
Rooted in Christ

“For he will be like a tree planted by the water; that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:8

Learning to develop a vital, growing, intimate
and personal, relationship with God.

COPYRIGHT 1997 © Grow in Grace

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied or stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means whatsoever, without the written permission of the copyright holder.

Unless otherwise identified, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible, © 1995 (update) the Lockwood Foundation

4th Edition printed July 1997

5th Edition printed December 2001

6th Edition printed March 2002

7th Edition printed June 2007

Grow in Grace, 16 Glenside Park, Drumbo, Lisburn BT27 5LG

Session 1**Page 5**

- ✧ Introduction
- ✧ Course Briefing
- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Gospel Outline
- ✧ New Life in Christ

Session 2**Page 13**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Assurance of Salvation
- ✧ Feelings
- ✧ Doubts
- ✧ Taking Your Stand as a Christian

Session 3**Page 19**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Sin in the Life of a Believer
- ✧ Forgiveness

Session 4**Page 23**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Memorisation
- ✧ Meditation

Session 5**Page 27**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Personal Devotions - What Next?
- ✧ Daily Devotional Study
- ✧ Daily Prayer

Session 6**Page 33**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Who we Have Become
- ✧ Temptation

Session 7**Page 38**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Put OFF/ Put ON

Session 8**Page 42**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ God's Will

Session 9**Page 47**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Interpersonal Relationships

Session 10**Page 51**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Preparing a Personal Testimony
- ✧ Authority - a Biblical Perspective

Session 11**Page 56**

- ✧ Growing in His Word
- ✧ Memory Verses
- ✧ Personal Testimonies

Session 12**Page 58**

- ✧ Social Evening

Introduction

Welcome to the course. We hope you really enjoy and profit from it. You may feel a little bit shy, or even nervous, initially, but in a few weeks everyone in the group will feel quite at home.

As the session starts the leader will introduce himself and ask each of you to share a little bit about yourself, your family, work, etc. As the weeks go by, you will all get to know each other very well.

Course Briefing

Your group leader will explain what the course is all about. You will find it helpful to read through the session notes before you come each night.

Growing in His Word

A daily time of prayer and Bible study should be a vital part of every Christian's life. Throughout the course, there will be a constant emphasis on this topic and help to make it a meaningful part of your life.

Your devotional studies, throughout this course, will be based on a booklet called *Growing in His Word*.

Tonight you will be working through the introductory notes in the booklet to make sure you understand what you have to do and how to go about it. The study in Mark's Gospel illustrates only one way of having daily devotions. As the course goes on you will learn to use other tools and develop your own ability to study God's Word.

The first part of each evening will be spent discussing the previous week's studies. This gives everyone a chance to share what they have been reading and provides an opportunity to ask questions and discuss any problems which may have arisen.

Your leader will take the initiative in this and we hope you will feel able to join in. No one will be forced to participate if they feel unable to do so. The sharing time and memory verse review will take about forty-five minutes, normally followed by a fifteen minute break for tea or coffee.

The Gospel Outline

This Gospel outline explains our position in God's eyes and what He has done to make it possible to fulfil His original purpose to have fellowship with us.

1. Mankind is Cut off from God

Through Adam's Sin

The Gospel really starts with the character of God and His purpose to create men and women to have fellowship with Himself. God is holy, pure and absolutely just. He hates sin (and evil) and because of His nature He cannot ignore it.

The issue in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve was dependence or independence.

Genesis 2:17 “. . . but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Would they choose a life lived in dependence on God OR a life lived independently of God, cut off from His resources and life? Adam chose 'independence' and we continue to live with the consequences of that choice today.

Death in Scripture does not mean 'extinction' but 'separation.'

Physical life exists when our soul/ spirit - the core of our being is connected to our body. Physical death is to be separated from our body.

Spiritual life exists when our soul/ spirit - the core of our being is connected to God Himself. Spiritual death is to be cut off from God.

When Adam sinned he died spiritually. God put him out of the Garden of Eden, he was cut off from God and he lost his knowledge of Him. (Many years later he also died physically.) For Adam acceptance was replaced with rejection. We are directly descended from Adam, he is our original ancestor and we share in his sin.

Romans 5:12 “ Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned . . . ”

Through our Own Sin

Isaiah 59:1-2 “Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.”

Scripture makes it clear that, not only are we cut off from God because of Adam's sin, but that we are individually and personally guilty of sin. The Bible teaches that apart from Christ every one of us is a sinner, no one is excluded.

Romans 3:22b-23 “. . . for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .”

Sin, in essence, is acting independently of God. That is its most fundamental definition.

Sin is doing what God says not to do.

Sin is not doing what God says we should do.

Throughout Eternity

The immediate consequence of sin is death; separation from God because of Adam's sin and because of our own. Indeed we were born into the world cut off from God.

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

But there are also long term consequences. Remember 'death' literally means separation. So death is the wages, the pay, of sinners who reject Christ. Sin results in separation from God now; exclusion from Heaven and eternity in Hell. Eternal punishment is not a popular subject today. Some argue that there is no such thing. Yet, Jesus, in the four Gospels, speaks often of what will happen to those who do not believe in Him. His words are graphic and describe conscious, eternal torment for those separated from God.

Matthew 25:41, 46 “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’ . . . ‘These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’”

See also: Luke 16:19-31, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, Revelation 20:15 (the lake of fire is Hell)

Revelation 20:13-15 “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

John MacArthur lists the following consequences of sin . . .

Sin corrupts the mind	Jeremiah 17:9, Ephesians 4:17-19.
Sin corrupts the will	Jeremiah 44:16-17.
Sin corrupts the affections	John 3:19, 1 John 2:15.
Sin brings people under Satan's control	John 8:44, Ephesians 2:2.
Sin makes us the object of God's wrath	Ephesians 2:3.
Sin robs people of peace	Isaiah 48:22.
Sin brings misery	Job 5:7, Romans 8:20.
Sin grieves the Holy Spirit	Ephesians 4:30.
Sin hinders answers to prayer	1 Peter 3:7.
Sin limits our ability to serve God	2 Timothy 2:20-21.
Sin disqualifies some from Christian service	1 Corinthians 9:27.
Sin renders our worship unacceptable	Psalms 33:1, Isaiah 1:14.
Sin causes God to withhold blessing	Jeremiah 5:25.
Sin robs us of joy	Psalms 51:12.
Sin brings God's chastening	Hebrews 12:5-11.
Sin hinders our spiritual growth	1 Corinthians 3:1-3.
Sin pollutes our fellowship with Him	1 Corinthians 10:21.
Sin causes our lives to dishonour Him	1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

2. Mankind Can Do Nothing about their Sin

There is nothing mankind can do to bridge the gap between us and God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Paul says that it is impossible for mankind to become acceptable to God through his own efforts.

"Not of yourselves . . ."

"Not as a result of works . . ."

Life independent of God is sin. It is impossible to undo what we have done, to unsay the harsh words we have used or undo our sinful actions. One sin on the part of Adam caused him to be cast out of the Garden of Eden. We have sinned many times and often thought little of it. Since the fall mankind has devoted his efforts of becoming acceptable to God through many different ways.

Self righteousness - those things we perceive to be 'good' done to earn credit with God but done independently of Him.

See Matthew 18:9-14

Unrighteousness - things which we deem not good done independently of God

Galatians 2:16 ". . . nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

Religions - Those 'religious systems' set up by mankind in a effort to become acceptable to God.

The truth is that there is only one basis of acceptance with God and that is being 'In Christ.' Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 . . .

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Then in Romans 8:1 "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The best we can do, independently of God, is seen by Him as filthy rags and worthless.

Isaiah 64:6 "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

At this point the situation of mankind is desperate for there is nothing men can do to undo Adam's sin or their own.

3. Christ has Already Done all that We Need

If God had not intervened that would be the end, eternal condemnation. But God did intervene and Christ has done everything we need to make it possible for our relationship with God to be restored.

1 Peter 2:24 “. . . and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

Isaiah 53:6 “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

We have learned that everyone has sinned and that the punishment for sin is death. Without God's intervention, therefore, we would all face Hell. The problem is a legal one. Suppose that, in a court of law, I have been tried, found guilty and fined £1,000,000. The penalty must be paid but I do not have the means to do so. If someone else was to pay the fine on my behalf I would go free. In that case someone else has assumed responsibility for my crime.

