it and the way God understands it, are very different. To us, we are here today and gone tomorrow. Two thousand years have passed since Jesus walked the face of this earth. That's a long time in our minds, but put that same two thousand years against the time of creation, and it becomes an infinite percentage in God's great plan. With the same thought in mind, and if my arithmetic is correct, our seventy-odd years of life, based on a percentage of two thousand years, is 3.5%. Put that percentage against the dawning of time, and the figure is so small that it actually doesn't matter.

So, if time doesn't matter in this case, why can't we allow God to sort out in His good time when He will raise us up, and if we have to wait in limbo (and I use the word carefully) for others to catch up, so be it? Surely the coming of Jesus is the most

important date in our lives, all of our lives, and this being so important, surely God, in His great love for mankind, will organize the great day for all to see simultaneously.

Many who have gone before us - folk who have dedicated, and in some cases, given their lives in the belief that Jesus will come again. Can you even think that God doesn't have a master time plan to accommodate everyone's hope in seeing Jesus' triumphant return? Jesus said He will return: that's good enough for me. I'll let Him work out the time schedule.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Do you keep a diary or personal organiser? If so, do you keep your appointments regularly? Can the person you are meeting rely on your timing?

2 It must have happened to you: You had an appointment with somebody, and they didn't show up. Explain to the group how you felt.

3 What is your understanding of Jesus' statement that He will return?

4 Do you think that we, as Christians, have the right to know when He will return?

5 Jesus stated that there would be false prophets who would come before Him. Do you think that any of these have already come? If so, name them.

6 In this age of technology, how do you imagine Jesus would come?

7 In the Bible, Jesus states that He will come when we least expect it. Using a bit of lateral thinking, what sort of situation do you think the world would be in, for Him to come again?

8 Do you think that we would recognize Him when He comes?

9 The book of Revelation describes all sorts of world catastrophes that have to happen before we see Him again. Do you think that these are still to come, or are we living through them now?

10 Explain how you imagine His coming will be, and how you will feel.

Remember to read over the Bible passage again and then spend time in praying for problems in the world.

STUDY 8

“Sort out your wrongs, first.”

Bible reading - Matthew 5: 25-26 and Luke 6: 41-42

We are very quick to point out the wrongs others have done, but slow to admit to our own wrongdoings. It is simply our nature. Pass the buck, turn the attention away from our own shortcomings. It's much easier that way.

Jesus, in His great perception of human nature, knew that there was a weakness in all people. When He instructed that we should take the splinter from our own eye, He knew that we had this weakness in our make up.

In analysing this weakness, it appears that there are two aspects we can discuss. One is the problem of looking down on others and believing that we, and we alone, are right, even going to the extent of condemning another's point of view. Second, (and I believe that this was the point that Jesus had in mind) is convincing ourselves that the sins of others are far more displeasing to God, than the little sins, we do commit.

Without making light of the matter, let me paint this picture to illustrate the point.

Travelling home from work the other day, doing sixty five in a sixty kilometre zone, I was annoyed when some idiot came past me, wheels over the white line, speeding along without any care for other road users. The damage he could have done! What if there had been some on-coming car? What if some innocent child had been crossing the road just at that point? My blood boiled. Luckily, my exceeding the speed limit won't hurt anybody!

A silly story, but can you see what Jesus meant when He hears our prayers. "Please forgive whoever, or please punish so and so, for the wrong they have done to me."

After all Lord, I didn't do anything wrong today." For a moment, and let's be practical, put yourself in Jesus' shoes. You hear this prayer, you know the whole story. What do you do? How do you answer this prayer? You must want to say, "Dear friend, go and read the Bible. It states quite clearly: First get your own house in order before you start cleaning up someone else's house.

Back to the first point. How we delight in putting ourselves on a pedestal! The enjoyment we get from looking down on others! We are quick to say we are all equals, tell ourselves we would never say we're better than our neighbours. Rubbish! We are all guilty. We think we dress better; we have better jobs; our children are at better schools; our gardens have prettier flowers; our shoes shine a little brighter. Sound familiar? The list goes on forever. There is always a comparison. There always will be.

