



This study includes:

- ✓ Key principles of personal witnessing
- ✓ The Church as a force in the community
- ✓ Four facts of stewardship
- ✓ Basics in friendship
- ✓ Practical outworkings of love in the local church

Each study also involves:

Scripture Reading, discussion points and personal assignments

..... and more.

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Study 1
Witness Life



At this period in the development of the church we are becoming increasingly aware of spiritual gifting – where members have specific callings and abilities that qualify them in some areas of service and that disqualify them from other areas. However, there is one calling common to every member of the Body of Christ, that of being a witness.



Acts Chapter 1:6 – 8

There in the 8th verse we read “ye shall be witnesses.” Note the emphasis is on ‘being’ rather than on ‘doing’. In other words, witnessing is not an act we perform when we testify of Jesus, it is a way of living.

The implicit thought is that if we are not living the life of a witness talking about him is not going to make much of an impression.



Recently we were hearing about a gang member who was converted to Christ. He wanted to be a Christian gangster and testify for Christ in the underworld.

Discussion Time



Discuss this situation, and draw parallels between testimony and lifestyle.

Jerusalem First

In Acts 1:8, we read the order in witnessing for Christ. “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth.”

1. Why is the order significant?

2. Where is our own Jerusalem?

3. Why do we think it necessary for someone to be proved at home before seeking to be effective in Samaria or the uttermost parts of the earth?

Having looked at the importance of a consistent lifestyle, why is it that Christians simply being 'good guys' will not win the world to Christ?

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**Character and command
Go hand in hand**

The disciples, when they were arrested for speaking of Christ, replied to the court "We cannot but SPEAK of the things which we have seen and heard".

Where do we find the command to go and teach?

There is a definite and clear command to speak the word of God to those who are perishing. This takes the task of testifying away from our feelings.



Wesley conducted an experiment. For a day, he decided he would only speak of Christ when he felt like it. At the end of the day he had spoken to NO ONE.

What does this tell us? If we leave the matter of sharing the gospel to our feelings, we will never speak to anyone.

There is always a feeling that now is not the right time or here is not the best place.

Have we found this to be the case in our experience? Why is this?



Consider Paul’s exhortation to Timothy. “Be instant in season and out of season.” Suggest what Paul was meaning when he said be prepared to share the word ‘out of season’.

Which verse in the scripture begins with ‘now is the accepted time’?
_____ Complete the verse.

In Group Assignment



As a group, read Luke 10:30 – 37. View this teaching in the light of our responsibility to publish the Good News.

Now answer these questions;

1. Who is our neighbour?

2. Why do you think the priest and Levite passed by and ignored the man's need?

3. Who might the thieves be who set upon the man?

4. What might the inn be where the man was brought to and cared for?

Assignment



Be ready this week to share the word with friends, family or in our workplace. Someone is waiting for us.

Study 2
Witness Life



In this study, we will be looking at the place of the local church as a presence in the community.

The emphasis has long been on personal witnessing – or the training of believers to share the word and lead others to Christ. We will wholeheartedly agree with the necessity of EVERY CHRISTIAN being a witness and not simply handing over responsibility to an evangelist, in the hope that his crusade team will bring revival to the area.

WE must not, however, overlook the importance of the local church as a vital force in society. By its very existence, the functioning church makes a powerful statement – that Jesus is alive and well on the Planet Earth.



Consider these references to the church making its own declaration to the world in the course of normal daily function.

John 13:34 – 35

“A new commandment I give, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Matthew 5:13 – 16

“Ye are the salt of the earth →let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”



Acts 2:46 – 47

“And they continued daily with one accord in the temple → Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Acts 5:12 – 13

“And by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people → but the people magnified them.”

These are a few of the references that speak of the impact of Christ’s redeemed community upon the unbelieving world.

What is the common truth that runs through all four statements?

In his book “Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness”, Jerry Cook, as the Pastor of a large church in Seattle, contrasts the idea of the Church as a field and the Church as a force.



The concept of the Church as a field sees everything happening within the four walls of a church building. People brought there to be saved; special attractions to lure unbelievers to hear the Gospel message. Further special attractions to keep people attending the services, a rotation of programmes and variety of activities to ensure the flock is kept safely within the confines of the fold. It is a concept that keeps the eyes of the church focused inward upon itself, its own needs and its own well-being and health.

