

God's Arithmetic- Group Study Guide

Instructions: Distribute books to group members one week prior to the beginning of the study. Instruct them to read the Introduction and chapter 1 in preparation for the first meeting. After that, have them read each successive chapter in preparation for meeting the following week. Reading assignments may be adjusted based on the total number of study sessions. Suggest that members highlight or make note of any passages of special interest, and write down any questions or insights they would like to discuss with the group. The group leader/facilitator should review the questions listed below for each chapter prior to the weekly session. Begin each meeting with prayer. Allow the first few minutes for members to ask any questions or share insights that came out of their reading. Then, depending on the time allotted to each session, the leader should be prepared to select from the Study Guide, those questions that will best review the main ideas of each chapter. Close in prayer.

I. Losing Life To Keep It

- 1) “There is a prevailing propensity today toward a kind of Christianity that supposes we cannot be faithful followers of Christ, if our aim is not the accumulation of material possessions, and the acquisition of the means to live “the good life.” The underlying problem with this type of sentiment is that it does not truly reflect the nature of what it really means to follow Jesus Christ.” (page 18)
 - a. Do you agree with the author's statement?
 - b. Explain in your own words why 'the accumulation of material possessions' cannot be the central focus in the life of a follower of Christ.
- 2) Consider the following two statements: “We come to Jesus Christ just as we are, with nothing to offer Him but a confession of our sins.” “To become a disciple of Jesus Christ, we must offer Him our entire life.”
 - a. Discuss how both of these statements can be true.
 - b. If we really have nothing to offer God for the salvation of our souls, how can we also say that God has 'expectations' of us in our relationship with Him?
- 3) Read Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG) on page 31.
 - a. Discuss what it means to “learn the unforced rhythms of grace”.
 - b. In what ways can we state to others how the Christian life brings rest and refreshment to our souls?
- 4) Jesus said that His followers “must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”
 - a. What does it mean to “take up our cross daily”?
 - b. How does that lead us towards God's purpose for us of “a rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10)? (See pages 35-36 as a starting point.)
- 5) Read Luke 9:24-26.
 - a. Explain the choice that Jesus sets forth for every person.
 - b. Discuss together positive ways to communicate these alternatives to those who don't know Christ, without “threatening them with hell”.
- 6) Read together the last paragraph on page 56.
 - a. Make a list of any obstacles that might stand in the way of making 'God's Kingdom and His Righteousness' our highest priority?
 - b. Review each item on the list, and discuss what steps we can take toward removing those obstacles from our lives.
 - c. In what ways can prayer and the support of other Christians, assist us in each of those situations?

- 7) On page 61, the author states: “*Losing Life to Keep It* is a challenge to us; a reminder that to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ - is more than just a convenience. It is a death to our sinful human nature; and a birth into a transformed life, where all things become new. For the serious disciple, this means there are choices we must make; choices that will affect every part of our lives.”
 - a. List some of the choices that the author goes on to suggest will need to be part of our new life in Christ.
 - b. What other choices can you add to this list?

II. No One Wants To Be Last

- 1) What does it mean to have a 'greatness mentality'?
 - a. In what way can it be said that our culture has the wrong kind of 'greatness mentality'?
 - b. Can anyone stand before God and say that they have a legitimate claim to greatness? Why or why not?
- 2) Read Luke 9:46-48 and Matthew 18:3-4.
 - a. In what way must we become like a small child, in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? (Pages 76-77)
 - b. What does Jesus mean when He says, “*Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*”?
 - c. What idea was Jesus attempting to convey to His bickering disciples?
 - d. In what way(s) does that same idea (that greatness lies in adopting the same kind of heart and mind as the little child) apply to us today?
- 3) What does it mean to be lowly and humble before God? Describe how our attitude should be like Jesus' as we strive to follow His example. (See pages 79-81)
- 4) Explain the meaning of the parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:1-16. Practically speaking, what was Jesus trying to teach His disciples about the way we are to serve alongside other believers? (See pages 97-98)
- 5) In what ways do pride and self-promotion still cause problems in churches today?
 - a. Brainstorm steps a congregation can take to ensure that trivial concerns do not cause division within the fellowship.
 - b. What can we do as a church (and as individuals) if infighting has broken out within the body of believers?
- 6) Read together Matthew 20:25-28.
 - a. What three questions does the author ask based on this passage? (see page 108)
 - b. Discuss the answer to each question using the ideas put forth in the book. Be sure to emphasize the Biblical meaning of the words '*servant*' and '*slave*', and why they are the true measure of greatness in God's Arithmetic.
- 7) What action did Jesus take during the Last Supper to show His disciples the true meaning of greatness?
 - a. Read John 13:12-17. Ask: What does this mean for us today as disciples of Christ?
 - b. Read the first full paragraph on page 125. Discuss: Why do you think that Jesus taught that the path to blessing lies in the servant life?
 - c. What is God's role in the transformation of our lives toward the likeness of Jesus, and what is our role in the process?
 - d. What do you think the author means at the end of the chapter, where he states that “greatness is not something you must fight for – but is a victory that Christ has already won.”

