

Life with God
A 20 session Study

Section Four: Extending Life with God

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Study Fourteen: Loving Others

Review from Study Thirteen: This study reflected on our souls. A diagram was considered, reflecting how the soul makes a unity of our lives. Additional passages, primarily from the Psalms, were reviewed with this diagram in mind. The exercise was to pick one of these verses and develop a response to it. Share what you did in response the scripture you chose.

Introduction:

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus answered with a statement about loving God and loving our neighbor. We know that love is important. The problem is learning how to love. It is important to remember that throughout these studies we are NOT trying to tack individual “laws” on to our life to earn God’s favor. Instead, we are seeking His inner transformation of our lives. So as we look at this teaching about love, realize our goal is not to “act loving”, but to truly “be loving”.

1. Think of someone you love. How does that affect your interaction with them?
2. What are the risks of loving someone?
3. How does Jesus define love? (John 14: 12, 13)
4. Read Matthew 5: 43 – 46. Does this seem difficult? How would this kind of love be possible?
5. Read 1 John 4: 16 – 21. What is the source of our love? (Or why do we love?) What is the relationship between our love for God and our reaction to others?

6. Obviously in these contexts love is not a feeling or emotional attachment to people. We don't always "feel" loving in this kind of way. So how would you define love as described in these verses?
7. Interact with this definition: Love is the settled determination and inclination to always seek another's good. (What does this definition include? What does it leave out?)
8. Read 1 Corinthians 13. This passage doesn't tell us how to love, but instead shows us a description of what we would look like if we loved. What qualities are most striking to you? What importance is placed on love in this passage?
9. How could you have this kind of love?

Summary: Our popular culture uses the word love in many ways that are at great odds with the way Jesus uses it. Love is not a warm feeling. It is not sexual lust. It is not simple affection. It is deeper and stronger and more powerful than all of those. It is the very nature of God. Loving isn't safe unless we have learned to live with God, because it entails risk and personal cost. When we are alive to God and living in His kingdom, we will be able to risk allowing His love to flow through us to others.

Practical Exercises

1. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 13.
2. Meditate on 1 John 4: 16 – 21. How do you come to "know" the love of God?
3. Ask God to fill you with His love for someone you tend to view negatively. What happens in your thoughts as you pray this prayer?

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Study Fifteen: Enriching our Worship

Review from Study Fourteen: God is love. The scriptures are quite clear about this. To live with God, we must learn His kind of love. It not something we can tack on to our lives, but something that really has to permeate all the dimensions of our lives. Refusing to live in love is essentially refusing to live with God. Here are the three practical exercises from this study. Share which one you did and how you saw God using it in your life. Of course, if you did something else, share that as well.

4. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 13.
5. Meditate on 1 John 4: 16 – 21. How do you come to “know” the love of God?
6. Ask God to fill you with His love for someone you tend to view negatively. What happens in your thoughts as you pray this prayer?

Introduction to Study Fifteen: The word often translated worship in the Bible has the root idea of bowing down or prostrating oneself before someone or something. This is obviously a posture that is meant to honor or show respect toward whatever is being addressed in this way. But as Christians of this century, we have attached the word “worship” to a type of music and a portion of our regular church gatherings. Consider the different ideas conveyed in these passages about worship.

1. Read Deuteronomy 26: 1 – 15. This was the instruction given to the nation of Israel about the annual pilgrimage they were to make to appear before the place of the Lord’s choosing. What did their “worship” look like? (Compare this to 1 Samuel 1: 3-5. Was Elkanah practicing what Deuteronomy 26 instructed? What did this look like for his family?)
2. What reasons are given for worshipping God in Psalm 29?
3. Read Psalm 66. What reasons are given for worshipping God? What actions are done to worship God? Who is called to worship God? Who will eventually worship God?
4. Read John 4: 20 – 24. Jesus is talking with the Samaritan woman. What question does she ask about worship? How does Jesus answer it? What does His answer mean?
5. Read Matthew 15: 8 – 9. What is vain worship?
6. Read Romans 12: 1. What is our spiritual worship?
7. The nation of Israel was repeatedly warned of worshipping false gods. What false gods or idols do people (Christian and non-Christian alike) worship? How is this worship carried out?
8. Read Rev. 4: 9 -11. This is a picture of heavenly worship. Feel free to read more of the passage. What characterizes the heavenly scene?
9. Develop a definition of worship.