We were all in this position, spiritually. We were condemned and unable to help ourselves. But Jesus has paid the legal penalty on our behalf so that those of us who believe may go free. This is the good news of the Gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins in order that we might be pardoned, and three days later He rose from the grave in triumphant victory.

4. We Must Trust in What Christ has Done and in That Alone

The fact that Christ died instead of the sinner does not mean that every sinner automatically receives pardon. In a very real sense we have NOTHING to do because Christ has done it all on our behalf. We cannot add to what He has done but must simply TRUST in Him. Forgiveness, pardon for our sin, is free - but conditions are attached and we need to look at these conditions.

We Must Repent

Acts 3:19 “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . .”

Repentance is really a process which results in a different way of living. There are three aspects we need to consider.

Revelation - Greek, 'apokalupsis.' This word means, 'uncovering' or 'unveiling.' It has the concept of God lifting the veil from the minds of human beings in order to reveal His divine perspective (truth).

Repentance - Greek, 'metanoia.' This word literally means, 'knowing after.' It is a new knowledge, perception or understanding of what God has revealed. It is a 'change of mind' as we adjust our thinking to what God has revealed. That change of mind is repentance.

Turning - Greek, 'epistrepho.' This word means, to 'turn and go in a new direction.' As a result of God's revelation to us of truth, we adjust our thinking to agree with God. A change in the way we think and behave follows on from that change of understanding. Notice that in Acts 3:19, repentance comes before turning, ". . . *repent therefore, and turn again . . .*"

To summarise, people need an unveiling (revelation) of God's truth, to bring them into a new understanding, from His perspective, (repentance) so that they can change their behaviour and go God's way (turning).

So repentance means much more than just being sorry for our sin. It ultimately involves a change in the direction of our lives which comes about when God lifts the veil and we understand situations from His perspective.

We Must **Believe**

Acts 16:31 "They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

The word BELIEVE in the Bible means much more than just mental assent to some fact or doctrine. It involves action based on knowledge. I believe that flights go from Belfast Airport to London every day. I may know the times they leave, the name of the airline, the type of aircraft, even the route they fly but this belief, this knowledge, will not get me to London. I must buy a ticket and board the aircraft in order to get to London.

We cannot earn salvation, it is a free gift - a gift which has to be accepted if we are to gain its benefits.

New Life in Christ

Accepting Christ is not just getting something, it is becoming something that we never were before. Paul puts it like this in Galatians 2:20 . . .

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

He writes again of this changed life in Colossians 3:1-3 . . .

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Assignment

Memorise Romans 3:22b-23 and plan to spend time each day in Bible study and prayer. Memorisation of Scripture should form a regular part of every believer’s life. The discipline of learning and revision is not easy and needs long-term commitment. In this course there is one verse to memorise each week. Please don’t leave it to the day of the meeting to start learning it. In a few weeks, we will look in more detail at memorisation and how to go about it. In the meantime learn Romans 3:22b-23 for next week.

“. . . for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .”

You should learn to say the reference before and after the text of the verse. In this case you can say Romans 3:23 for the reference as long as you start where the sentence begins in verse 22b. Your leader will discuss which Bible translation you should use.

This verse tells us that sin is a universal problem. It does not matter whether we are respectable churchgoers or totally immoral - we have all failed to live lives which meet God’s standards.

Growing in His Word

This is the first night for sharing - just relax and share something from your first week's studies.

One of the great blessings of personal devotions comes when we realise that God has a message just for us, in our circumstances. We hope you will experience this more and more for yourself as the course progresses.

The Word

What you share can vary enormously but should focus primarily on what you have been reading in your personal devotions and how it relates to your own life. It may be only a simple thought or insight you have had but sharing it can be a blessing to others in the group. It might even be a rebuke for some way in which you have failed Him.

Personal

You may also share personal problems with the others in the group and seek their prayer support.

Perhaps you have asked God's help to work on some area of your life and would like the prayer support of your friends in the group. Maybe you have come across things which you do not understand and want information, or difficulties for which counsel is needed.

Your leader will take the initiative but do not put him or her on a pedestal. All of us are learners and disciples together.

Nothing personal or confidential shared within the group may be discussed outside the group without the permission of the person involved.

Memory Verses

Each week you will be reviewing all the memory verses you have learned. Tonight there is only one verse - Romans 3:23. In session four we will discuss memorisation in more detail.

We suggest that you use 6 in. x 4 in. filing cards cut in four for your memory verses. They are handy to keep with you for learning and revision. Write the reference on one side. On the other side, write the reference in the top left and bottom right hand corners. Write the text in between.

It is very important to keep revising the verses you have already learned. Always quote the reference BEFORE and AFTER the text as you learn and revise. In this way the reference and text will be linked in your mind.

Next week's memory verse is Romans 6:23.

Paul, in Romans 6, is writing to Christians about the contrast between their old way of life and their present one. In verse 23, he explains that a man's wages are his just reward for his work. If we work at sin the pay back we receive is death. By contrast, eternal life cannot be earned - it is God's gift to be received.

Assurance of Salvation

When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. We read in John 14:16-17 . . .

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

During His life on earth Christ's physical presence could only be experienced by a small group of people with whom He lived and worked. Now Christ permanently dwells, through the Spirit, in the hearts of all those who love Him, wherever they live. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of Christ's promise not to leave the disciples alone. See John 16:7-15.

In 1 John 5:13, John writes . . .

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

It is clear from this verse that God intends us to know that we are saved. Why do many people not have this assurance?

There are a number of possible reasons:

- ✧ They are not saved. (Matthew 7:21)
- ✧ They are saved but living disobedient lives.
- ✧ They have not confessed Christ to others. (Romans 10:8-10)
- ✧ They do not know what the Bible has to say about assurance.

It is important to understand that assurance is NOT based on feelings. Assurance IS based on two other things . . .

- ✧ God's Promises
- ✧ The witness of the Holy Spirit

We Know we are Saved Because God Says So

Acts 16:31 "They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"

This is a conditional promise. It says that if you believe, then you are saved. Did you believe? Then God says that you are saved.

John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

This is another conditional promise which says that if you come to Christ seeking salvation, God will not turn you away.

Our salvation is based on what Christ has done on the cross and on God's promises to save those who ask Him.

A promise is God's commitment to do something - in this case, save us. Feelings are not mentioned. I may feel rotten because I am ill or circumstances are difficult but God's promises are unchanged by my feelings.

We Know we are Saved Because of the Witness of His Holy Spirit

Romans 8:15b-16 "... 'Abba! Father!' 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God ..."

Before we were saved, the Holy Spirit brought conviction of sin and of need, into our minds. We had a deep awareness that our relationship with God was not right.

Having been saved, the fear of the penalty of sin is gone. It is replaced by an inner sense of peace that our relationship with God is now right. The term relationship is used deliberately. This inner witness is NOT that I feel different or better but that because I have done what God commanded I have been brought into a new relationship with Him. I am saved.

As we shall see in the next session, our fellowship with God is affected by sinning but our relationship is not.

If you do not have an inner peace, an assurance that you are saved, then please see your leader and talk about it.

Feelings

Many people are ‘feeling’ oriented. We often use the word in our daily lives . . . “*I feel we should . . .*,” for example.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told or encouraged to act on our feelings. In fact, the reverse is the case. We are commanded in the Bible to behave in certain ways, to develop mature character, whether we feel like it or not.

In relation to salvation, many people expect to ‘feel’ different immediately after they accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. Some do, others do not. Those who do not may begin to doubt the reality of their conversion experience.

You are certainly different, once you are saved, because you have spiritual life; the sense of guilt over sin has gone and the issue of your relationship with God has been resolved. This change will become more and more evident to you as time goes on and you will feel good.

- ✧ You will want to please God
- ✧ You will want to have fellowship with others
- ✧ You will want to read the Bible
- ✧ You will realise that the change is real

The key is understanding that when we are saved we have a new RELATIONSHIP with God. Suppose you marry someone and a few days later you wake in the morning with ‘flu, a temperature over 100, a streaming cold and, to crown it all, a migraine. You feel lousy. Would you question that you were still married? Of course not! You have a new relationship and feelings do not change it. Neither feelings nor lack of them affect your salvation. You are saved by God through what Christ has done on the cross. You do not have to ‘feel’ anything to be saved.