III. Small Is Large One Cup At A Time

- 1) What are some of the reasons that so many Christians convince themselves that they are incapable of making a difference in advancing the Kingdom of God. (Pages 128-129)
- 2) When should we support Christian ministries that are different than ours, and when should we oppose them? What criteria should we use to define a ministry that is truly “Christian” in its nature and character? (Pages 135-136)
- 3) Read Mark 9:41. On page 137 the author states, “The simple and undeniable truth we have to grasp; is that Christ comes to us in other believers. Whatever we do for them because they are a Christian - we do for Jesus.” Do you believe this to be a true statement? Why or why not?
 - a. If it is a true statement, what difference (if any) should it make about the way we treat our fellow believers?
 - b. How would it affect our attitude toward those Christians with whom we have a disagreement?
- 4) On page 138 the author notes the principle that, “Faithful service to God is not beyond our power. We are asked to give only what is within the power of anyone to give.” Explain what this means.
 - a. List the different kinds of resources we have available to give to others.
 - b. Why is it that even something as small as 'a cup of cold water' may mean more to someone than we can possibly know?
- 5) Ask: Does God consider the value and significance of our gifts to Him in terms of their size?
 - a. What criteria does God use to value our acts of service to Him? (See page 140)
 - b. What difference does it make to properly recognize the value God places on our “small” acts of service?
- 6) Read 2 Corinthians 5:10.
 - a. How does the fact that 'we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ' affect our lives as believers?
 - b. Explain why this is a positive motivation for us rather than a negative one. (Page 141)
- 7) Discuss the meaning of “Christian freedom”.
 - a. Divide into small groups of 3 or 4 people (depending on the size of your large group). Allow each group 3-5 minutes to list matters of individual conscience that Christians face today, where there are different points of view. Have each group share what they came up with and list them on a piece of paper. (If possible, use a whiteboard or something similar that everyone can view)
 - b. Discuss together some of the principles the Word of God gives to us, as to how we are to treat each other in these situations. (See pages 143-149 for ideas)
- 8) In God's Arithmetic, “*We cannot all exercise great spiritual gifts, but we can all exercise love, and employ in God's service - those gifts Christ has given us.*” Discuss the following questions (see pages 157-161):
 - a. Does each Christian have a spiritual gift?
 - b. Are each person's gift(s) necessary and important to a church's ministry?
 - c. For what reasons does God give us spiritual gifts?
 - d. Why is it absolutely necessary to exercise spiritual gifts with genuine Christian love?
- 9) Is there something God can teach us through the life of every believer in Christ? Explain why this is so, and give examples to support your answer. (Pages 162-165)
- 10) In God's Arithmetic, “*We can't allow the limits of our resources and abilities to prevent us from doing all we can. Nor should we feel guilty when we have done the best we can do.*” Explain why each of those statements is true. How do the Biblical examples in the book (pages 166-172) support the truth of these statements?