But how do we deal with things when we are on our knees asking God for forgiveness? In God's eyes people are truly equal. So start off by seeking God's forgiveness for your own misdemeanours and let God sort out what others have done. Pray that God will, in His great wisdom, forgive you, and that His will, will be done.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Have you ever felt that a mistake you made was not as serious as a mistake made by someone else?

2 Do you recall as a child, trying to put the blame on your brother or sister, or for that matter, a friend, knowing full well that you were in the wrong?

3 If someone has taken the rap for you, how would you set about correcting the wrong?

4 Have you ever picked up a newspaper and read about something that someone else did, and thought to yourself, that he or she deserved the sentence they got, knowing full well that you once did the same thing? (a traffic offence for instance)

5 Explain something you did wrong as a child and felt lucky that you weren't caught.

6 How would you go about helping a friend who confessed to you that they had done something wrong?

7 Do you believe that Jesus was being hard when He said that we should confess our sins before we look at others' misdemeanours?

8 What do you think the terminology, "holier than thou" means, in the light of this discussion?

9 Let's assume that you have now corrected your wrongs. How would you now look at another's sins?

10 After this discussion, do you believe that other folk are really in the same boat as you, and the wise thing to do is to confess your own sins before looking too critically at others?

Reread the Bible text once you have finished going through the questions.

STUDY 9

“If one part of your body is doing wrong, fix it.”

Bible reading - Matthew 5: 29-30

When you open the bonnet of a modern-day car, presuming that you are technically minded, you can only marvel at the layout of the engine in the engine compartment, the precision of workmanship and the fact that this powerhouse of steel and technology can propel your shining automobile at speeds of two hundred kilometres per hour. Fantastic, in anyone’s book!

But, within this engine, there are tiny nuts and bolts, tiny wheels and gears and as well as these are engineered, if one of them comes loose or breaks, your car is going to stop, and no matter how you react, your fine piece of machinery is simply not going any further. Fortunately help is at hand: and a call to your friendly auto mechanic, a few hours and some money out of your wallet, and your engine is as good as new, and you are motoring down the highway again. However, had you tried to restart your engine, that tiny nut or bolt that had broken, could have done all sorts of damage to other parts of the engine, and instead of paying some money out of your wallet, you may well have been seeing your bank manager for a big loan instead.

What Jesus said all those years ago, was just the same principle. If one part of your body is doing wrong, cut it off, so that it won't contaminate the rest. Now we all realise and know that He was speaking figuratively. We can't go cutting pieces away. Apart from being impractical, it would be painful. Let me slip in this note here. We all know that in medical science, surgeons do cut away pieces or organs to stop other pieces of flesh being diseased by the offending bit, and in most cases the prognosis is good.

Jesus was referring to items such as our tongues, our talking capability, our ears, our listening mode. These are what need cutting off, figuratively speaking. In other texts, Jesus speaks of the smallest organ, the tongue, doing so much damage, or the ears taking in the evil that some men speak. These are the pieces which need cutting off before untold damage is done, not only to others, but to our own bodies.

How often have we said something, and wished only moments later that we hadn't. We have overheard a nasty remark and wished we had been somewhere else. The things we hear and say, not to mention what we see, are all received by those organs which Jesus says we should cut off because they cause great damage to the rest of our being. We can't literally cut them off, but we can learn to control their use. We can think before we say awful things. We can make sure we are not exposed to gossip, and we can turn away and choose not to see that which will haunt us for the rest of our lives.

We've all seen the three monkeys with the note that says, "See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil." It's a good lesson and could mean that we can retain our bodies intact.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Have you ever said something without giving it much thought, and regretted it seconds later?