If you have genuinely repented and believed, God’s Word says that you ARE saved.

Doubts

Most people at some stage in their Christian walk have doubts. Doubts about all sorts of issues and for all sorts of reasons. Often it is an attack from the enemy whose strategy is to deceive believers.

Doubts may take the form of questions about evolution, the resurrection, personal trials or human tragedy. It may be simply looking over the hedge to the other side, desiring to satisfy the flesh.

It is the truth which will make us free.

John 8:31-32 "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'"

Often the young believer thinks that his problems are unique and that no one else has suffered the trials or doubts that he has.

We read in 1 Corinthians 10:13 . . .

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

In other words, every trial or doubt or temptation that you have suffered has been experienced by countless other Christians and there is a way of escape provided by God.

It is impossible to deal here with every issue which might bother you. If you need help please ask your group leader, Pastor, Minister or a mature Christian friend. They will help or, if necessary, direct you to someone else who can. There are answers to most of your questions.

Taking Your Stand as a Christian

We saw last week how belief in the Lord Jesus was a requirement for salvation. When Jesus died for us He took responsibility for our sin. The only proper response to this is to surrender ourselves fully to Him, recognising Him to be both Saviour and Lord of our lives.

In Luke 12:8-9, Jesus said . . .

“And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; 9 but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

Failure to take a public stand and tell others of our faith in Christ is one of the most common causes of lack of assurance, especially among younger believers.

We read in Romans 10:8-11 . . .

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’”

Confession is clearly vital to our spiritual growth. We may have eternal life but, until we tell others of our new found faith, our growth will be hindered and we shame our Lord who took our place on the cross.

If you have not yet told others of your faith will you do so this week? Tell the group your difficulty, ask for prayer and determine that you will take your stand for Christ. When you do so God will give you a great sense of peace and joy and you will have taken another step in a life of discipleship.

Assignment

Memorise Romans 6:23 and review Romans 3:22b-23

Continue with daily personal devotions.

Growing in His Word

Two weeks have gone by already, is your Bible study beginning to make sense?

- ✧ Are you having difficulty fitting in your personal devotions every day?
- ✧ Are you learning something from your studies?
- ✧ What practical problems have you found?
- ✧ Have questions come to mind which you cannot answer?
- ✧ Is God asking you to make changes in your life?
- ✧ What about those devotional times which are less exciting than others?

BILLY STRACHAN was asked about this some years ago. In response he asked . . .

“What happens if you pour hot water through a sieve? What is left behind?”

The answer, *“Just a few drops of water - but the sieve is cleaner.”*

The Word of God has the same cleansing effect on us, even on those days which seem to be dry.

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23

Assignment for next week - 1 Peter 2:24

God cannot turn a blind eye to sin. It must be punished. We learn in this verse how Christ, who was without sin, suffered punishment for our sin, in our place, in order to deliver us from sin and its consequences.

Sin in the Life of a Believer

We cannot earn salvation and we cannot keep it in our own strength. Our security is in God, in His promises and in what Christ has done on the cross.

When we genuinely come to Christ for salvation, that salvation is secure. But as believers we still experience an ongoing struggle with temptation and sin. What effect has this sin on our lives?

The first and immediate consequence of sin is loss of fellowship with God. Paul urges us

not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30).

When someone offends us it causes a rift in our friendship with them. In just the same way, our sin causes a rift in our fellowship with God. It does not alter our relationship with Him but it does affect our sense of close communion.

The Bible teaches us that when we sin we are to confess our sin to God. He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). This is why confession is part of the A.C.T.S. prayer outline.

Confessing is admitting that what you have done is wrong, it is agreeing with God's judgement.

Learn to turn to God as soon as you realise that you have sinned. Admit what you have done is sin and seek His forgiveness. Your fellowship with Him will be restored. When your sin affects others, you need to seek their forgiveness also and, if necessary, make restitution.

The problem for most of us is that, not only do we sin but, we have a marked tendency to sin, repeatedly, in the same way. As we fail again and again, we become embarrassed and reluctant to come to God about the same issue.

It is important to understand that . . .

- ✧ God does not regard sin lightly. Christ had to die because of our sin.
- ✧ Habitual sin is not natural for a genuine believer. Paul says in Romans 6:2 . . .

“May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”

- ✧ In Matthew 18:21-22, God commanded Peter to forgive his brother 490 times. Will He be less willing to forgive us? God never condones sin but neither is there any limit to His forgiveness and mercy towards His children when they repent and seek Him.

Forgiveness

We have spoken often over the last few weeks about forgiveness without really explaining what the term means. A dictionary defines forgiveness as, “*ceasing to feel angry towards an offender.*” In the Bible, it means much more.

Part of Jeremiah 31:34 reads . . .

“. . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

The word 'remember,' in this context, means to 'call to mind something we know, to retrieve something from our memory and think about it.' Our brains are full of information and buried memories. Usually they only come into mind when something triggers them. Then we remember, and mull over the memories.

God says that when He forgives our sins He will never remember them again, He will never call them to mind again.

Forgiveness can be defined, by implication, as three promises:

- ✧ That God will never think about our sin again.
- ✧ That God will never speak to us again about forgiven sin.
- ✧ That God will never speak to anyone else about our forgiven sin.

As we discussed earlier, sin causes loss of fellowship with God. Forgiveness restores it. Then the matter has been dealt with, it is buried and God will not raise it again.

When we consider forgiveness in relation to each other, the same principles apply. Forgiving someone for an offence against us involves the same three promises . . .

- ✧ Not to dwell on the offence.
- ✧ Not to raise it with the offender.
- ✧ Not to discuss it with a third party.

Feelings are not involved in forgiveness. We can forgive people we do not like for offences we cannot forget. Our forgiveness involves a commitment not to mull over the offence again. We can only think about one thing at a time and we can choose what we think about.

When we fail to forgive others for their sin against us we become emotionally and spiritually bound to that person by our unforgiveness.

The offender should ask for forgiveness but may never do so. No matter how far away we go we cannot be free until we forgive them for the offence. Initiation of forgiveness by us immediately breaks the bondage.

Bitterness or Forgiveness

Forgiving is not forgetting. Those who try to forget the offences of others against them find they can not do so.

Forgiveness is a choice. We may not want to forgive because it pulls against our concept of justice. We want revenge for offences suffered but justice belongs with God. If we do not forgive others we are still chained to them emotionally and spiritually by our failure to forgive. We should forgive them for our own sake, not theirs.

Forgiveness is costly. We live with the consequences of the offences of others. The question is . . .

“Do we live in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness?”

Don't wait until you feel like forgiving, you never will. Forgiveness has to be a deliberate choice. As soon as we forgive we are free, we will feel better and we will gradually forget the offence.

Assignment

Memorise 1 Peter 2:24 and review previous memory verses.

Continue with daily personal devotions.

Growing in His Word

How have your devotional times gone over the last week?

- ✧ Have there been any problems?
- ✧ What have you learned?

Tonight, as well as the sharing time, there will be an opportunity to share in a brief time of prayer.

For some, public prayer is difficult but the leader will try to make it as easy as possible for you to take part.

If you would like to pray but feel shy pick one item, plan what you will say and do it. It does not have to be long or worded in any special way. If it is easier for you, write it down for the first few occasions. You might pray like this . . .

“Dear Father, we do thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ and for what He has done for us. We pray that You will help us to understand Your Word tonight.”

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23 and 1 Peter 2:24.

Read Acts 3:17-21 together. The memory verse for next week is Acts 3:19.

To repent is to change in our attitude towards our sins. In order to be forgiven we must not only turn away from sin but also turn towards God.

Remember to keep revising all your memory verses during the week.

Memorisation

You have been memorising scriptures for some weeks now but other issues have prevented a study on this topic. You may well ask; *“Why should we memorise? Is it really necessary?”* So let’s look at a number of reasons for memorising Scripture . . .

God Wants us to Know His Word

Again and again in Psalm 119, memorisation is urged or implied. Turn up Psalm 119 together and note what the following verses have to say . . .