- 11) **“In God's Arithmetic, success is not equal to money. In God's eyes, success = faithfulness”** Discuss why there are so many Christians who equate success to money. What steps can we take to move from a financial or material definition of success, to God's definition of success?
- 12) What are the three reasons that God wants us to know that He will reward our service? (Page 176-178) Can you think of any others?
- 13) Do you agree with the author's contention that the rewards God gives to faithful disciples are *spiritual* in nature?
 - a. Review together some of the blessings (rewards) that God gives to faithful believers both directly, and by them to others. (Pages 183-186)
 - b. What does the author contend is our ultimate reward (page 186)? Do you agree? Why or why not?

IV. The Surprising Color of Joy

- 1) Referring to James 1:2-8, the author states:
 “This is something that James wants us to understand - right off the bat. Namely that we can learn to see in our trials, an opportunity for joy. As we choose joy, and allow it to color our lives, it becomes part of God's way of helping us grow in our faith. Joy leads us to a deeper and more rewarding experience of His love. James is not saying to us in this passage, that 'choosing the color of joy simply places rose colored glasses on our situation'. The essence of his inspiration, is that we can consider it pure joy when trials come our way; because there are significant and substantial spiritual benefits that advance in our lives through God's grace.” (Page 195)
 - a. Discuss: Does James say that joy in the life of the believer is a *feeling*, or an *attitude*?
 - b. Is it really possible to cultivate an attitude of joy when life is difficult?
 - c. According to the author, what is the reason we can consider it pure joy when trials come our way?
 - d. What role does experience play in learning to “consider it all joy when trials come our way”? (See also page 202)
- 2) Explain how Christian endurance under trial can be likened to the training of an athlete? (Page 196)
- 3) What is God's promise to us in James 1:5 for dealing with stressful situations?
 - a. What does it mean that God will provide us with wisdom when we don't know what to do? (Page 197)
 - b. Do we always receive God's wisdom immediately, or does it sometimes require perseverance in prayer? Explain your answer.
 - c. What difference does it make that God provides His wisdom to us generously, graciously, and without rebuke or condescension?
 - d. What is the one thing necessary on our part, to enjoy the real and satisfying experience of receiving wisdom from God? Why is this so? (Pages 200-202).
 - e. What will be the result if we ask God for wisdom without faith, or with divided loyalties?
 - f. Review as a group the summary paragraph on page 204.
- 4) Read together 1 Peter 1:3-5. Ask: How does the promise of our future inheritance and the security of our salvation, help us to face any form of persecution with joy? (Pages 205-208)
- 5) Why is it dangerous to teach believers that God wants our lives to be happy and prosperous? (Page 210)
 - a. Since God can use our problems to our benefit, how might that affect our prayer lives? (Pages 210-211)

- b. Consider the following quote:
 “Yes, we should always surely work and pray for the relief of human suffering; but we must always do so with the deepest conviction that God's will be done. We must trust our Father's wisdom - and more than that, we must learn to rely unflinchingly upon His love.” (Page 211)
 Ask: Is it possible that it is not always best for a Christian to have an immediate release from their suffering? Explain your answer.
- 6) How does passing through trials assure the believer that their faith is genuine? As God purifies our faith, what will the end result be? (1 Peter 1:7)
- 7) What does Peter say will be the result of a daily love relationship with Jesus? (1 Peter 1:8) Why does love motivate and inspire our service to God in a way that a sense of “duty and obligation” alone never can?
- 8) Review as a group the reasons Peter gave that our joy will sustain us when our faith is tested and we are mistreated (Pages 221-222). Which of these brings you the most joy in your walk with the Lord, and why?
- 9) Read the first full paragraph on page 231 and answer the following questions:
- In what way is 'proven character' (Romans 5:4) a life long process that comes only through experience?
 - Read John 16:33. Why can our afflictions not ultimately harm us?
 - Is it possible and desirable to learn to praise God for all the circumstances of our lives – the good and the bad? Why?
 - How would you help a young believer to understand that even their pain can be blessed to them by God, and give them reason for joy?
- 10) Paul says in Romans 5:4 that proven character produces hope in our lives. In your own words, explain the 'hope' that is produced by proven character. (See top paragraph page 234)
- In Romans 5:5, Paul says “this hope will not disappoint us”. In what ways is the hope of Christians different from the hope of those who do not know Christ?
 - Why will the hope that God gives, never let us down?
 - Why will all other kinds of hope the world offers, ultimately be a disappointment? (Page 238)
- 11) Ask for volunteers to mention situations in life when pain and suffering do not make sense.
- What does Paul tell us in Romans 5:5 is the only thing we can fully rely on in those situations?
 - What does it really mean in the midst of our everyday struggles that “*God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*” Romans 5:5 (See page 240)
 - What Greek word does Paul use to describe the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14 and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22? (Page 241) What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is the “arrabōn” who guarantees God's promises?
 - How does the Holy Spirit help us to choose an attitude of joy, when life's pressures weigh us down so heavily?

