

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Bible Doctrines: Life

Walking with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/17/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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iFOLLOW

www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Basic Doctrines: Life

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

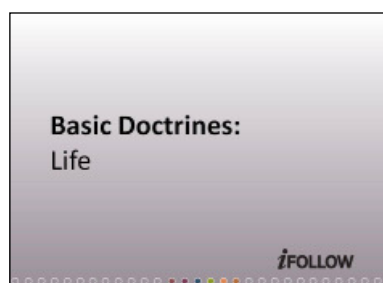
1. Understand that life comes from God and God alone
2. Recognize the transformation that occurs when Christ enters your life
3. Choose to allow His presence to shape your choices daily

Content Outline

1. The gift of physical life
2. Physical education
3. Spiritual life
4. Social life
5. Fullness of life

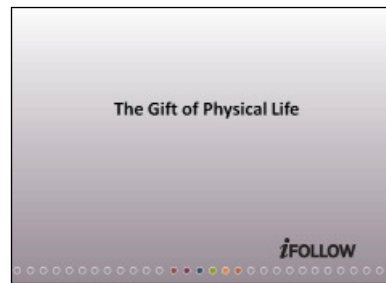
Background Material for the Presenter

People now days live much longer than in previous generations, especially people in the so-called developed world. In itself, that's good, of course. But long life, if it's just more years, is not always a blessing. It's one thing to live a long time, but what about the quality of life itself? Sometimes doctors perform all kinds of heroic actions to artificially keep a person alive even if the person has very little, if any, quality of life left. Ethical people understand that quality of life is not restricted to an acceptable level of physical well-being; it has a wider application. What do we do with the years that we have been given? Do we live with a purpose and in harmony with others? Do we live in satisfying relationships with fellow human beings and, most of all, with our Creator? These are important questions for all who have been given the gift of life.



The Gift of Physical Life

How did life originate? Some people point to a godless evolutionary unfolding of human existence. Others argue for a divine guiding role in the slow process of millions of years during which simple forms of life made their appearance and, subsequently, developed into more complex organisms, including humans. This theory, however, creates more questions than it answers (and besides, nothing in the Bible even hints that God used evolution to create humanity). Meanwhile, several renowned scholars have in recent years convincingly argued that this theory is in a deep crisis. But even the staunchest supporters of evolutionary thinking must admit that life remains as great a mystery as ever.



Those who believe in God as the Creator of this world and of all the universe do not have all the answers either. But the creationist approach is far more logical and coherent than the improbable theory that human life resulted from chance.

What is true for the mystery of life in general is also true for each human life. Although we possess a lot of scientific knowledge about the processes involved in the conception and growth of human life, each new parent who holds a newborn child in his or her arms knows intuitively that this new life is nothing less than a miracle. It is a fundamental Christian conviction that life—and human life in a very special sense—is sacred.

In Psalm 139, David describes the miracle of human life and the magnificent design of the human body. Verses 13-14 say: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (NIV) The psalmist’s conviction concerning God’s ability to create does not reduce the sense of awe and mystery about life. According to *The Interpreter’s Bible*, some scholars propose that Psalm 139:15 is possibly “a reflection of the idea that the human fetus was made by God elsewhere before being introduced into the womb” (Vol. 4, p. 716). It is easy to get caught up in such idle speculation and overlook the larger purpose of the Psalm: to serve as a testimony to God’s omniscience. God was aware of us and had plans for us even before the physical elements of our existence had come together in the unique combinations that make us who we are.

We also can consider this song about God’s awareness of us as a poetic recognition of the fact that our “physicality” and “spirituality” are intertwined. Thus, we are not spirits that come down from some mysterious realm and plant ourselves in physical bodies. Our physical bodies are us, and we need to respect them as God’s house.

Clearly, the Bible regards God’s Creatorship as self-evident. God’s greatness and goodness are proven by the things He has made and the way He has made them. The evidence

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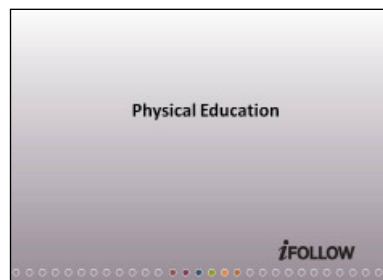
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includes our own bodies. As such, our own existence can serve to remind us of God, His love for us, and His plans for our destiny.

Physical Education

Who does not know the words of the well-known song that says God has “the whole world in His hands”? This applies to the universe and to our entire planet. But also to each one of us individually; whoever we are and wherever we are, God holds us in His hands. We owe our physical life to Him, all of it, from beginning to end.