Contrasted to this we then are presented with the vision of the church as a FORCE – ‘As the salt of the Earth, As the Light of the world’ at work in the community where God has called them.



It represents a clear voice speaking on the pressing moral issues of the day, pornography, abortion, homosexuality, etc.

It is not afraid to become involved in influencing the appointment of good men into governmental positions or of prevent the appointment of bad ones!

By Acts of Charity and Mercy in the community they interpret the love of God to people in the clearest way. One church rebuilt the house of a man who was burned out without insurance. He was not a member of that church or a believer, yet his house was replaced free of charge to him.

What do you think happened to him?

What statement did this make to the rest of the community?

In many different ways, the church as a FORCE imparts the power and grace of God into a lost world. Their focus is outward to the people around. It is there where the influence is felt.



Discussion Time



There are two contrasting positions stated here. The traditional evangelical place of separation from the world, the other that seeks to exert influence through involvement.

Discuss the two positions and make notes of your conclusions.

Assignment



For the next week reads ACTS chapter 8 paying particular attention to the incident of Philip witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Study 3
Personal Witnessing



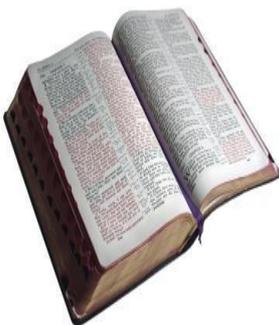
God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Who is ‘whosoever’ in this verse? You’re right if you said ‘anybody’ or redemption.

Our joyful task as believers is to share this message with everyone who will listen.

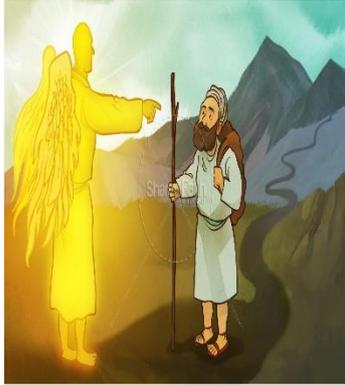
The book of Acts gives accounts of whole cities being stirred by public proclamation of the Gospel and also of individuals being spoken to by other believers.

Let’s look at the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8.



Acts 8:26 - 40

This passage describes one of the most remarkable incidents in scripture of God’s grace coming to a single individual. We’ll ask ourselves some questions, give ourselves some answers and hopefully draw some conclusions from this incident.



Acts 8:26

The angel of the Lord spake to Philip.

Why do you think Philip needed direction from the angel?



Acts 8:27

He arose and went.

The journey was about sixty miles by foot. What does this phrase tell you about Philip?



Acts 8:27

Behold a man

What does this little phrase tell you about God and His love for individuals?

Why would this particular man be of great influence for Christ in his country?



Acts 8:29
The Spirit said

What particular significance has this phrase to us, when it comes to personal witnessing?



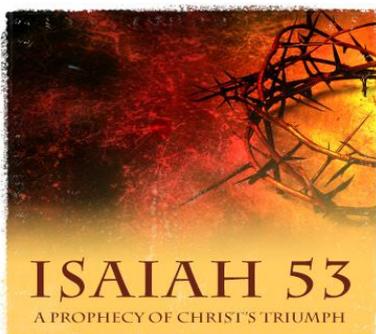
Acts 8:30
Philip ran

What does this tell us about Philip's attitude to his task?



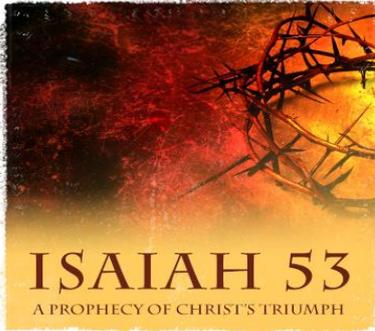
Acts 8:31
Sit with him

Discuss what it may mean to sit with a person.



Acts 8:32 – 33

He was reading Isaiah 53. Look into this chapter and find the verses that are quoted here. Which is the next phrase that Philip would read?



Why is that phrase important, and why is a correct understanding necessary when it comes to explaining the way of salvation?



Romans 10:9

This is an important verse in the steps of salvation, write it out in full.

Did the Ethiopian follow the command of this verse? Why was his baptism important?



Acts 8:39

The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip

Suggest why this appeared at this point.