v. One For Good Measure

- Read aloud Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12. Explain the meaning of 'the golden rule' and why it is largely misunderstood. (Page 257)
- Read Luke 6:32-36.
 - How does Jesus contrast the way 'sinners' act, with what He expects from His followers?
 - Explain why Jesus wants us to act toward “the ungrateful and the wicked” the same

way that our Heavenly Father acts toward them? (See pages 258-260)

- c. On page 260, the author states, "*The golden rule isn't just a demand on our lives. It is not merely words on a page that must be slavishly obeyed. It is a living thing; spiritual.*" Discuss what this means and why it is important to understand.
- 3) Read Luke 6:37.
 - a. What does Jesus mean when He says we are not to "judge" or "condemn" others? (Page 261)
 - b. How can you respond to someone who says to you, "You have no right to tell me that anything I do is inappropriate! You're judging me!"
 - c. Does "judging others" mean that we have no business evaluating the behavior of other people?
 - d. In what sense should we "judge" others, and in what sense should we not judge them?
 - e. Why does Jesus emphasize the importance of forgiveness?
 - f. What are the results in our lives if we refuse to forgive others? (Pages 261-262)
 - g. What are the benefits for us when we freely forgive others?
 - 4) Read Luke 6:38.
 - a. Is Jesus promising financial prosperity for us if we give generously to others? Why or why not?
 - b. In what ways does this verse teaching Jesus' followers an entirely new way of thinking? (See pages 263-268)
 - 5) Using Luke 6:46-49 as a starting point, explain the meaning of "Lordship". What are the three unshakable possessions that belong to those who build their lives on the gospel of Christ? (Pages 273-274)
 - 6) Using the author's exposition of 2 Corinthians 8-9 (Pages 275-286), guide the group to discuss the following questions:
 - a. What are the appropriate motivations for Christian generosity that will lead us to expect God's blessings.
 - b. What attitudes does Paul teach us a Christian should *not* have when they give?
 - c. What are some of the promises God makes to generous givers?
 - d. List some of the ways Paul states that generous giving produces an abundance of blessing (see last paragraph page 285).

(During this entire discussion, be sure to include these concepts: Giving is a privilege. Generous giving is the result of the transformation of our inner lives. Giving is not an 'obligation', but is a 'response to God's grace'. If we are miserly in our giving to the Lord, we cannot hope to see a rich harvest of blessing for ourselves or others. God alone determines the time and manner in which He will reward our generosity. God is not concerned with the amount we give, but with the motive and attitude of our heart. Giving to the church impulsively or sentimentally is no way to manage our practice of giving. Grace is our motivator; love - the dynamic; and joy - the reward — for giving to God's work. There is no limit to God's resources to bless the good deeds He inspires in His people. Our willing generosity allows God to enrich our lives in every way, to increase our maturity, and to prepare us to live generous lives on every occasion.)