Verse 7 “. . . when I learn Thy righteous judgements.”

Verse 11 “Thy word have I treasured in my heart . . .”

Verse 12 “. . . teach me Thy statutes.”

Verse 16 “. . . I shall not forget Thy word.”

We Need Scriptures for Ministry

We need to know Scriptures off by heart in order to share them with others.

As we talk to others about the Lord and as we share the Gospel we need to be able to quote Scripture. It is the Sword of the Spirit and is used by God to challenge the hearts of men and women.

The Example of Godly Men

Joshua and David memorised and meditated on God’s Word. The Lord Jesus often quoted the Old Testament. Take time sometime to read through Psalm 119, where virtually every verse refers in some way to God’s Word.

How to Memorise

The key to Bible memorisation is constant revision, especially as you grow older. You will never forget verses you learnt properly when you were young.

- ✧ Write out the verse on a card as we discussed in Session 2.
- ✧ Learn the reference and the first phrase and repeat them over and over. Never leave out the reference - it is the easiest thing to forget.
- ✧ As each phrase sinks in add another, repeating the reference and the whole verse up to that point.
- ✧ Continue to the end of the verse and then say the reference again. In this way a link is made in your mind between the reference and the verse and also between the verse and the reference.
- ✧ Repeat the reference and verse until you are fluent.
- ✧ Revise whenever you have a free moment throughout the day.
- ✧ Each morning review all your memory verses by saying each over 3 times
- ✧ Concentrate throughout the day on the new verse.

When you first learn a new verse, you will forget it quickly - perhaps even in a few hours.

Each time you revise or relearn that verse it is easier to do so and you will retain it longer.

After two or three weeks of revision it will be imprinted in your mind and you will be able to say it without really thinking about it. Eventually the verse will become permanent.

Review of memory verses needs to be built into your daily routine. Being answerable to the group provides a good incentive but remember that you memorise Scripture because God wants you to do so.

If you continue memorisation after the course is finished and learn a new verse each week, in a year you will have memorised fifty-two verses.

Meditation

The blessings associated with meditation are repeated often in Scripture and have a special mention in Psalm 1:1-3 and Joshua 1:8. Throughout Psalm 119, the topic occurs again and again.

Read Psalm 1:1-3 together

On what do these verses teach us to meditate?

When should we meditate?

What benefits of meditation are taught?

Read Joshua 1:8 together

What part was God's Word to play in Joshua's life?

What was Joshua told to do with God's Word?

What benefits were promised to Joshua?

How does meditation bring prosperity and success?

What is Meditation and How do we Meditate?

By definition, meditation is prayerful, thoughtful consideration of a verse or a passage of Scripture over a period of time. It includes thought about the verse in its context, its meaning and how it may apply to our lives.

In Proverbs 2:1-8, the writer urges us to search the Scriptures for insight and understanding as one would search for hidden treasure. Often the great truths and principles in Scripture are hidden to superficial study. Meditation is one key to unlocking these truths, but it will not come easily.

Meditation takes time and patience but you can do it during any spare moment with passages you have memorised. Think about the Scripture, phrase by phrase, word by word. Think about the context, emphasise different words in turn. Look at other translations, background reading or complementary passages for further help.

Consider alternative meanings.

You will not glean all there is in a verse immediately. As you meditate over a period of time, more and more of its truths will be revealed to you. You may meditate on a particular verse for months before a particular truth or principle is revealed to you.

Why not meditate on your memory verses and share any insights with the group.

Group Exercise

Spend five minutes thinking about and meditating on Isaiah 40:31.

“Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

Note: ‘Wait’ comes from the Hebrew *qâvâh*; a prim. root; meaning to bind together, perhaps by twisting.

James Strong, The New Strong’s Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996), H6960.

The word brings to mind a picture of someone, without strength, clinging on to the Lord. A Clematis can’t support itself, it must have something to which it clings to fulfil its potential.

Discuss your thoughts and insights together and continue meditating on this verse throughout the week.

Assignment

Memorise Acts 3:19 and review previous memory verses. Continue with daily personal devotions and meditate on Isaiah 40:31.

Growing in His Word

We do hope that you are comfortable with the group and able to share with the others in it. If you do have problems, whether spiritual in nature or otherwise, do share as deeply as you can with the group.

If you have not taken part in the group prayer time, why not do so tonight?

Discuss your insights as you meditated on Isaiah 40:31 during the week.

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19.

Learn Acts 16:31 for next time.

In this verse we are taught that anyone who believes, will be saved.

To 'believe' means more than just mental assent to a truth but requires an active response on the part of the person who believes. The Amplified Bible puts it like this; "*Take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping . . .*"

Personal Devotions - What Next?

During the last four weeks you have been using the studies, in Mark's Gospel, in the devotional booklet, '*Growing in His Word.*' These studies were an introduction to the whole idea of spending time each day in God's Word and in prayer.

As a follow on to this, you will be looking, in this session, at a process which will take you through the rest of the course and hopefully beyond. You will find the details of this process in, '*Growing in His Word,*' after the study in Mark's Gospel.

Two things need to be highlighted in this session . . .

- ✧ The new study process which is outlined in the Follow On section.
- ✧ The reading plan which you should work through in sequence.

Continue to use and develop A. C. T. S. for your prayer times.

Daily Devotional Study

How Your Diary Might Look . . .

2 Timothy 2:1-2

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Looking

These two verses are addressed personally to Timothy - “You therefore my son.”

Paul seems to refer back to his imprisonment and suffering. He had been deserted by most of his friends as he exhorts Timothy to “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

In verse two, Paul refers Timothy to what he has heard him teach “in the presence of many witnesses,” and urges him to . . .

“Entrust these to faithful men.”

“Who will be able to teach others also.”

Timothy is probably at Ephesus from where he seems to have asked for Paul’s advice in regard to certain issues.

Thinking

These were personal instructions to a young pastor in a missionary church. Paul’s instructions were in regard to Timothy’s strategy as a pastor and Christian worker. Train faithful men. There are four generations here, Paul, Timothy, faithful men and others.

Applying

I must pass on to others what I have been taught.

Ephesians 4:25-29

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbour, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labour, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

Looking - What Do You See?**Thinking - What Did it Mean?****Applying - What Does it Mean to Me Today?**

Psalm 1:1-3

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”

Looking - What Do You See?

Thinking - What Did it Mean?

Applying - What Does it Mean to Me Today?

Genesis 13:1-12

Verses 8-12

“So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left.’”

10 Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere — this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah — like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar:

11 So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.”

Looking - What Do You See?**Thinking - What Did it Mean?****Applying - What Does it Mean to Me Today?**

Daily Prayer

A. C. T. S. should still form the basis of your daily prayer time and you should continue to develop each section. As your prayer time grows longer a Prayer List will be a big help not only as a reminder but also to allow you to spread your whole list over the week.

The Bible teaches us to pray for many different groups of people . . .

- ✧ The government and those in authority
- ✧ Our country, our pastor, elders and church leaders
- ✧ Our family and friends
- ✧ Missionaries and others in the Lord's work
- ✧ The unsaved and backsliders
- ✧ The poor and needy

A PRAYER LIST is just a simple list of these items. Build it up gradually rather than trying to write out scores of items all at once. There is a limit to how many requests you can include within a reasonable devotional time scale. Decide how often you want to cover a particular item and allocate it accordingly on your list.

List specific requests not generalisations. Get to know real needs and then pray for them. A good place to put your Prayer List is in the back of the note book or diary which you use for your daily studies.

Your Prayer List will need to be modified from time to time. Some items removed and others can be added as needs become apparent.

Consider keeping a record of answered prayer in a separate book. It is a rich blessing and encouragement to look back and see how God answered prayer in your life.

Assignment

Memorise Acts 16:31.

Over the next week make out a simple Prayer List in whatever way is most suitable for you.

When you finish Mark's Gospel, start using the new study tools and the devotional reading plan in, *'Growing in His Word.'* This will be a very busy week so try not to get behind. The new study may feel a little awkward at first but stick with it. The more you put into your walk with the Lord, the more you will be blessed.

Growing in His Word

Group Discussion

Tonight the emphasis is on PRAYER. Are you still using A. C. T. S.?