Assignment



Are you ready to be “caught away” from someone you have befriended or witnessed to? If your job is not yet finished, visit or phone that person to encourage them in the faith.

Point to Ponder



Everything that we have has firstly comes from God. As stewards, we answer to God for the way in which we administer what He has given us.



1 Corinthians 4:2

Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man may be found FAITHFUL.

Notice that the word is ‘faithful’ not ‘successful’, we can be sure that God has a way of measuring success that is a great deal different in human standards.

Discussion Time



Discuss the distinction between successful and faithful and write out a short sentence on what you think it means to be faithful.

Now let's consider some of the chief areas of our stewardship.



Our life looked at in the simplest terms can be measured in days, and days in hours and minutes. How we spend those hours and minutes will eventually decide how we spend our lives.



1 Corinthians 10:31

Paul writes:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

In this regard, our jobs (whatever it may be), our recreation, and our spare time should be lived out with an eye to God's glory and in the perspective of eternity. However, within our weekly time table, we need to assess whether we are being faithful stewards of our time.

If our week (or our weekend) is so busy that we do not have time to assemble together with God's people, if our time spent in recreation, hobbies or in watching television exceeds time spent in spiritual pursuit, if our day does not allow time for personal devotions, then we can be sure that we are not being good stewards of the time given us by God.

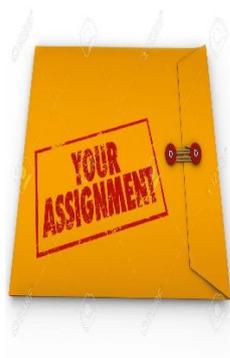
In a factual assessment done by Peter Wagner of Church growth ministries – it was estimated that the average North American Christian can legitimately give around 4 – 6 hours a week in direct service to God.

Discussion Time



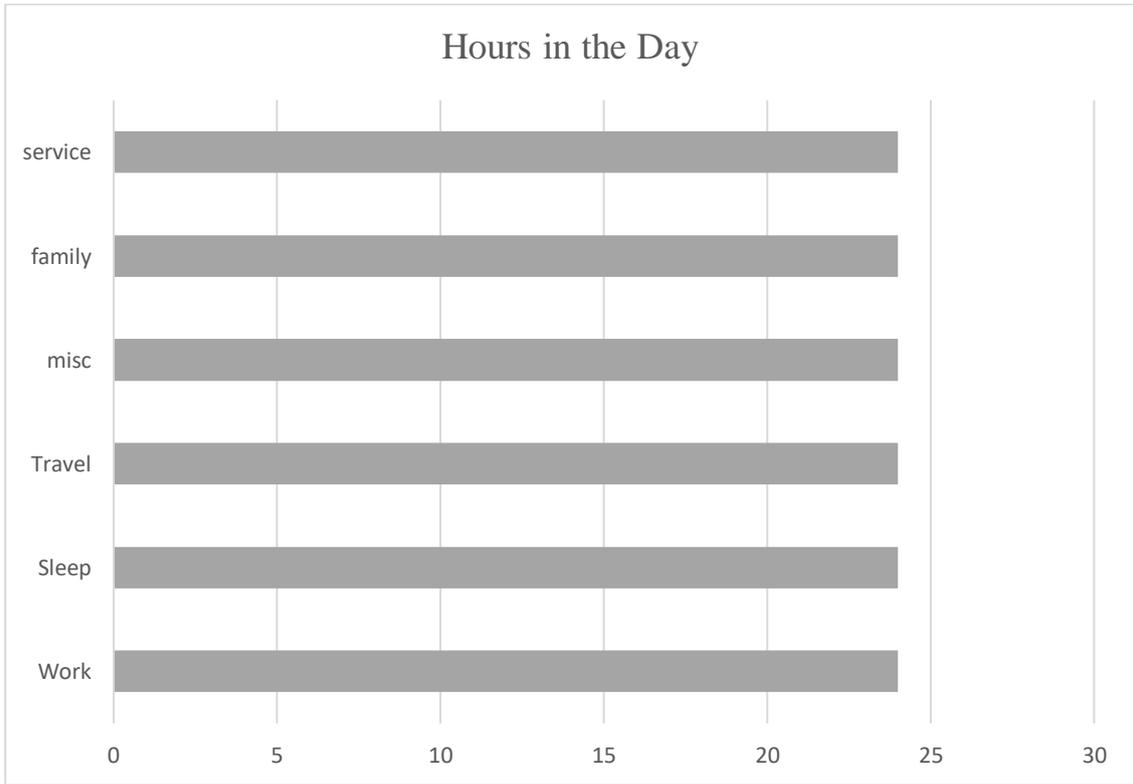
Discuss this finding. Where should the line be drawn that divides family time and church time?