- 7) What is tithing?
 - a. Why do you think churches take an 'offering' during worship services?
 - b. How is tithing an act of worship?
 - c. How can our failure to tithe deprive us of the blessings God desires for our lives?
 - d. Can a Christian give large amounts of money, yet their offering be unacceptable to God? Explain your answer.
 - e. In what way(s) does a Christian benefit from their generosity, that an ungodly person cannot? (See pages 295-296)
 - f. Read together Malachi 3:10. Discuss: What was God's underlying purpose in

- making this promise to His people? Do you think God was trying to burden His people or to set them free? Why?
- g. Describe the imagery of God's promise here in v.10 and what it can mean for our lives (see page 301).
 - h. Discuss how you might encourage a person who is struggling with whether or not they should tithe. What would you tell them to do first, and why?
- 8) Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11. What was God's purpose in giving such a command to Israel? What lessons does this passage teach us today? (Pages 306-308)
 - 9) Review the three actions the author suggests we can readily take which will hasten our progress in experiencing the grace of generosity. (Pages 309-318)
 - a. What ideas mentioned were the most helpful to you?
 - b. Search pages 315-318 for as many specific ways that you can find, which show how random acts of kindness to others can help us experience spiritual fruitfulness in our lives.

VI. Be Weak To Be Strong

- 1) Introduce the discussion for this chapter by going around the room, and having each person share at least one 'limitation' in their life that they think stands in the way of serving God effectively.
- 2) Look together at 2 Corinthians 11:21-29. Is Paul “bragging” about himself in this passage? Why or why not? (Pages 329-330)
 - a. After a short discussion, read aloud v.30. Ask: Why would Paul say that he would rather boast about the things that show how weak he is? (See top of page 331 for ideas)
 - b. What do you think of Paul's approach here to his adversaries?
 - c. What did he hope to accomplish by highlighting his personal weaknesses?
- 3) Review the author's three cautions to us regarding Christians who claim to have received “special revelations” or “ecstatic heavenly experiences”? (See pages 332-333)
 - a. What claims like this, or books have you read, where people say they have been to heaven or hell?
 - b. Why are the author's warnings so important to us today?
- 4) The first of the five principles which lead to spiritual power is, “*A true experience of spiritual strength and power comes only by giving all glory to God.*” Answer the following questions:
 - a. What criteria do you use to identify authentic spiritual power?
 - b. Should we be suspect of a Christian preacher or teacher if their focus is on themselves and their own ministry rather than on Christ and God? Explain your answer.
 - c. What impact does Christ-like love and character have on a preacher's message?
 - d. Does this mean that a Christian teacher or pastor must be 'sinless' to be effective?
 - e. Summarize by asking: How can you identify a 'true spiritual leader'?
- 5) In what way can Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' be regarded as a gift? Do you think it is really possible that God can have something wonderful wrapped up the painful afflictions that evil sometimes brings into our lives?
 - a. Discuss the possible ways that our pain can also be a blessing to us.
 - b. When our pain doesn't make sense, does that mean God doesn't care, or that He is unaware of what is happening to us?
 - c. How does choosing to trust in God's love for us when life doesn't make any sense, make a practical difference in our day to day living?
- 6) The second principle of spiritual power is, “*When faced with a serious limitation or*

weakness, the first thing to do is to bring the problem straight to God.”