2 Have you ever been party to a conversation when a third party has been ridiculed. How did you react?

3 Have you ever said sorry to a person about whom you spoke badly?

4 Do you read popular magazines' gossip columns that track celebrities?

5 Explain what it felt like to be the recipient of some unfounded gossip, if this has ever happened to you.

6 Have you ever reprimanded a third party publicly when they have said something that is not true about someone else?

7 Explain how you think Jesus feels when we run others down.

8 Other than the tongue, what part of the body should be "cut off," so as not to offend others?

9 Do you think it would be a good idea to pause and think carefully before you react to a statement or question by someone else?

10 Explain what you believe would be a way of stopping yours or others' tendencies to speak out without thinking, thus regretting what you had said.

Have you gone over the Bible readings again?

STUDY 10

“You can't take revenge.”

Bible reading - Matthew 5: 38-42; Luke 6: 29-30; 1 Cor 6: 7

In today's world, legal organisations thrive on suing ordinary people, companies and even states. Huge amounts are spent on legal fees and court costs. A whole industry relies on finding a weakness, or a fault, in someone else's situation or case. Who knows the financial implications? One

can only imagine that it must run into billions each year, and that doesn't bring into account the monetary cost to the poor individual that loses the case, as well as the emotional strain on their lives.

Our social norm dictates, that if you are wrong, there are consequences, and the person in the wrong, must pay in some form or another. That's how society has operated since time immemorial, and I'm not suggesting that we wrong others and get away with it. Can you imagine a world with out law and order? It would be chaos in no time. But Jesus says, "Do not take revenge. If someone slaps you on the cheek, let him slap the other cheek too. If someone wants to sue you for your shirt, give him your jacket as well." Impractical I hear you say. And the answer would probably be yes. Except for one thing, and this is what we are overlooking.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus explains a new way of life; a new way of conducting our lives. The fact that we have for centuries, chosen not to adopt this ideal way of life, is our problem. The fact remains that in this new world order that Jesus talks about, people would not do things to others in order to harm them, and therefore, there would be no reason to take revenge. Sounds great, but Lord, how as an individual, do I start this new order?

Jesus, in His great wisdom, strikes at the very heart of our weaknesses. It's our defence mechanism that always comes to the fore. Blame someone else: "It's not my fault. He or she is the guilty one, never me. I'm the one that got hurt." Blame someone else. And yes, in this case, the other person may be at fault. But to start this new world order Jesus is saying, "Stop the cycle. Don't take revenge, forgive the other party, break the cycle, take a chance and I'll sort out the other party. Just trust Me."

Imagine if you started, and slowly, but surely, others followed. This new world order that Jesus spoke about would start to happen, and the original reason for taking revenge would disappear. You and I might just be the ones to get the ball rolling. Difficult, you say? Yes, but at no time did Jesus say it would be easy.

Just as an aside, there could be a few lawyers after you, and your only defence would be, "That is what Jesus said."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you have ever had to defend yourself, explain what it was like.

2 Now explain what it was like when you didn't win, and you had to apologise to someone.

3 There are a number of TV programmes which take you behind the scenes of court cases. Do you think they are real? What can we learn from them?

4 Considering the trial of Jesus, do you think that the courts in those days were fair?

5. Be honest, if someone slapped you on the cheek figuratively speaking, would you be happy to turn the other cheek and forgive them?

6 Jesus said that we should not take revenge. Are you trusting enough to walk away and let Jesus sort out the offence?

7 We live in a state of wanting to see the offending party being punished for their crimes. How would you suggest, based on what Jesus said, we could stop this cycle?

8 One day, when we come before the throne of God, we are going to have to account for our sins. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we are forgiven. How do you reconcile these two statements in the light of you not taking revenge?

9 If we are not to take revenge, and this is what Jesus said, give at least three other ways that you would deal with someone who had "slapped your cheek."

Go over the Bible readings again before closing in prayer.

Pray for insight in handling problems that come your way.

STUDY 11

“Do good in private.”