Assignment



Fill in how your average week is spent. Make your own assessment of your time sheet.

Do any adjustments need to take place? If so where? Is there an evening that can be spent differently? Is there a good balance between family time, time spent in service to God, recreation, meetings and so on? Pencil in any changes you think are necessary.



Study 2 – Stewardship
Getting the Accounts Straight



Part of our stewardship is in the area of finances and the general administration of our wealth.



Keeping in mind that the earth and all its fulness (including our tiny portion) belongs to God what does God expect by way of our stewardship of our wealth?



Giving is clearly part of His expectation. In the Old Testament tithing was commanded of the people of Israel. This was to support Gods work and to take care of those who were specifically called to serve “At the Altar.”

One tribe, the tribe of Levi, was called into priestly service. They had no portion of land given to them in the allotment of Canaan. They were not to take jobs other than ministering in the sanctuary.

Clearly if the other eleven tribes gave on tenth of their over-all wealth to God’s work, the Levites would be adequately taken care of.

Whenever God's people began to backslide, they ceased to give to God's work. In turn God's ministers were unable to function adequately and His work suffered.

Have we noticed the connection between giving and spiritual health?



Look in the church offering box if you want to know how the church is faring!



On one occasion when Israel was restored to God there was such an offering of wealth that the priests told the people no to bring anymore.



Malachi 3:7- 11

Have we proved the connection between giving and God's blessing in our own lives?

Discussion Time



Discuss situations in the group where you have proved the faithfulness of God as you have given to His work.

The New Testament does not speak specifically about giving one tenth of our income. There are instances however, where the giving of the saints is described for us.



Acts 11:28 – 30

2 Corinthians 9:6 – 8



Discussion Time



What is meant by “As he purposeth in his heart” and “according to his ability”?

The tithe then, in a specific amount in our giving and what we might term a ‘scriptural ratio’ of our earnings. Our offerings are to be according to our ability, and obviously that ability will differ considerably from one person to another.

One thing is certain – if God blesses a certain person with power to earn money, the wealth that he gains through God’s prospering is to be used to glorify God who ‘giveth power to get wealth’.

Offering money is only part of our stewardship to God. Our house is to be considered part of our wealth, our cottage, our car, our boat, our private aircraft, all belong in the category of wealth and cannot be kept apart from our stewardship commission.

Discussion Time



Discuss in what way these things can be employed to the glory of God.

Remember this adage concerning stewardship “if you don’t use it, you lose it!”

Assignment



Stock check.

Ananias and Sapphira “Kept back part of the offering to God”.

Are we keeping anything back? If we are let's bring it to the Lord's table, and await His instructions.

Study 3 – Stewardship
Talents and Gifts



Matthew 25:14 – 30

For the sake of clarity, we will interpret the word ‘talent’ in its broadest sense as a gift or ability.

The truth that is being conveyed is that:

1. Each person has received gifts from God.
2. Each person is responsible for the fruitful employment of those gifts. They are to be used to the glory of God.

Point to Ponder



We are only accountable for what we have received from God. The man who received one talent was only responsible for that single gift, not for any others.

Clearly it is important that we confine ourselves to areas in which we are gifted and leave things to others in which we are not gifted.



1 Corinthians 12



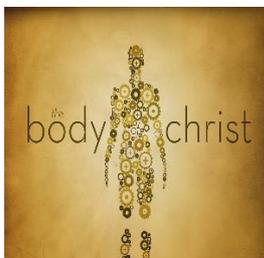
Do we notice a division in this chapter between the Distribution of Gifts and the Function of Gifts?



1 Corinthians 12:1 – 12
Explains something of the distribution of gifts.

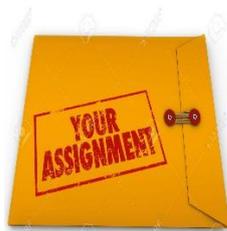


1 Corinthians 12:13 – 28
Explains the function of those gifts in the various members of the body. The thoughts of role difference is brought out here. The foot cannot do the job of the hand, or the eyes of the ear, etc.