- a. What is the purpose of prayer in our lives? (Page 344)
 - b. Describe the process of discovering God's will for us on a specific matter? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this process? How important is the Word of God to discovering God's will? What can we do if the Bible doesn't specifically address the matter we are struggling with? (Pages 342-344)
 - c. Define the meaning of 'importunity' in prayer. Why do you think Jesus and Paul taught that importunity was vital to a successful prayer life? How many times should we pray about a matter before we 'give up' on it? Why? Does importunate prayer mean that we are 'badgering' God? Why would God desire us to petition Him in this manner?
- 7) The third principle of spiritual power is, *“Our experience of spiritual power deepens as we learn to trust God's “No's”.*” Using the example of children, talk together about why it is important sometimes to say 'no' to a request.
- a. How does the concept of 'tough love' fit into this conversation?
 - b. Discuss how trusting God's “No's” to us, can deepen our spiritual power.
 - c. Do you believe that when God says “no” to us about a matter, that He has something even better in mind? Explain your answer.
- 8) The fourth principle of spiritual power is, *“Our spiritual life grows as we learn the total sufficiency of God's grace.”* Use the author's discussion on pages 348-349 to discuss what 'grace' actually means.
- a. What is God really telling us when He says, *“My grace is sufficient for you”* (2 Corinthians 12:9)?
 - b. What does God mean when He says in that same verse, *“my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (Page 350)
- 9) The author states emphatically that, *“God is more concerned with our character than our comfort.”* (Page 351) Discuss why this is important, and how it could be dangerous for us as believers to deny the truth of it.
- 10) The final principle of spiritual power is, *“The secret of spiritual strength is learning to delight in our weaknesses; to genuinely choose to embrace them. We must continually nourish and foster the awareness that it is through those weaknesses, that the power of Christ is most effective in our lives.”* From a natural point of view, we are taught that we must learn to trust in our own abilities. In the path to spiritual power, why must we learn how *not* to trust in our own abilities?
- a. Do you think it is possible to learn to actually delight in our limitations; to embrace them? How can we do this?
 - b. Explain why no Christian should ever consider themselves a “nobody”, who is unable to use their gifts in God's service. (See page 357)
- 11) Review together aloud the 5 principles of the path to spiritual power (pages 357-358).
- a. Discuss which principle is the most difficult to apply in your life and why.
 - b. Name each of the three individuals that the author uses as an example of the principles, and recall the circumstances that showed these principles at work in their lives. (Pages 360-396)
 - c. Ask group participants if they can think of other Biblical examples of the principles at work. (See pages 358-360 for suggestions)
- 12) Read together the last paragraph of the chapter on page 397. Ask whether anyone has this desire for a greater experience of God's power in their life. Spend a few minutes in prayer for everyone present, using the author's suggestions as a starting point in your petitions.

VII. Hi-Def Pictures Of God's Children

- 1) Discuss what the author means by this chapter title, “Hi-Def Pictures of God's Children”
 - a. Why do you think so many people today view Christians as 'hypocrites'? (Page 402)
 - b. What advice would you give to contemporary Christians who want to avoid being perceived in that way?
- 2) Name the three qualities of holy character that the author presents as most distinctively telling the world that a person is a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. If you were going to add to this list, what quality of character would you place on it? Defend your choice by explaining why you think that aspect of character is “unrivaled” in presenting God's brand.
- 3) Review the four main reasons why it is important to 'love our enemies' (see pages 407, 408, 411, 412). Answer the following questions:
 - a. Why is retaliation for the wrongs done to us not effective in overcoming evil?
 - b. What does Romans 12:21 tell us is the right way to overcome evil? Why does the author say that the cross of Christ is the best example of this (pages 407-408)?
 - c. How does 'loving our enemies' affect our thinking, our prayer, and our speech?
 - d. Why is 'love for enemies' so distinctively like God and Christ?
 - e. Read together the first full paragraph on page 412. Ask: Is it really possible to love our enemies in this way? How? What actions would you counsel for someone whose heart is filled with bitterness and hate toward someone who has wronged them?
 - f. Read together 1 Peter 4:19 and Romans 12:17-19. Discuss how a believer can learn to put themselves and their circumstances into the hands of God when they are wronged. (See page 413)
- 4) Review together the story Jesus told Peter and the other disciples in Matthew 18:21-35.
 - a. What are the key precepts the author suggests this passage teaches us about forgiveness? (See pages 417-420)
 - b. Can we expect to live in daily fellowship with our Heavenly Father, and experience His blessing in our lives, if we refuse to forgive others? Why not? (See page 421)
 - c. Why did Jesus teach us to pray, “*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*” (Matthew 6:12 NIV)?
 - d. Why is forgiveness sometimes a 'process' in our lives? (Page 422)
 - e. What resources has God provided to help restore us to mental and emotional health when we have been wounded?
 - f. Explain why forgiving the sins of others is such a clear Hi-Def picture of a child of God. (See last paragraph page 423)
- 5) Read John 13:34-35.
 - a. How does a church provide unbelievers with their first look at what believers are like? (Page 430)
 - b. What happens when Christ's love is not on display in a local body of believers?
 - c. Review the bullet points on pages 432-433 from the letter of 1 John on the meaning of the importance of loving one another. Discuss how these truths affirm Jesus' command to us in John 13:34-35.
 - d. What exactly does Jesus mean when He says that we should love one another “*in the same way I loved you*”? (See pages 434-437 for help) What does the author suggest is the ultimate example of this? (Page 437)