In what ways have you been able to develop your praise and worship of the Lord?

Share ideas together and discuss how you go about it.

How are your Prayer Lists working out?

Have there been any problems in making them out?

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31.

Assignment for next week - John 6:37.

What a wonderful assurance such a verse gives to us. No matter how many reasons we could give for Christ not accepting us, He promises that if we come to Him (through faith and repentance), He will receive us.

Who We Have Become

All Men are Born Slaves to Sin

Think back to Session One. We saw there that the unbeliever is controlled by sin and can never keep God's Law. In fact no one can be saved through keeping the Law (Romans 3:20). The Law can only highlight our sinfulness and leaves us with no excuse.

The Bible speaks of the unbeliever as being a slave to sin and under its domination. Our position, as believers, is totally different and we need to understand what Christ has done for us on the cross.

Believers Receive Spiritual Life

When we received Jesus Christ as our Saviour, not only were we forgiven, but we became different people.

✧ We have been born spiritually. God has given us spiritual life, which we did not have before. Speaking of believers as ‘being in the Spirit,’ Paul tells us in Romans 8:11 that God Himself will give life to our bodies through His Spirit who dwells in us.

John 3:3 “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

✧ We have become a new creation, a person whose deepest desire is to please God. The person we are now is radically different from the person we once were for we are now a spiritual being living in a body of flesh.

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

✧ The sinful person we were is dead. That person no longer exists, the old man, the old self, Paul tells us, is dead. As a new creation we get our spiritual life from Christ. This life is lived by faith, by total trust in Christ our Saviour. “*You are in the Spirit,*” Paul tells us, in Romans 8:9, ‘not in the flesh.’ Now our deepest desires are to please God. There is still an urge to sin within us but we are no longer under its dominion.

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

The Struggle Within

As believers God has given us new life and with it a deep-seated desire to please Him. As we live life in the Spirit we still experience the struggle between the new creation within us longing to please God and the pull of sin.

Paul speaks of this in Galatians 5:16-17 and urges us to walk in the Spirit, to act on the basis of who we are and not to give in to the desires of the flesh - the pull of sin . . .

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

The Struggle Reveals Who We Are

If you are a new Christian, perhaps you are surprised at the intensity of this battle and at the struggles you face as you try to follow the Lord. Remember what Paul says in Romans 8:1-2 . . .

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

God has dealt with sin, we are no longer under its domination. We really are different people and we do not feel comfortable when we sin. Though we struggle the deepest desire of our new creation is to please God.

Temptation

As we have seen, even after conversion we experience a struggle against sin. Although God has made us new people we are still tempted by the pull of sin within us.

In all of these studies we must remember that we are accountable to God for every sinful thought, word and deed. We cannot blame anyone else. God holds us responsible.

To tempt, is to encourage or entice to sin.

Temptation itself is NOT sin.

James 1:13-15 is an important passage, especially verses 14 and 15 . . .

“14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

This passage gives us an indication of how temptation can affect us. We are pictured being enticed by tempting thoughts; thinking about them, mulling over the benefits or pleasures we anticipate, then giving in and sinning.

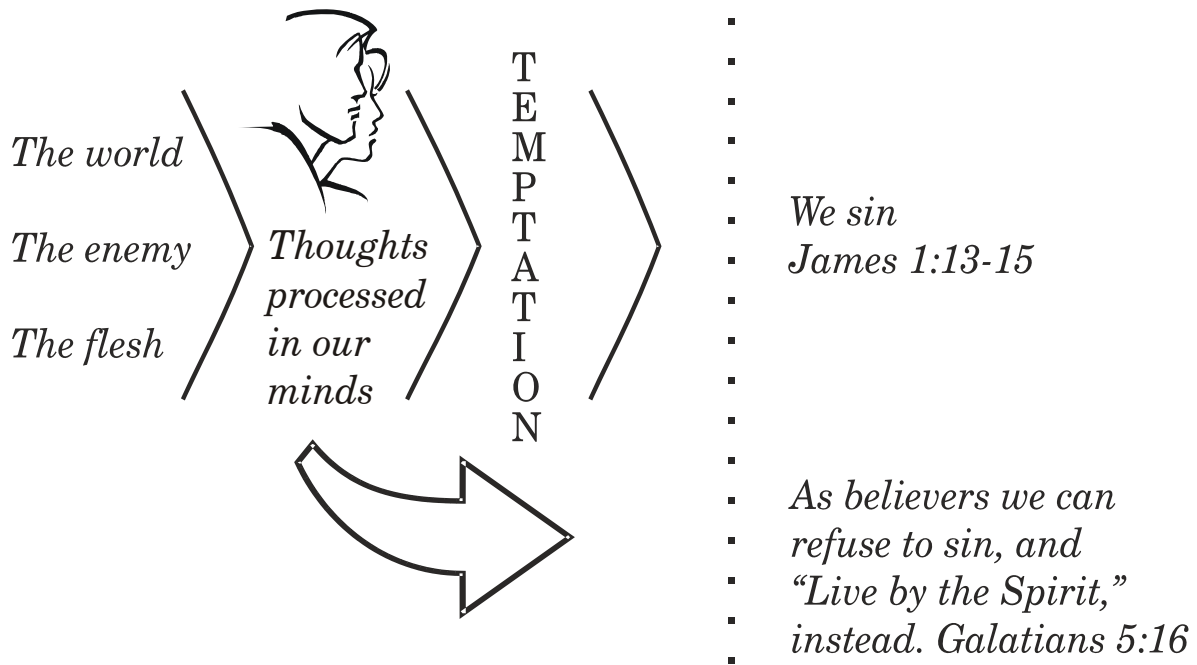
It is in our minds that we sense the lure of the world, the deceit of the enemy and the enticement within us to do wrong. All these seek to pull against our new life and the voice of the Lord. This enticement (temptation), may be triggered, either internally by thoughts or memories; or externally by what we see or hear. Just as a fisherman dangles bait before a fish to try and entice it to take the hook, so the temptation to sin engages our minds.

But remember, God has broken the power of sin over us, we do not have to sin any longer.

Time is involved between human conception and birth, a time of development and growth. When we are tempted the same is true. The longer we think about a temptation the greater its attraction becomes. We may not respond immediately but as we imagine the anticipated pleasures, the more likely it is that our resolve will weaken and we will give in and sin.

Our Minds

Our Actions



The diagram above illustrates the process as a thought occurs to us. This thought may originate with someone or something in the world around us. It may come from the enemy or it may come from evil desires within us.

As we process the idea in our minds, it may become a temptation to do something wrong. We then have to make a decision . . .

“Will I act in this way or will I allow the life of Christ to be manifest in me?”

Uncontrolled thoughts lead to sin.

Uncontrolled sins become habits.

To Summarise

- ✧ We become aware of a sinful temptation in our mind either directly, or triggered by something we see or hear.
- ✧ This temptation will come as an enticement, with the dangers hidden and the benefits or pleasures exaggerated.
- ✧ We usually mull over the temptation for a period of time. During this time, the desire to give in tends to increase and our will to resist to decrease.
- ✧ We sin.

We find this whole sequence illustrated in Joshua 7:20-21. Achan says that he saw a beautiful mantle, silver and gold and that he coveted them. Achan saw, he coveted, he took. There is an obvious sequence of events in this story. Achan saw the goods and the temptation entered his mind. He thought about what he would gain - he coveted them. No doubt, he thought little about the consequences. Then temptation became sin, he took the things which were forbidden.

Not all sin originates in this way. There are other sinful responses which include anger, resentment, bitterness, worry, blaming others and so on.

It is important to understand that temptation itself is not sin. Jesus was tempted, in His case personally by Satan, but said “*No*” and did not sin.

We have studied the mechanism of temptation in order to understand God’s way of victory better. God has provided a way out and the power to deal with sin in our lives. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Assignment

Memorise John 6:37 and review previous memory verses.

Continue with the new devotional tools.

Growing in His Word

The Bible makes it clear that there is only one interpretation of Scripture. However, there can be many applications as each of us applies to our own lives.

If you have any problems with the new studies please talk about them. Your leader will help you in any way he can. When you come across something which you do not understand, why not make a note of it in the back of your notebook and ask the Lord to give you understanding?