1 Corinthians 12:29 – 30
Simply asks questions which emphasize the difference between the members and the way in which gifts are distributed.

Assignments



Look at the list of gifts in verses 1 – 30. Which gifts have you operated or which do you think you may have?

Discussion Time



Discuss with the group the reason you feel the Lord has blessed you with these gifts.



Romans 12:1 – 8

The gifts listed here are sometimes termed ‘Motivational’. They are gifts that motivate us in, or towards, the Calling of Christ for our lives. Gifts of teaching, caring, exhortation, serving, leadership are spoken of here.

Points to Ponder



It is clear that such abilities are evident in people who are not Christians. (the ability to teach, lead, give, serve, etc.) This prompts the question as to when these gifts are imparted ... at birth or ... at our new birth?

If they are given at birth, are these gifts strictly spiritual gifts?

Discussion Time



If they are natural giftings, at what point and in what manner, does a natural aptitude become a Spiritual force? Discuss these points as a group considering verses one and two of chapter twelve as a possible guide post in our thinking.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices unto Thee take that which we have surrendered to Thee, touch us, transform us by the working of Your Spirit, that the gifts that you have given us may be used to bring forth fruit unto God.



Study 4 – Stewardship Part A
Am I My Brother's Keeper?



The final area of stewardship that we will be considering in this short course is related to people.

Taking care of ourselves and others is probably the most important aspects of stewardship.

The first suggestions ever asked by God are to do with people.



Genesis 3:9 asks “where are you?”

Genesis 4:9 asks “where is your brother?”



Notice “you and your brother” (yourself and others). To God’s question “where is your brother?” Cain answered, “I know not – am I my brother’s keeper?”

Discussion Time



Discuss this reply. What do you think is the answer that God expects to hear when he asks whether we are our brother's keeper?

God has given every Christian responsibility or care for some other person – at least one and possibly more. List some of the people that you consider yourself to have some degree of responsibility for. List them in order of priority and briefly express what you think your stewardship role is to those people.

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Discussion Time



Let's discuss together some of these perceptions. See whether your priorities agree with each other and where your definitions of responsibility differ.

If a pastor has responsibility to care for a flock of God's people – does the care and stewardship (shepherding) of the flock belong entirely to him?





1 Corinthians 12:24 – 26

What do you think is meant by the phrase ‘That the members should have the same care for one another?’

Assignment



Read our lists together and through the week promise yourself to implement at least two of these aspects of care with another member of your Christian family.

Next week share with the group who it was and what you did.

Study 4 – Stewardship Part B
... And What about Me?



Finally, we consider ‘ourselves’. We are probably all familiar with that little secret of having joy in our hearts.

Jesus first
Others second
Yourself last

Very true. We do remember however that care of ourselves is an indispensable part of life itself. We will very quickly discover that we cannot adequately look after others if we have not learned to take care of ourselves.



1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20

Verse 19 ‘ye are not your own, we do not belong to ourselves’. On What basis does Paul make that statement?

Verse 20 What two things belong to God?

1. _____
2. _____

When we take care of our physical life we are faithful stewards of that which belongs to God.

Assignment



List six or seven ways in which we can nurture our physical life.

List four or five ways we can nurture our Spiritual life, which exhibits good stewardship of our spirit.

Discussion Time



Have we neglected ourselves? Remember God is concerned with the whole man. Someone once said, “Glory is the glow of God’s health.”

To glorify God in body and spirit is to manifest Spiritual and Physical health. Let’s commit ourselves to help each other towards the goals of abundant, healthy lives for God’s glory.

Study 1
Love One Another



Points to Ponder

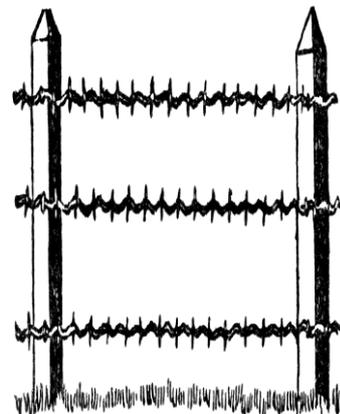


Human beings have capably demonstrated that they are able to kill each other, hate each other, rob each other and mistrust each other.