Summary: It is evident that the root idea of bowing before someone has to do with honor. Since we were created by God, and He has done great things to continue to bless us and reach out to us, He deserves every honor we can bestow upon Him. Romans 12:1 says that every part of our body should be submitted to Him. In the Old Testament tithes were brought to the Levites to reflect that the increase given that year was from His hand of provision. Vain worship is going through any motion of worship without a requisite heart that truly wants to honor God. It seems then that the best way we can enrich any worship that we participate in is to get our hearts in the right place.

Practical Exercises:

1. Read Revelation 4: 1 – 10. Over the course of a week pray the praises of the 24 elders. Meditate on the meaning of each phrase.
2. Pray through a selection of psalms. Make up a song to go with one you particularly enjoy.
3. Reflect on how you spend your time and money. What do they say about what you truly worship?

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Study Sixteen: Managing our Resources

Review of Study Fifteen: Worship is an all encompassing posture toward God. It can involve various types of activities but it must flow from a heart filled with delight that God is God, that He is worthy of His rightful place over everything as Creator and Sustainer. Here are the suggestions for practical exercises from this study. Share with the group which one you did and what you learned.

4. Read Revelation 4: 1 – 10. Over the course of a week pray the praises of the 24 elders. Meditate on the meaning of each phrase.
5. Pray through a selection of psalms. Make up a song to go with one you particularly enjoy.
6. Reflect on how you spend your time and money. What do they say about what you truly worship?

Introduction to Managing our Resources: The Bible teaches clearly in Genesis One that God has given man a significant place in His creation. It is one that involves ruling or reigning. Every single person has some say over a part of creation. Some obviously have “say” over more than others do, but everyone has say over something. What we do with our “something” reflects our values and our understanding of our place in His creation. We can manage it for His kingdom or we manage it for our own interests. Consider these passages as they speak to the two main categories of our control, our time and our money.

1. Read Ephesians 5: 15 – 16. What does Paul counsel? How would you go about doing this?
2. Read Galatians 6: 9. What is the counsel here? What are the things we will do if we aren't patient? How does this speak to our instant gratification culture?
3. Under the Law, the Jews were supposed to rest every 7th day, the Sabbath. This obviously was a action that was meant to direct their hearts toward God. Consider these verses ... Ezekiel 20: 12 and 20. What possible link do you see between keeping the Sabbaths and “knowing God”? Does this make a case for the spiritual discipline of solitude?
4. Consider this statement. “Rest/solitude is to time what giving is to money, each require a step of faith.”
5. Read 1 Timothy 5: 8. This verse is in the context of the church caring for widows and orphans. What do you think Paul means when he writes “provide for his own?” As we are managing our money, what is one primary consideration?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 11. What is the motive given for working? What do we do with the resources that we earn?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 9: 6 – 8. What is the principle of giving that Paul teaches here? Specifically, for what reason are we given “an abundance?” (Is Paul saying this is how we will get a lot of “stuff” for ourselves or for some other purpose?)

8. Read Luke 16: 10, 11. What do you think Jesus means when He speaks of being faithful with little things? What are the true riches He speaks of?
9. Discuss this question. What is the difference between “needs” and “desires”? How can the materialism of our culture lead us to get in over our heads financially?

Summary: The obvious point here is that God wants us to be good managers of the resources entrusted to us. How we spend our time and our money shows our truest and deepest values. Cultivating a biblical mindset in these areas goes much deeper than one study can cultivate. Consider these additional steps for further growth.

Practical Exercises:

1. Take Financial Peace the next time it is offered in our church or here in the area.
2. Join a Crown Ministries Study. (We may be offering these soon.)
3. Do a word study on money. What does Jesus say about it?
4. Write a budget if you don't have one. Do you have all of your needs covered? If not, what can you do to change this?
5. Evaluate your giving. Is it in line with the teaching in 2 Corinthians 9? (Cheerful? Under compulsion? With purpose? From the heart?)
6. Evaluate your week. How much time do you spend in front of the television? At work? With family? With the Lord? Etc? Are you living in a way that makes the most of the time?

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Study Seventeen: "With God in our Workplaces"

Review of Study Sixteen: All of our resources truly are entrusted to us by God. How we use them reflects what we truly value. Jesus spoke about being faithful. Share with the group what impressed you most from the study, and what follow up steps you are going to take. (Many of the suggestions can not be done in a week's time. Share your plans with the group.) Here are the suggestions from Study Sixteen:

7. Take Financial Peace the next time it is offered in our church or here in the area.
8. Join a Crown Ministries Study. (We may be offering these soon.)
9. Do a word study on money. What does Jesus say about it?
10. Write a budget if you don't have one. Do you have all of your needs covered? If not, what can you do to change this?
11. Evaluate your giving. Is it in line with the teaching in 2 Corinthians 9? (Cheerful? Under compulsion? With purpose? From the heart?)
12. Evaluate your week. How much time do you spend in front of the television? At work? With family? With the Lord? Etc? Are you living in a way that makes the most of the time?