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31, John 6:37.

Romans 8:16 for next week.

To 'testify' is to 'declare that something is true.' This is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit who brings us peace by assuring us that we are God's children.

Put Off/ Put On

We looked in earlier sessions at who we are in Christ, a new creation, spiritually alive, living life by a new principle through faith in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God has done His part through Christ and made it possible for us to live and please Him.

Paul addresses this question of Christian living in Ephesians chapter four. He reminds the Ephesian believers that when they came to know Christ, they had been taught about a change of lifestyle. Verses 20-24 read . . .

"But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

The Greek word translated 'self,' in these verses, literally means 'man.'

This radical change in lifestyle involved . . .

Put Off What they were to avoid

Learning God’s alternative, renewal of the mind through the Word

Put On Lifestyles consistent with Scripture and their status as Christians

Biblical Change

Change is a two factored process, putting off and putting on. Both must be present to effect genuine change. Putting off will not be permanent without putting on. Only when righteous behaviour becomes habitual is the change complete.

Put off

Ephesians 4:28 “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labour, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”

It is not enough for the thief to stop stealing, though he is commanded to do so, but he must become someone who works to help others. When he has become such a worker he is no longer a thief.

Put Off, alone, does not work. Think of all the good resolutions you have made over the years. How long did they last? We saw in the last session that temptation leads, so often, to sinful behaviour. When we become aware of temptation there are several options.

- ✧ Mull over the temptation which inevitably leads to sinning.
- ✧ Think to ourselves, “No, I won’t . . .,” and try, through will power, to resist.
- ✧ Deal with the temptation in a Biblical way.

In the first two options, the end result is that we concentrate our minds on what we are trying to avoid. We will see that the key to victory is to learn to do something else or think about something else as soon as we realise that we are being tempted.

It is possible to do so because we are a new creation freed from the dominion of the sin, participating in God’s life and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Learning God’s Alternatives

Throughout Scripture we find what we are to ‘Put Off’ contrasted with what we are to ‘Put On.’ For example in Ephesians 5:18 . . .

Put Off “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation,”/

Put On “but be filled with the Spirit.”

And in 1 Peter 3:9

“Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult” /

“but giving a blessing instead . . .”

The positive behaviour contrasted in these verses represents examples of Biblical alternatives. In the first case deal with drunkenness by being filled with the Spirit. The man who is controlled by the Spirit is unlikely to get drunk. Wherever you find such contrasts in your Bible mark them, as we have here, with a diagonal slash.

Put On

In principle . . .

Deal with temptation by replacing it with a Biblical alternative.

Victory over sin is only possible for Christians to whom God has given the necessary resources, new life and His Spirit. Those who are unsaved are still under the dominion of sin and unable to help themselves.

The proper place to deal with temptation is at its source in our minds. The emphasis must be on replacement, on ‘Put On.’

We can defeat sinful thoughts and temptations by learning to replace them with Biblical alternatives, i.e., to think about or do something else. But our concentration needs to be on the replacement not on stopping the sinful thought or action.

It should be habitual for us, as soon as we become aware of a tempting thought, to turn our minds to something good and profitable.

Philippians 4:8 “-Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

2 Corinthians 10:5 “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ . . .”

We can only think about one thing at a time so when we concentrate on something ‘good’ everything else is replaced.

In the light of these principles we should . . .

Replace sinful habits by dealing with the tempting thoughts from which they originate. Practice Scriptural alternatives and structure our lives to avoid situations of temptation and sin.

Examples in Scripture**Ephesians 4:29**

Put Off *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth,” /*

Then the Biblical alternative . . .

Put On *“but only such a word as is good for edification
according to the need of the moment, so that it will give
grace to those who hear.”*

If we consistently try to say only things which build others up we are unlikely to destroy people with our tongues.

Philippians 4:6

Put Off *“Be anxious for nothing,” /*

Then the Biblical alternative

Put On *“but in everything by prayer and supplication with
thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*

There are many Scriptures which provide help for us as we seek to live in a way which pleases the Lord. Look for them, especially those which are appropriate to temptations you face.

If time permits, you will be working through some practical situations as to how this works out.

Assignment

Personal Devotions as usual.

Romans 8:16 to memorise for next week.

Growing in His Word

You will be sharing together as usual. If you have not yet taken part in this, why not take your courage in your hands and do so? It will be a blessing to you, likewise, the time of group prayer.

Learning a new study tool is not easy for anyone so if you are finding it hard stick at it. It will get easier as time goes on.

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31, John 6:37, Romans 8:16.

Joshua 1:8 is the verse for next week. Make sure you are revising all your memory verses.

Do you understand what the verses mean well enough to explain them to someone else? If not, ask your group leader.

Be sure to include the reference when you are revising.

In Joshua 1:8 we are taught that the Word should be shared verbally, that we should meditate on it day and night, that we should obey its teaching ourselves. It promises that if we do so, God will make our lives successful and prosperous. This success and prosperity is not in material gain or wealth but in the spiritual realm, for God sees things in a much broader perspective than worldly success.

God's Will

As we seek to understand God's purposes in relation to our own lives the question in our minds should really be, *"What is God's will, and how should I adjust my life to align myself with it?"*

Paul said that his objective was to present every man mature in Christ. In this, he echoes God's purpose for our lives, for God is primarily concerned that we become more like Christ. Thus, whatever our situation and the choices we make, God continues His work in our lives. Indeed, He uses our circumstances to achieve His ends.

God is Sovereign and He intends us to live in an attitude of brokenness, aware of our need to abide in Him in total dependence. This is the sort of fellowship which Adam had with God before the fall. It is the sort of fellowship which Jesus had with the Father while He was on earth.

The key to knowing the Will of God, is the Word of God, and a deep intimate relationship with Him.

It is crucial to understand that God is the initiator. He is the One who is working out His purposes in this world and in our lives. God chooses to work through men and women to fulfil His purposes but His ways are not our ways and it is our responsibility to align ourselves with what He is doing.

“God reveals Himself, His purposes and His ways as He speaks to us by the Holy Spirit; through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and others.”

“Knowing and Doing the Will of God” by Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King

God Speaks Through His Word

1. Specific Teaching

Faced with any significant decision, we need to understand what God’s Word has to say about it. The amount of time and energy devoted to such a study should reflect the importance of the decision. When the Biblical boundaries, for this topic, have been established we can have a deeper understanding of God’s perspective (wisdom) on the issues we face.

For example, a very simplified look at how we should treat each other.

We are . . .

- ✧ To love one another. John 13:34
- ✧ To be of the same mind towards one another. Romans 12:16
- ✧ To admonish one another. Romans 15:14
- ✧ To show forbearance to one another in love. Ephesians 4:2
- ✧ To forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32
- ✧ To teach and admonish one another. Colossians 3:16

These Scriptures and principles teach us, in part at least, how God intends His people to relate to one another.

2. Broad Principles

While all decisions must remain within the limits which the Bible sets, not all the issues which may concern you are specifically dealt with in Scripture. In this case, consider wider Biblical Principles which define God’s Will in broader terms.

Commands like those to, “*Love one another . . .*”, “*Seek God first . . .*”, and “*Owe nothing to anyone . . .*”, provide broad guidelines which help us to make decisions in many areas of life.

God Speaks Through His Spirit

In Prayer

Prayer is two way, we speak to God but He also speaks into our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit. In doing so . . .

- ✧ God’s Spirit gives us understanding of His Word and its application to our lives.
- ✧ God’s Spirit speaks personally and intimately into our hearts and minds.

As we seek to discern God’s purposes, prayer should be central. Prayer is not only voicing our needs and requests but it is listening to what God wants to say to us. Often as we pray issues through, over a period of time, God’s purposes become clearer.

Ask God to give you an understanding of His Word as you spend time in it each day. Ask Him to reveal; Himself, His purposes and His ways.

Even when we do not know what to say, God’s Spirit is praying for us.

Romans 8:26-27 “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

God Speaks Through - Circumstances

John 5:19 “Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’”

Christ’s life was lived in an unbroken fellowship with His Father. When the Son saw the Father’s activity that was an invitation for Him to join Him. The Father showed the Son what He was doing.