Trillions of dollars are spent yearly on weapons to kill people.



Political systems are riddled with deliberately fostered mistrust and suspicion. Much of our economy is based on making money at the other guy's expense.



All of these things, as human beings, we are familiar with. None of these things are needed to be taught.

The New Alternative



When Jesus said, ‘Love one another’ in John 13, the simple command leaves us baffled as to where to begin.

Let’s read this passage and for our final studies in Paving the Way (part 2), examine some of the ways in which we, as people who bear God’s name, can carry out His new commandment, and love one another.

Point to Ponder



If the church had carried out this commandment, the world would long ago have been Christianized.

Often the opposite has been true: bitter doctrinal conflicts and feuds over procedure have helped divide the Body of Christ over the centuries.

Love, then, must begin at home, in the family of God.



1 John 4:7 – 21

When John says, ‘let us love one another’ he does not go on to say in this way or in that. He simply says, “Let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”

Let’s answer some questions to help us understand the word LOVE from God’s dictionary.

- 1) There is a reason why a person does not or cannot express love. What is it? _____

- 2) How did God demonstrate His love to us? _____

- 3) Who took the initiative in showing love and how? _____

- 4) What is John's conclusion in verse 11? _____

- 5) What is the secret of dwelling in love? _____

- 6) What is one of the enemies of love mentioned in this passage? _____

- 7) What does perfect love do? _____

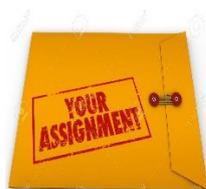
- 8) Does John draw any distinction between loving God and loving our brethren? _____

The last question gives rise to some interesting thoughts about where and who God is.

In one of His most powerful teachings – Jesus says:

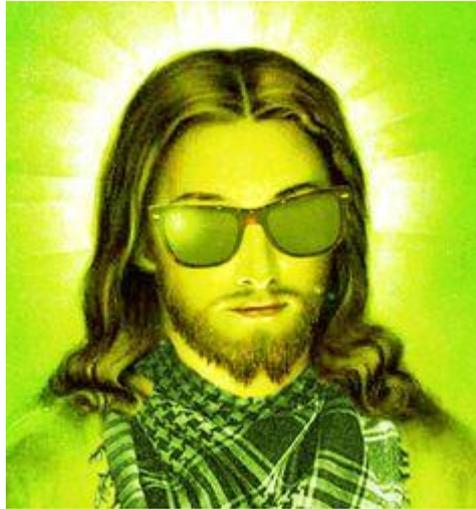
In as much as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren you have done it unto me and in as much as you have failed to do it unto the least one of these brothers you have not done it unto me.

Assignment



Discuss what message this teaching has for the Church.

GUESS WHO?



Apparently, Jesus is often in disguise moving incognito in a thousand different situations. As we minister to our brothers and sisters and in the broader context of the community, pray that the Lord will give us all new eyes to see Him in the lives of those around us.

Study 2
Loving Our Brother



There has been a misconception abroad that loving our brother or sister must somehow be demonstrated by heroic public acts, great deeds of sacrifice, that gain medals of recognition for acts of valour as Christian soldiers.

However, loving one another is to be demonstrated daily in a series of consistent small acts, words, thoughts and gestures that of themselves would never earn a distinguished service medal, but which, over the years, add up to a life lived out in love.

Care, kindness, giving, help and friendliness are all words that describe love at work. They break the nuggets of the love of God down to the currency of everyday life.



Assignment



Put contexts to each of these words that demonstrate the commandment love one another!

1. I care for my brother when _____

2. I am kind to my brother when _____

3. I demonstrate giving when _____

4. I show love when I help _____

5. I prove my friendship when _____

What disillusion or offends Christians more than any one other thing is when they perceive that their love is rejected or exploited.

How many of us can identify with these things happening in the family of God?

I loaned money to a brother, it was never repaid.

I was asked for the use of my car by a friend in the church. When it was returned the gas tank was empty and the back seat was covered in popcorn and ground up potato chips. It was a real mess.

I babysat for a young mother in the church at least a dozen times. I did it just to show I loved her and to help out. When I needed help myself she was too busy.



I helped a brother in business – to get him started. Later on, when he did some work for me I was charged full price.