Introduction to "Living with God in our Workplaces"

Work was not a curse from God. Work is meaningful activity that produces some good. Adam had work to do before the Fall. Unfortunately, with the Fall, there is a difficulty about our work that wasn't there before. It is important we come to understand that our places of work are far more than just a source of income. How we do our work really reflects our understanding of what it means to live in God's kingdom and "with Him".

1. Read Proverbs 18: 9. What does it mean to be "slack" in our work? Why is this destructive?
2. Read Colossians 3: 22-24. Although the first verse in this passage is addressed to slaves, reflect on how this verse applies to your work. What does it mean to do your work heartily as unto the Lord?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 11, 12. What does it mean to behave properly toward outsiders?
4. Read 2 Thessalonians 3: 8 – 11. Describe what kind of situation you think Paul was addressing in this church? Do you see anyone trying to live that way today? How do we apply this principle to our situation?
5. It is wrong to think we function differently in our "work" life and our "home" life. Certainly the relationships are a bit different, but does this mean that because it is "business" that we treat people with disrespect or in unloving ways? What does it mean to love those around you at your job? Discuss the difference between relationships at work and relationships at home (or in the church). What differences should be there? What differences shouldn't?
6. Discuss what challenges there are to living with God where you work. Is it hard to be known as a Christian where you work? Why? What can you do about it?

7. Spend some extra time in your study breaking down into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and pray for some individuals where you work. Ask God to bless them through your life in the coming month.

Summary: Our work place is the predominate place of our discipleship or apprenticeship to Jesus. We spend much of our time there, so naturally it should be seen as a place of learning how to live “with God.” This is where the “reality” of daily life meets the “reality” of the kingdom of God. It is clear that we should work hard and carefully for those who employ us. It is also clear that our work is a statement about our attitude toward God. We should do it in a way that seeks to please the Lord, rather than seeking to please men. Work is also the place where we will have most regular contact with those who don’t know Jesus. (The obvious exceptions are those who work for a Christian ministry.)

Practical Exercises:

1. Reflect on your job performance at work. Setting aside your last performance review, what would Jesus say about it? Pray and ask the Lord to show you His perspective. Think of some steps you can take to change in that area.
2. Pray for some people at work. Ask the Lord to bless them. Do this regularly for a month and see what happens.
3. Consider some additional reading or training that would help you do your work more effectively.

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Study Eighteen: "Blessing our families"

Review from Study Seventeen: Doing our work well should be a hallmark of us as followers of Jesus Christ. We should do an honest day's labor for our pay. We should see our work as something we do interactively with Jesus. We also should recognize our places of work as primary opportunities to model kingdom living for those who don't know Jesus yet. Here are the exercises from Study Seventeen. Share what you did and what the Lord taught you through the experience.

4. Reflect on your job performance at work. Setting aside your last performance review, what would Jesus say about it. Pray and ask the Lord to show you His perspective. Think of some steps you can take to change in that area.
5. Pray for some people at work. Ask the Lord to bless them. Do this regularly for a month and see what happens.
6. Consider some additional reading or training that would help you do your work more effectively.

Introduction to Blessing our families:

Families are important to God. In fact according to Ephesians 3:15 every family on earth derives its name from Him. So how do we live and lead our families into God's best? Obviously there are so many facets to family life that this study can only address the big outline. Pray as you begin the study, asking the Lord to use it to show you an area of need.

1. Read Hebrews 13: 4. What do you think that it means to hold marriage in honor? Is marriage honored by our culture? Why or why not?
2. Read Ephesians 5: 22 – 33. What specific instructions are given to husbands and wives? How are these instructions different? What reasons are given for these instructions? What goals are given for doing this? Who is the model in this passage for husbands?
3. Read Ephesians 6: 1 – 4. What attitude should children have toward their parents? What does it mean to honor your father and mother? As a parent what is your responsibility toward your children according to this passage? As an adult, what is your responsibility toward your own parents?
4. It is easy to read the passages above and rattle off statements about the right relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children. It is much more difficult to actually carry them out. One of the challenges is being so busy that you fail to take the time to reflect on these issues. So... here is an opportunity. Have every couple in the group go off by themselves and discuss how they are doing with these challenges. Have those who are unmarried in the group discuss their relationships with their own parents in groups of 2 or 3.
5. End your time in prayer, sharing whatever you are comfortable sharing with each other.