Bible reading - Matthew 6: 5-6; Matthew 6:17-18

We often read in the newspapers of someone opening the doors of some new charity organization, or of someone unveiling a plaque at a children’s home, and in most cases the person opening the home or unveiling the plaque has put a great deal of money into the project. “Wonderful,” we say, and thank God for these good people. We as a community are very thankful, and it’s in our nature to thank those who do these great deeds. So we roll out the red carpet, get the newspapers involved, and publicly thank the donor. Up to this point we are all right. But here is the fine line. Jesus says, “Don’t make a big show of it.”

Who is Jesus referring to? The answer is simple: the Donor. It’s our duty to say thank you, but the more difficult part is for the donor to remain humble.

A favourite verse of mine is Malachi 3:10, where God puts a challenge to us. I’ll paraphrase it. “Bring your talent to Me and put Me to the test, and see if I won’t give you back more than you can handle.”

I should explain one thing. You’ve got to do it in the utmost of secrecy.

You can decide who the beneficiary should be. Obviously the church at which you worship must come first and you can give money, gifts, or your talents, providing that you give at least one tenth of what you have. Not always easy. But here is the solution and the fun part. Choose a charity or an individual who you believe is a worthy recipient and without letting them know, pay something into their bank account or deliver something to their door, of course unmarked. Just for fun, put a coin or two

into a beggar's hand. Do it regularly and start to hold your breath because you are in for a big surprise. God will also have fun. Suddenly, all sorts of good things will begin to happen, more than you can possibly imagine. But the secret remains, you have got to be generous quietly. Don't tell a soul

What does all this mean? Jesus wants us to do our duty, but He wants us to do it for His benefit and not ours. The Glory, and this is the key, remains with Him. It's not our task or duty to tell the world what we have done

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Explain how your favourite charity operates, and what its goals are.

2 Do you believe that, as a society, we support charities enough?

3 When you are approached by a charity for a donation, how do you feel?

4 Perhaps someone in your study group works for a charity. Ask that member to explain what they do, and what the difficulties they experience when trying to get assistance.

5 Does your group know of another person who works for charity not expecting any reward?

6 Jesus does millions of things for us each day. Do you think that Jesus announces each good thing he does, and DO you think that our 'thank you' to Him each day is enough?

7 How do you feel when someone boasts about the goodness they have done? Do you pat them on the back? Do you thank God for their work? Do you grumble behind their back?

8 What are your thoughts about tithing? Should it only be financial, or do you think your time and talents should be included too?

9 The last question for this chapter is a challenge. Do something good for someone this new week, but don't tell them about it.

Remember to always reread the Bible text for a clearer insight.

STUDY 12

“Don’t worry”

Bible reading - Matthew 6: 24-34

Each day when we awaken, we are presented with all sorts of new challenges. Many of us have brought over old concerns from the day before, and without thinking about today’s worries, we are thinking about what will happen tomorrow. So the day starts with yesterday’s problems, today’s concerns and tomorrow’s headaches. It’s enough to make you think that it may be a good idea to stay in bed!

Staying in bed might be a solution, but if you think about it for a while, can you imagine what all this turmoil is doing to your sub-conscious? Slowly but surely, like a cancer, all these worries and concerns build up, and before you know it, you are on the verge of a breakdown or at best, your health is affected. We all worry. Some seem to cope better than others. Some talk about their worries. These are probably the lucky ones. But others bottle it up until they burst, and the consequences are sometimes addictions to

alcohol or drugs or even death - a serious set of circumstances in anybody's book.

Jesus was aware of this problem all those years ago. He knew that worry was an affliction that was affecting the average man in the street, and He chose to address the disease by stating that we must stop worrying for, "worrying won't add a day to your life."

The sad thing is that Jesus does walk in our shoes, but we get so caught up in these very worries, that most times we lose sight of Jesus, and try and take on the troubles of yesterday, today and tomorrow in our own strength ...with some dubious results.