A brother plowed out the Church parking lot for two years, and never received payment. When the church had a construction project on hand that required the same equipment that was used by this particular man, he was not asked to bid on the contract. Not surprisingly he felt offended.

Discuss these situations and suggest what the response of these people should be. No doubt we all have our own situations we can point to where we perceived ourselves being exploited or misused. If you feel it will benefit the group, share one of these situations. Invite comment.

Ingratitude for acts of kindness, using the church as a welfare state, presuming on the generosity of others, will erode trust and love faster than sale will erode your car. Let us all be sensitive to other members of the Body of Christ.

Paul in the Philippians Chapter 2 says “let every man look not only on the things that belong to himself but also on those things that belong to others”.

What does he mean by that? _____

Does this mean a return to acts chapter two verses 41 – 47 where we read “They had all things in common”.

Some Christians believe that a return to this situation is the true new testament way of life. Communities and communes are wide spread in the west.

What are our thoughts on community lifestyle where such commands as preferring our brother and every man looking after the things of his brother must find a daily and practical application if the community is to survive.

Discussion Time



Discuss this situation and list what you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of such a social system.

Study 3
Love One Another

STEPPING STONES



STUMBLING BLOCKS

or



In our consideration of love, we need to think about those who are classed as weaker brethren.

Prominent among the characteristics of weaker Christians is the fact that they are easily offended or discouraged. They have their problems, but Paul says, if other Christians are the reason why these weaker brethren are stumbling, then they bear a large part of the responsibility.

Paul takes up the subject of how weaker believers should be treated in Romans Chapter 14.



Romans 14

This is an important passage of scripture that explains some of the pragmatic outworking of love in the local church and how the bonds of fellowship are maintained between brothers and sisters.

Look at some of the points raised here. The main issue is one of a judgemental or censorious attitude towards other members of the Body of Christ.



1 Corinthians 2:14 – 15

There was a vast difference between the statement written in these two verses where the faculty of judgement is referred to and the statements in Romans 14 where the attitude of judgement is spoken of.

FACULTY



ATTITUDE

We are all to exercise the faculty of judgement in the course of our walk, we would be foolish not to, the problem really begins when we adopt judgemental positions and visit our judgemental attitudes upon our brethren.

When we do this we move over into areas that belong only to God Himself. In verse 4 of Romans 14, Paul illustrates this truth, from a master, servant relationship.

Discussion Time



Discuss this verse and write a quick synopsis of what is being said.

Look at verse 3. What attitude will a judgemental spirit produce?

Since the human spirit is quick to pick up on censorship and disapproval, we need to guard against analysis of others that conveys the message “you are WRONG!”

The weaker brother often knows he is wrong, but the message that says, “you are WRONG!” also says “I am RIGHT!” and nothing will more quickly destroy the spirit of unity and the bond of peace than this type of self-righteousness.



Romans 14:10 – 12

Where does Paul say judgement of believers will ultimately take place?

In this same passage, Paul speaks about care in the exercise of Christian liberties.

One person is free to eat meat (offered to idols), another isn't. One person strictly observes the Sabbath Day law, another doesn't. One person drinks wine (presumably in modest amounts), another doesn't.

Since all these believers could be in the same local church, who decides where the parameters of these allowable practises are drawn? Read verse 14.

In the light of verse 15 – 16 and 20 – 21, how shall I exercise my liberties as a Christian, bearing in mind that I also live among other members of God’s family?

Suggest other areas of conscience that could be controversial or divisive, if not guarded against.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In-Group Assignment



FAMILY COURT



Now consider these situations and say how you would deal with each one.

- 1) A brother recently saved, has a restaurant in town that sells liquor. He has been criticized by other Christians for selling alcohol. He comes to you, as a friend and older brother to ask counsel. What would you say to him?

2) You live in a dormitory at college and are billeted with a fellow student who plays Christian Rock. This is not your type of music. Tensions begin to build, you feel you must say something. What do you say when you finally speak?



3) You witness to your neighbour of the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah she comes to the fellowship and is saved. Her husband is not a Christian. She continues to follow the Lord, but comes to worship and bible study with mod clothes, tight pants and weird hairstyles. Other members of the group are noticeably taken aback. Two of them leave. You are the group leader and have responsibility for these members. Should you say anything? If so, who to? And what?