That is exactly what God wants us to do with His lordship of our lives. We are to see what He is doing and adjust our lives, our plans, and our goals to His. We are to place our lives at His disposal so that He can accomplish His purposes through us.

John 15:8 “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”

God Speaks Through Others

God also speaks through other believers. Leaders, men and women who are walking closely with Him, and mature Christians, may have much to contribute through their understanding of God and how He works.

As we shall see in Session 10, God uses those in authority over us in a special way and we should acknowledge and submit to that authority, unless it conflicts with God’s revealed purposes and ways in His Word.

Some Examples from the Lives of the Apostles

In Acts 15 a major decision faced the Apostles and it is interesting to see how they reacted. In fact, their decision was made based on Biblical teaching and the particular circumstances they faced. James summed up the discussion by saying in Acts 15:19 . . .

“It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

Such an approach is common as we study Paul’s writing . . .

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| <i>“It is not desirable for us . . .”</i> | <i>Acts 6:2</i> |
| <i>“It seemed good to us . . .”</i> | <i>Acts 15:25</i> |
| <i>“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .”</i> | <i>Acts 15:28</i> |
| <i>“But it seemed good to Silas to remain there . . .”</i> | <i>Acts 15:34</i> |
| <i>“Paul chose Silas and departed . . .”</i> | <i>Acts 15:40</i> |
| <i>“If it is fitting for me to go . . .”</i> | <i>1 Corinthians 16:4</i> |
| <i>“But I thought it necessary . . .”</i> | <i>Philippians 2:25</i> |
| <i>“I have decided to . . .”</i> | <i>Titus 3:12</i> |

The Apostles obviously did not always have direct guidance or revelation from God. They made the wisest decision they could in the circumstances which faced them.

Guidelines For Decision Making

We have looked at basic principles in order to help us to make wise decisions which are within the general boundaries of God's Will as revealed in the Bible.

In Scripture there are many passages which shed light on how we should behave. A number of verses have been reworded as questions to help to put possible choices in perspective.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| ✧ Am I putting my desires before God's? | Matthew 6:33 |
| ✧ Will this help me to love God and others more? | Matthew 22:37-39 |
| ✧ Will this help me to make disciples? | Matthew 28:18-20 |
| ✧ Will I neglect my responsibilities? | Romans 13:7-8 |
| ✧ Will this put me into debt which I can't repay? | Romans 13:8 |
| ✧ Will this increase my knowledge of Christ? | 1 Corinthians 2:2 |
| ✧ Will this glorify God? | 1 Corinthians 6:20 |
| ✧ Will this hinder others? | 1 Corinthians 8:9 |
| ✧ Will this help me to lead a holy life? | 1 Peter 1:15 |

IN SUMMARY:

When you are faced with a major decision:

- ✧ What does the Bible say?
- ✧ What is the wisest course of action?
- ✧ Have you done all that God has asked you to do?
- ✧ Have you sought counsel from those in authority over you?
- ✧ Have you prayerfully considered the matter?
- ✧ Make your decision and commit the consequences to God to overrule if He so chooses.

As we seek to follow our Sovereign God; to make decisions based on Scripture and in submission to Him, He will fulfil His own purposes in our lives and guide us as a shepherd guides his sheep.

Assignment

Continue with your Personal Devotions and memorise Joshua 1:8.

Growing in His Word

Enjoy your time of sharing together and prayer. Do share any problems you may have with the group, knowing it will go no further. Others can neither pray for you nor help in a practical way if they do not know about the problems.

No personal matter shared in the group is to be passed on to outsiders without the permission of the person concerned.

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31, John 6:37, Romans 8:16, Joshua 1:8.

Discuss together the meaning of John 5:24, which is the verse for next week.

Eternal life is not only something we will have in the future, it is something we have right now from the very moment we trust Christ as Saviour.

Interpersonal Relationships

None of us can live in isolation and avoid day-by-day contact with other people. In fact this contact with others is a vital element of our lives. We need to learn to live in harmony with them. God uses the friction which sometimes occurs to highlight our own shortcomings with the objective of making us more like Christ.

God wants us to live in harmony with each other, to love and care for those who are within the body of Christ and outside. At the same time God has made provision for conflicts by giving clear instructions on how to react when they do occur.

1 Peter 3:8 "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit."

We are responsible for every thought, word and action. We must not blame others, our upbringing or circumstances when we sin. Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own evil desires (James 1:14).

Relationships are doubly important because they also affect our relationship with God.

Our Relationship with Others Affects our Relationship with God

We read in Matthew 6:15 . . .

“But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

In other words, my failure to forgive someone else will result in God refusing to forgive me for my sins.

Then in Job 31:13-14 . . .

“If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves when they filed a complaint against me, 14 what then could I do when God arises? And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him?”

These verses illustrate a principle. It is that our horizontal relationships with others affects our vertical relationship with God Himself.

Whether others sin against us or we sin against them, it is clear that these matters must be sorted out because of their impact on our relationship with God.

Summary of the Principles Which Follow**When Others Sin**

- ✧ The principles of Matthew 7:1-5 apply first.
- ✧ The principles of Matthew 18:15-20 apply.

When We Sin Against Others

- ✧ The principles of Matthew 5:23 apply.

In this section we are primarily considering interpersonal relations. We must of course confess our sin to God and seek His forgiveness and cleansing.

In restoring relationships between believers there are two main areas to consider . . .

Others Have Sinned

1. Matthew 7:1-5

Read the passage together. In it we learn that before we speak to someone else about their sin we must

- ✧ Examine ourselves.
- ✧ Then we must put right what is wrong in our own lives.

When we eventually approach that person it will be, humbly, as one who has sinned and with whom God has been dealing.

To judge is to come to a conclusion about someone's guilt without knowing all the facts.

For Group Discussion

- ✧ We are commanded not to judge others.
- ✧ We are commanded to deal with our own sin first before approaching others.
- ✧ Why are we so quick to see sin in the lives of others and so slow to see it in our own?
- ✧ Why and how do we minimise our own sin and magnify the sin of others?

2. Matthew 18:15-22

Read these verses and discuss the following points and their implications . . .

- ✧ We have a responsibility to speak to those who sin against us.
- ✧ We must not discuss this sin with anybody else first.
- ✧ The objective is always the restoration of the relationship.
- ✧ Only if the first approach fails should anyone else be involved and even then the objective is still restoration.

We Sin Against Others

Matthew 5:23-24

Read these verses and discuss . . .

- ✧ When we become aware that we have sinned against another, restoration takes priority.
- ✧ Only after we have been forgiven may we continue our service to the Lord.

In each case we, or the offender, must be forgiven and by definition the issue is to be buried.

Application

Does this material cause you feelings of guilt because it brings to mind a spoiled relationship either through your sin or that of someone else? If so, will you commit yourself to do all in your power to restore the relationship with this person? We are commanded to love and forgive even our enemies.

The Circle of Forgiveness

The idea of a 'circle of forgiveness' is an important concept.

When confessing sin, seeking forgiveness and restoring relationships, only those involved in the original offence should be approached.

One does not need to confess sin to someone who was not involved in the original offence, indeed, it is potentially harmful.

Assignment

Memorise John 5:24 and continue with personal devotions each day.

Continue with your Personal Devotions and memorise Joshua 1:8.

Growing in His Word

Normal review of the past week's devotional studies and group prayer.

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31, John 6:37, Romans 8:16, Joshua 1:8, John 5:24.

Discuss 1 Corinthians 10:13, the memory verse for next week.

The Greek word translated 'temptation' in this verse means literally 'to put to the test.' This testing may be in the form of temptation to sin or of trials in everyday life.

The temptation to sin is common to everyone but God promises us two things. Firstly, no temptation that comes our way will ever be greater than our ability to endure it. Secondly, God always provides an escape route so that we do not have to yield to it.

Preparing a Personal Testimony

The next time you meet, everyone in the group will have an opportunity to share about the Lord, what He means to them and what He has been doing in their life.

One of the most natural ways of sharing your joy in the Lord is through your testimony. Your testimony is the story of how you came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It usually includes information about how you became aware of spiritual issues, how you actually came to the Lord and your subsequent experience as a Christian.