Summary: Husbands have the responsibility of leading their families toward Christ-likeness. Their goal should be to create an environment conducive to everyone's growth and maturity. This may require sacrifice on their part. Wives have the responsibility to encourage and support their husbands in this initiating role. Many times it is the wounds from our families of origin that can keep us from living well in our own families. If issues surfaced during this study, please make intentional decisions to deal with them. These matters are too important to let slide.

Practical Suggestions: As with our study on resources, the topics surfaced in this study are too broad to be addressed in one week. They will take a lifetime to complete. The suggestions are simply a possible starting point. There are many more resources available than just these suggestions.

1. Take the course “Love and Respect” that we offer periodically. It is about the husband and wife relationship.
2. Read a book about raising children together as a couple. A couple of suggestions: Dare to Discipline by James Dobson, Shepherding a Child’s Heart by Tedd Tripp.
3. (For Husbands) Ask your wife out on a date to review your progress as a family. Lead the discussion by asking your wife how she is doing. Ask her about her relationship with the Lord, with you, with the children. Listen and ask lots of questions before making any statements. ASK how you can help before offering any advice.
4. (For Wives) Pray for your husband that God will help him lead you in becoming more like Jesus.
5. Attend a Marriage Seminar: The Central Virginia Alliance for Marriage and Family offers seminars frequently in our area.
6. Seek out a counselor. (You can contact the church office for some suggestions) Don’t allow bad patterns to become so entrenched in your family that you deepen the hurt in each other’s lives.
7. Seek out another couple as mentors. Look for another couple who you see as growing in their relationship with the Lord and ask them to meet with you periodically to talk openly and honestly about your marriage and family.
8. Pray together as a couple for each other and your children.

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Study Nineteen: Bringing Change to our Environments

Review of Study Eighteen: Our families are important to God. The love relationship between a husband and a wife are meant to reflect the love of Jesus for the church. God identifies himself as our Father and we are His children. It is essential that we are INTENTIONAL about the well being and condition of our family relationships. We need to give prayerful consideration to our own situation and be willing to take the necessary steps to allow growth and maturity to unfold. Share with the group what impressed you most from this past study and what step(s) you are taking from what you learned. (The list from the previous study is not reprinted here as there are too many other good steps that can also be taken.)

Introduction to Study Nineteen: We are affected by our environments. Have you ever felt gloomy on a rainy cloudy day? Yet there are far more powerful environmental conditions than just the weather that affect us. One word that we could use is culture. As people who live in America we are shaped by the “environs”, (thoughts, ideas, values) of a larger group of people. But we could also use that word of much smaller settings. A city for example can have a set of values. Think of the cultural differences between a small town in a rural area of Tennessee and a section of Manhattan in New York. A workplace can have a “culture”. People can either be gloomy and negative about the “boss” or “management” or they can be thankful for how well the company is being directed. (O.K... that last one may be rare, I realize, but it is possible.) So what is our responsibility in each of these environments?

1. Read Romans 12: 1 – 3. What are we to avoid? How do we do this? What attitude should we have as we are seeking to live this way?
2. Read Jeremiah 29: 4 – 7. (Background: Some of the Jews were taken into exile. False prophets were saying that God was going to bring them back. God was letting them know that He wasn't. Instead they needed to submit to the exile and go about life. But notice how they were to go about life.) What should we do about our city following this as a model? Does this apply to our employer? (Think about it... if the company does well, doesn't that make it more likely that you will keep your job?) How can you go about this?
3. Read 1 Timothy 2: 1 – 4. What responsibility do we have toward those in authority? How do we do this? What is our motivation? What is your plan for this?
4. Read Romans 12: 18 – 21. What does this say about “office politics?” How do we live this way? How do we overcome evil with good?
5. Read Matthew 7: 7, 8. These verses are most often applied to prayer. Can it apply to more? Reflect on this thought. Jesus is teaching a way of life that depends on God, rather than human manipulation. Instead of pushing people or manipulating people into doing something, how would it be different to simply ask? Think of a recent time you wanted someone to do something for you. How did you approach it? What was the result? Think of how applying this approach might have changed what you did.

6. Read Ephesians 5: 11. What does it mean to participate in something? What kind of things go on at your work that could be characterized as “darkness?” What would it look like for you not to participate in them?

Summary: Our environments affect us. It is good and appropriate for us to seek to be a blessing to our surroundings. We can seek the welfare of our country, our city, our workplace. Our first priority seems to be prayer. Then, we work hard, and seek opportunities to do good works even in the face of evil and opposition. We give up manipulation and angry pressure as ways of motivating people. We learn to ask. We gently but firmly refuse to participate in anything that is evil or dark. This may be as simple as refusing to chime in when everyone is “bashing” the boss. Prayer and grounding in God’s word are necessary prerequisites to overcome the natural conformity we have to our social settings.