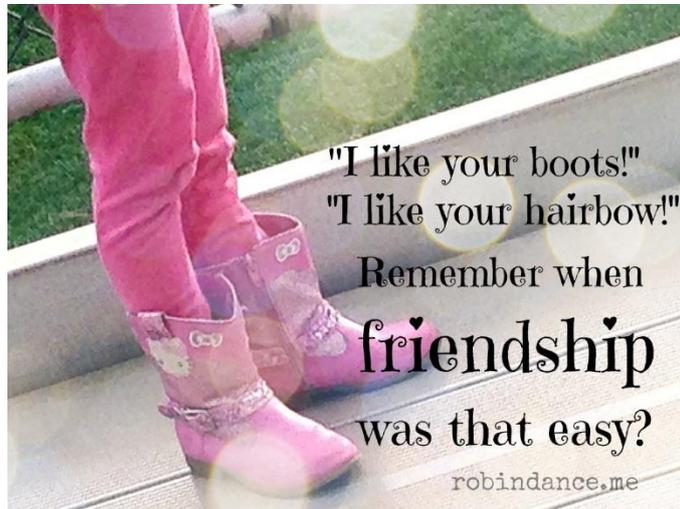
The history of the Church abounds with schisms and rifts: there have been dislocations that have sometimes led to bloodshed, even between members of the Body of Christ.

Many of these tragic splits began with wrong attitudes, which were later to be followed by equally wrong actions.

Love, and love alone is the key to our relationships.

2000 years ago Jesus simply said, 'Love one another as I have loved you'. The command has not changed. When we obey, it we will surely find that all men will know that we are His disciples.

Study 4
*Greater Love has No Man than This
That He Lay Down His Life for His Friends*



Simple friendship within the Family of God, may not appear to be an important aspect of the Church at work. How wrong we can be.

Loneliness is probably the most chronic human ailment that afflicts our society today. It would amaze us if we knew how widespread it is in the Church. Lonely people are faceless people. Friendship puts faces on our brothers and sisters. Being a friend to someone is the greatest single gift you can bestow upon that individual. If we are to be friends within the Body of Christ we need to know the components that make up true friendship.

We must emphasise here that relationships in Christ, in order for them to function effectively, must have Christ at the center.

Need-centred relationships that bring people to emotional dependence are always deficient and dangerous.

Points to Ponder



In nature, there are creatures that exist on the basis of mutual need being met. The phenomena is called 'Symbiosis'.



The bird that sits on top of the alligator's head is safe not only from birds of prey but also from the alligator. He picks the alligator's teeth, generally does his dental work, and also cleans parasites from the scales of the reptile. In return for the favour, he has security and food 'in a plate!'

They exist harmoniously because of services rendered.

Friendships that are based on services rendered and that are symbiotic to some degree, are fundamentally unhealthy. For example, a person who needs approval may be attracted to or seek the companionship of someone who likes to be followed – who in turn supplies approbation when necessary to the other person. Such relationships press people into each other rather than into Christ. They are what we may term 'Jack Sprat relationships'.



Two or three people who have suffered pain in past relationships might seek each other out, and build friendships around sharing mutual hurts. Their fellowship times may be no more than 'pain or pity parties'.

Discussion Times



Discuss these two situations, and perhaps other of a similar nature.

Listed below are some elements that are essential for good friendships in the Body of Christ.

Loyalty, care, commitment, honesty, trust, integrity, sacrifice, forgiveness, acceptance, communication: Talk together about these words and list the five which you consider to be most important to a healthy relationship. Say why.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

We can all point to friendships which didn't last. They ended in dislocation of one sort or another. Where do you think the problem lay?

Assignment



Write a short account of what you think went wrong, your reactions to the experience.

Do you have a friend in your local church? How would you assess your relationship? How might you more fully express your love to that person?



Remember communicating love by word and deed forms the heart of all friendships.

List 10 ways in which love can be expressed and friendship thereby strengthened.



Matthew 25:34 - 40

A person feels isolated when they perceive (rightly or wrongly) that others do not care, do not understand, or do not love them. As isolation increases, so do feelings of alienation and rejection. This ought never to happen in close fellowship and caring churches but it does – often. People just slip between the cracks and are never seen again. Stop and think one moment, is there one of your brothers or sisters in Christ today who needs an extra

assurance of God's love? Reach out and touch them. Your hand will become the hand of Jesus to them.

'in as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me'