If you are sharing your testimony with someone who is not saved, it is vital that you use ordinary language and not theological terms which they may not understand. Words like 'saved,' 'born again,' 'accept Christ' may be quite foreign to a non-Christian. Once you have prepared an outline of your own testimony, it can be modified as necessary.

Your testimony will vary depending on who is listening to you. You will naturally concentrate on those areas of your experience which are most likely to be relevant to them. If they are unsaved you might concentrate on how you were saved. If you are speaking to Christians you may well concentrate on your more recent experience of the Lord.

For next week you may want to concentrate on what you have been learning recently in Rooted in Christ.

A complete testimony covers three broad areas of your life . . .

- ✧ Before conversion
- ✧ How you were converted
- ✧ Life as a Christian

Before Conversion

When you share with a unsaved person, it is good to emphasise this part of your story and explain what went on inside you, the ways in which God communicated with you and the issues which caused you spiritual concern.

By all means, share the sort of lifestyle you led, if this is relevant, but do not go into details of sin. Instead, explain how you felt and what you thought so that others can relate to your experience and recognise for themselves, God speaking to them.

How You Were Converted

Talk about your actual conversion experience, how your concerns came to a climax, how God communicated with you (e.g. through the Scriptures) and how you came to a point of decision. Your experience is unique to you, as God deals with each of us as individuals. Nevertheless, others will relate to it.

Life as a Christian

This is the area you will probably want to emphasise next week. Share your experience as a Christian. The peace of mind which was yours, how you told others about your new found faith, about the freedom from guilt, your assurance of eternal life and what a difference being a Christian has made in your life.

Talk especially about how you have grown, how God has led you and challenged you to change, about what has been happening in your life. Talk about the things which have held you back, about the things which have helped you. Has God used trials to bring you closer to Himself? Share as openly as you can with the group.

Remember a testimony is not a sermon but an expression of how God brought you to Himself and how He has kept you.

Prepare your own testimony for next session, about five or six minutes. Share whatever part of your experience of Christ you want to. Write it out initially to make sure you have included all you want to say but try not to read it on the night.

There will be about one hour for everyone in the group to share. If there are ten in the group this means that each person has only six minutes so please stay within these time scales so that everyone gets a chance to take part.

Authority a Biblical Perspective

The basic principles about Biblical authority are taught in Romans 13. Read verses 1-7 and then discuss the following points raised in this passage.

- ✧ We are all to be subject to governing authorities.
What does 'be subject' mean?

- ✧ All authority has been appointed by God.
Does this include evil governments?

- ✧ When we resist those in authority we resist God Himself.
How are we resisting God when we resist our boss?

- ✧ Rulers are tools in God's hands.
In what way is this true?

The Character of the Authority

Read and discuss 1 Peter 2:18-25 together and discuss the following points:

- ✧ Servants are to submit to those in authority regardless of how those in authority behave.
- ✧ There is credit only in being Christ-like when treated wrongly.
- ✧ We have been called to suffer.
- ✧ Jesus set an example at His trial.

See God Behind Authorities

It is clear from these studies that we are to look beyond those in authority and see God Himself working through them. This is relatively easy with a good boss but very difficult when the boss is difficult, unfair, or inconsistent.

Discuss some of the attitudes of parents, boss, government, church leadership which cause you problems.

For example:

- ✧ Unfair treatment
- ✧ Inconsistent behaviour
- ✧ Standards unclear or changing
- ✧ Temper
- ✧ Ungodly words or behaviour
- ✧ Provocative actions or words

Discuss:

How can you look through these problems to discern God's hand at work?

Have a Clear Conscience

As we saw last week it is important that we have a clear conscience with others. When conflicts with authority arise, first search your own conscience in relation to attitudes, pride, example, disloyalty, gossip, criticism, dishonesty, selfishness etc. Put your own sin right first.

Should You Always Obey Authority?

From time to time you may be asked to do things which cause you a problem either because you don't want to do them or because they are wrong. In the first instance, examine yourself, as we have already discussed, and deal with anything which may arise.

Then, assuming that your conscience is clear, appeal to the one in authority and express your reasons for concern about his instruction to you. Do so humbly and leave the decision with him. If there is no moral objection to the instruction and if he insists, then you must obey.

If, however, the request would cause you to sin or violate your conscience you should appeal to your authority explaining your convictions, without judging. Do so humbly and with a positive attitude. Leave time for God to change minds. If this fails, then you must obey God rather than men, even if this causes suffering.

Read Acts 5:25-32, 41. Discuss the apostles' stand in verses 29 and 41.

Assignment

Prepare your testimony for next week. Write it out if you need to.

Memorise 1 Corinthians 10:13 and continue with your personal devotions each day.

Growing in His Word

This is the last night to share formally together. It would be helpful to make private commitments to continue to encourage one another in this area of the Christian life. Daily devotions must become an integral part of life. This course has helped you make a start. It will require discipline and commitment on your part to carry on. It would be better to miss your breakfast than this time of fellowship with your Lord and Saviour.

Jesus said that we are the light of the world. Think of an old fashioned oil lamp. It has a wick immersed in oil which, when lit, gives off light. If you keep the lamp filled with oil and trim the wick, the light will continue to shine.

The oil symbolises God, the Holy Spirit, and the wick stands for us. It is the oil which burns, not the wick, but the wick becomes charred and is gradually used up, hence the need for trimming.

We, like the wick, are just an intermediary. Only as long as we are immersed in fellowship with God will we shine in the world. If we lose touch with the 'oil' our spiritual light will go out. We will become like a dry wick giving light to no one.

Our fellowship today will not do for tomorrow. We only get enough oil for today. Walk with Him in intimate daily fellowship so that He may shine through us and that our light may not go out.

Memory Verses

Memory verses for review: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 3:19, Acts 16:31, John 6:37, Romans 8:16, Joshua 1:8, John 5:24, 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Matthew 28:18-20 are the memory verses for this week. They are very important verses.

Christ reached out to you through others, to lead you to Himself and to teach you how to follow Him.

These verses contain the GREAT COMMISSION. It is your responsibility and privilege to pass on God's Word to others in turn.

These verses teach us a number of things . . .

- ✧ The Lord Jesus has been given all authority over every other being both in the spiritual realm and here on earth.

- ✧ Christ commands that we make disciples of all nations. ‘Making disciples’ includes not only evangelism but teaching and training.

- ✧ New believers are to be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

- ✧ These new believers are to be taught to obey everything that Jesus taught.

- ✧ To those who obey these commands, Jesus promises to be with them wherever they go while this world continues to exist.

Personal Testimonies

Tonight is a very special night as you have an opportunity to share with your group what God has done in your life.

Keep within the agreed time scales so that everyone has a chance to take part.

Assignment

Matthew 28:18-20 is the last passage for memorisation. Since the next session is a social evening there may be no sharing time. These are very important verses. Please learn them and continue with your personal devotions as usual.

Social Evening

The course is usually run with anything up to five or six groups meeting in different locations. This last session is intended to allow all these groups to get together and share their experiences with each other. You may do whatever is appropriate in your own situation.

There are no hard and fast rules about what you do. Some groups have used a church hall and catered for themselves. Others have booked a private room in an hotel or restaurant and gone out for a meal.

The evening may be purely social but in most cases a short programme follows the meal with members from each group taking part.

In this event, you should plan the programme well in advance to give those taking part time to prepare. The programme could include, sketches (humorous or otherwise), singing, testimonies, solos or other musical items and finish with a brief epilogue.

It is difficult for people to cope with humour and serious items mixed at random. If you wish to include humour in the programme you should plan the 'funny items' early on and progress to the more serious items. This can be a very special night so don't include anything in the latter part of the programme which may spoil the sense of God's presence or take away from what He may be saying to people.

You can leave an open time for any others, not in the programme, who may wish to say something.

Growing in His Word

We hope you have enjoyed the course and trust that it has been a real encouragement to you. Hopefully the discipline you have established over the last 12 weeks will help you to continue to spend time with God and study His Word each day.

We would encourage you to keep memorising verses. You will find several memory systems in any good Christian bookshop. Your last memory verse, in this course, is 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Published by . . .

***Grow in Grace, 16 Glenside Park, Drumbo,
Lisburn BT27 5LG***

Telephone 028 9082 6679

www.growingrace.org