Practical Exercises:

1. Pray!!! (Kind of obvious huh?) Pray for your boss, for your company, for our city, and for the country. Make a list of individuals you will pray for on a regular basis.
2. Look for a need you can fill. Consider your neighborhood, your workplace etc. Look for something that needs to be done, or could be done to improve things. Quietly, without fanfare, do it.
3. Prepare a list. Make a list of people at your workplace and positive qualities you see in them. Keep a running list and review it periodically. Look for opportunities to speak a positive word to them about what you see.

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Study Twenty: Bringing Change to Others

Review from Study Nineteen: As followers of Jesus Christ we can seek to be a change agent or blessing to our environment. We can seek to do the kinds of deeds that make a difference. This will require some thought and, more importantly, prayer to manage. Share with the group your response to this study. Here are the exercises as a reminder.

4. Pray!!! (Kind of obvious huh?) Pray for your boss, for your company, for our city, and for the country. Make a list of individuals you will pray for on a regular basis.
5. Look for a need you can fill. Consider your neighborhood, your workplace etc. Look for something that needs to be done, or could be done to improve things. Quietly, without fanfare, do it.
6. Prepare a list. Make a list of people at your workplace and positive qualities you see in them. Keep a running list and review it periodically. Look for opportunities to speak a positive word to them about what you see.

Introduction to Bringing Change to Others

We all probably have a variety of impressions about the idea of sharing our faith. Some of our impressions may be joyous because we saw someone actually come to faith in Jesus. Other impressions may make us uncomfortable, because we have observed someone share their faith in an extremely insensitive way. You may see a very different path open up for you as you consider the passages in this study. As always, pray for the Lord to help you as you reflect on His word.

1. Read 1 Peter 3: 14 – 16.
 - a. What could cause fear? Why shouldn't we be fearful?
 - b. What does it mean to sanctify Christ as Lord?
 - c. What does it mean to be ready to make a defense? What is the CONTENT of such a defense?
 - d. What attitude should we have as we do this?
 - e. Why would anyone ask us a question? What does this presume?
 - f. Why is keeping a good conscience important?

Before moving on to the next section, consider this question. How do you know what you know about God? Western culture has increasingly pushed “religious” information into the realm of conjecture or “belief”, not something you can actually know. Give some thought to how you actually can KNOW spiritual truth. What does that mean? (Some more information will be given on this topic in some Sunday morning messages in the coming year.)

2. Read Matthew 5: 13 – 16. What does it mean to be salt and light? What is it that people actually see? What is the result of this?
3. Read Matthew 4: 17. As Jesus preached the gospel, He gave one command and one reason. What were they? How does His presentation compare with what we often hear as “the gospel”?

4. Read Matthew 7:6. What do you think this means? (Is Jesus saying we should view some people with disgust and view them as dogs and pigs?) Consider the previous 5 verses about judging! How do these verses affect the meaning of this instruction? (Hint: Are pearls anything pigs can use or need? What do they need?)
5. Discuss this question: What is good news about the gospel? (The word gospel means good news by the way.) What is the gospel (news) about?

Summary: Our resistance to sharing our faith may have its source in two different areas. The first may be a fear of some kind of rejection. If our goal is to go through life without any kind of suffering, we are going to be disappointed. We all experience some kind of suffering. The question is, will we suffer for what is good and right? Will we suffer for something that matters? Although rejection may not be pleasant, it is not a form of “suffering” we should fear. It (rejection) is a normal part of life. Everyone experiences it for one reason or another. Why shouldn’t we be willing to face it for something as important as Jesus’ message?

The second area may be a lack of understanding of just how good the news truly is. If we are not living life “alive” to God in His Kingdom, we may have the wrong idea. We may be thinking we are offering people a solution that they will only need on their death bed. If we are not living lives of joy, peace and righteousness in the Holy Spirit right now, it is difficult to tell other people about it. As we embrace the reality of life with God and enjoy the peace and purpose it gives us, we will want to share that life with others. As we begin to live it, we will have opportunities to explain it to others. If we have prepared ourselves for just such a moment, we will have ways to speak naturally about a life with God made possible by faith in Jesus Christ.

Practical Exercises:

1. Make a list of the good things about life with God. Reflect on how your life is different now than it was 5 years ago. How would you explain the change to someone?
2. Think about the key ideas in sharing the good news with someone about Jesus Christ. Practice explaining them to someone.
3. Pray for an opportunity to share your faith with someone else.