VIII. When Gain is Loss

- 1) Have different individuals read aloud the following scriptures: John 3:3, 3:16, 8:23-24, 8:34-36, 8:43-47, 8:51; Romans 3:23; 2 Corinthians 4:4. From those passages, explain why the following statements are true:
 - a. "Every human being is born into slavery and bondage."
 - b. "We are all destined to die in our sins."
 - c. "Jesus Christ can set us free from this bondage, from the penalty of our sins, and into a permanent place in God's family."
- 2) On page 449 the author states, "For those of us who have been Christians for any length of time, it isn't so much "what we *don't* know", but "putting into practice what we *do* know" — which is most needful for our spiritual growth." Give examples of specific practices that you think he is speaking of.
- 3) In Philippians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul is refuting false teachers who believed that right standing with God could be obtained by their own efforts. Many people today are still relying on these same means of salvation. Answer the following questions:
 - a. Why is there no ritual or ceremony that can make a person right with God?
 - b. Why is being born into a Christian household, no guarantee that a person is right with God?
 - c. What advantage is there (if any) of growing up in a 'traditional Christian home'?
 - d. Why can no position or rank in society entitle a person to the forgiveness of their sins by God?
- 4) A person who is a devout adherent of another religion comes to you, and accuses you of being intolerant of those who do not believe as you do. They state, "You must respect the beliefs of other religions, since they are just as sincere as yours." How would you respond to this person? How does 'a loving Christian' defend themselves against claims that they are intolerant of other faiths? How would you explain why genuine Christian faith is inherently unique and exclusive? In what sense (if any) can it be said that a true follower of Christ is 'intolerant'?

Hint: distinguish between 'intolerant' as it refers to an active refusal to allow others to have or put into practice beliefs different from one's own; and 'intolerant' as it refers to an active refusal to deny the Bible's affirmation 'that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to get right with God and possess eternal life'. Is it 'intolerant' to believe that only God has the right to set forth the conditions of acceptance in His sight, and that only the Bible reveals the truth regarding those terms of acceptance? Also, distinguish between being 'intolerant' and being 'bigoted', which means 'to be so emotionally or subjectively attached to one's own belief as to be *hostile* to all others' (Christians are not 'bigoted', as that would run counter to the very heart of the Christian faith.)
- 5) What does the author suggest are the two most compelling evidences of the truth found in the Bible? (Page 463-464) Do you agree or disagree with him? Why?
- 6) What did Paul mean in Philippians 3:7 when he says, "*But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*" (Page 469)
 - a. What is involved in a person coming to the same conclusion as Paul did?
 - b. What is the Holy Spirit's role in this, and what is ours? (Be sure and highlight both God's initiative in salvation, and our willingness to accept His offer.)
- 7) Based on Philippians 3:8, the author distinguishes between 'knowing Jesus Christ' and simply 'knowing about Him' (pages 472-473).
 - a. In your own words, explain what it means 'to know Jesus Christ'.
 - b. Why did Paul consider as "garbage", every effort he had previously made to get into

a right relationship with God by his own striving? (Page 474)

- 8)** In Philippians 3:9, Paul describes two kinds of righteousness. One is “from the law”, and the other is through “faith in Christ”.
 - a.** Explain the difference between these two ways of attempting to get right with God.
 - b.** How did Jesus do for us what we could not do for ourselves? (See pages 475-476)
- 9)** What are the three ways in Philippians 3:10 that Paul expresses his desire to press on toward maturity in Christ? Talk about how each of these three desires Paul expresses, can draw us closer to Christ and onward in our Christian maturity. (Pages 477-479)
- 10)** Read aloud Philippians 3:12-15.
 - a.** Brainstorm ways that believers can press on toward Christian maturity.
 - b.** Why does Paul say that the Christian life is like a race? (Page 481)
 - c.** How can we “hold on to the progress we have already made”, as Paul urges us to do in v.15?
 - d.** What promise does God make to us in v.15?