We really need to get back to basics here. We have all used, and thought about our faith. Why is it then, that when worries get in our way we do not have the faith to get on our knees, put our hands together, and say to Jesus, "I have this problem, this worry, whatever you wish to call it, and I can't sort it out myself. Please help?" It may sound trite, but Jesus already knows the solution, and is already waiting for you

to discuss the situation with Him. The last thing Jesus wants is for you to turn away from Him and put your trust in some man made substance.

Put your trust in Jesus and worry no more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Into which group do you fall. Those who tell others about their worries, or those who keep it to themselves?

2 What worries you most?

3 Do you admire people who don't seem to have a care in the world? Have you ever covered your deep worries so that it seemed that you did not have a care either?

4 Do you know anyone who has turned to some sort of addiction because they could not deal with their worries?

5 Do you think that we worry about things that will probably not happen anyway? Explain some of these things.

6 Do you believe in Jesus' statement that "worrying won't add another day to your life?" If so, why do you think we still worry?

7 If you know someone who worries, do you think it wise to help them with each individual concern, or do you think it better to help them get over the mindset of worry?

8 Are you willing to hand over all your worries to Jesus, or do you think that you'll just keep a few?

9 At the end of the day, the question is this: Is your trust in Jesus sufficient to deal with worries that occur each day? Discuss this statement.

10 Is your example of faith in Jesus able to convince others that they should hand over their worries to Jesus?

Reading over the set Bible text is very important to round off the lesson.

NOTES TO THE HOME GROUP LEADER

“What Jesus Said “ - Volume One, is designed to cover a twelve week cycle. It should take a period of one hour to read and discuss with your group members. It’s up to you, the leader, to determine the depth of your study, based on each members’ spiritual position.

Below you will find, useful guidelines for creating a lively, interesting and committed group. These are only hints for an established group. As the leader, you should already know your group’s likes and dislikes. However, if this is your first group, you may want to use these tips to get started.

1 When your group first arrives at the meeting place, be sure that you introduce them to one another. Make them feel at ease and welcome. Let them chat for a few minutes. Start off the conversation by finding out where they work; where do they worship; what prompted them to join you, etc?

2 Once they have settled, suggest that the group ask for God's blessing on the gathering. Open in a time of short, uncomplicated prayer. This prayer will be your responsibility as leader.

3 Check to make sure that everyone has a Bible handy, and discuss what version each member has. It's always an advantage to have different versions: when it's time to do a reading, two or three versions can be read out loud.

4 Hand out a copy of 'What Jesus Actually Said' to each person. If you wish, read the preamble out loud, so that everyone gets a feel of what they are going to be doing for the next twelve weeks.

5 Always bear in mind that your group is going to be made up of various personalities. You will have dominant folk, quiet folk, folk who will want to take over the conversation, and folk who will feel that they have nothing to contribute. It is vitally important that you, as the leader, give equal opportunity to each person to state his or her opinion. Encourage the quiet ones and subtly control those who talk a lot.

6 It could be helpful, in a joking way, to make up some basic rules: Such as you not accepting one word answers to questions you might ask. However, if someone would rather not answer let them say "Pass," and go on to the next person. Do not make anyone feel that their answer is inadequate.

7 It's always wise for you as the leader to have pre-studied the week's work, and if necessary, do a little prior research.

8 Let someone read the Bible verse, then allow two or three people to take it in turns reading the commentary.

9 Read the discussion questions, and give everyone a chance to answer.

10 Remember that there are no finite answers, so give everyone the opportunity to state their view. This will lead to lively debate. But be sure to judge when each question has run its course

11 Round off the study with a conclusion.

12 Close the formal discussion with a prayer, inviting those who have a prayer request to include that in the closing prayer.

13 Make sure that everyone knows the time and place of the next week's meeting before serving some refreshments.

My prayer for you and your group is that your fellowship and walk with Jesus will increase and show fruit as you study, 'What Jesus Actually said'.

GOD BLESS YOU.