If we owe our existence to our Creator, it stands to reason that we also owe it to Him to be careful with what He has entrusted to us. There is ample evidence in the Bible that God is interested in our physical well-being. He manifested His care for the people of Israel time and again. He gave His people numerous instructions about healthful eating and sanitation. He gave them manna in the wilderness. He looked after Elijah when there was famine in the land. These are just a few of many examples of God’s care for our physical well-being.

This truth becomes even clearer in the ministry of our Lord. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels leaves us in no doubt that Jesus’ understanding of religion was very much practice-oriented.

Let’s look at a few passages which clearly show Jesus’ interest in His own physical well-being and that of the people around Him. First and most obviously, everyone who knows anything at all about Jesus knows He was all about healing. The fifth chapter of Mark is a recounting of three of these healings. First, Jesus takes a trip across the lake apparently for the sole purpose of meeting the demoniac of Gadara and healing him. Different disciples remember this event differently. There may have been more than one demon-possessed person involved. The general scholarly consensus is that there was one who was more memorable, perhaps both by greater insanity to begin with, and by the fact that he instantly longed to become one of Jesus’ disciples. He **did** become one. Jesus must have greatly trusted this man’s experience, because He sent him right away as a missionary to the area of the Ten Cities, without even taking him first for some training, as He did the others.

Then Jesus heads right back across the lake, where He is met by Jairus, begging Him to come heal his beloved daughter. Jesus begins to go, surrounded by overwhelming crowds, but is delayed by the woman with the issue of blood, whom He heals both in body and in spirit. First He stops her bleeding. She would have been satisfied with that, with knowing she could go home again. For twelve years, she had been ritually untouchable. If she had a family, she couldn’t live with them. Now she can. What more could she want? But Jesus wants more for her. He stops, makes a point of noticing her, speaks to

her (in public, no less) and requires her to say aloud, to witnesses, what has happened. Then Jesus publicly commends her faith for all to hear. This woman walks away a new person in ways she could not have imagined.

Because of this delay (Jairus must think) Jesus does not make it to his house until after the child has died. Too late! Or not ... This Jesus can even raise the dead! It is interesting that in the woman's case He makes a public display, and in this case He chooses to be private with the family. But in the course of one day, three great miracles have shown Jesus' care for physical well-being, and also made what will become great and cumulative changes in three different neighborhoods. In two of the three cases, His care for physical well-being was in direct and polar contrast with the attitudes of those around Him. Who would care for a crazy man and a bleeding woman? Jesus does. And He cares for much more than their outward bodies, but He makes it clear that their health begins there.

In the very next chapter, Jesus shows that He also cares about resting from ordinary (and extraordinary) stress. The first part of Mark 6 is taken up with His commissioning of the twelve to "go and do likewise." They are to travel the land and teach and heal and touch as their Teacher does. When they come back, later in the chapter, probably some weeks or even months later, He says, in verse 31, "Come away and rest awhile." He knows that they have had both "good" stress—the excitement of healing and of having "authority over unclean spirits"—and "bad" stress, the ones who won't listen, who fight and criticize the work, who send them away as the swineherds did Jesus. "Come away," He says. "Let's talk." When was the last time He said that to you? Did you go?

Immediately after this incident, crowds who saw them going chase them down and beg for attention. Jesus does not send them away, but teaches and then miraculously feeds them with just a bit of food.

Sometime ago, a woman suggested to a small church that people might be more likely to attend the various series they held if they fed them. The board objected. "We've learned that if you feed them, they just come for the food. They don't really listen to anything else, or become converted."

Jesus didn't seem to worry about that. He knew that if He looked after the physical needs of His hearers, only then would they realize He really cared about them, and only then might they listen to what He had to say about living in the light of God. But He didn't feed them **so that they would listen**. There's a fine line. People recognize a secret agenda. **Jesus fed people because they were hungry**. He cares about our physical needs.

Perhaps one of the most clear-cut example of this is the Sabbath. Imagine, right in the middle of a law code (don't do this, don't do that), a free present to one and all. A guaranteed day off every single week! The Israelites called it Shabbat because that means **stop**. What do humans instantly do? Change it into some kind of onerous burden. They presented God as saying, "You'd **better** rest! Take a break or else! No, no, don't you **dare** do that work!!" How silly!

By Jesus' time, Sabbath, instead of being an unexpected and exciting present, had become a gloomy duty. Jesus had a different idea. In Luke 6:1-11 (and many other places, too) He shows and role plays for those watching what He thinks the Sabbath should be. The first story in this chapter is of Jesus rubbing grain straight off the stalk in His hands to husk it, then eating it. No cooking, no fire, no waiting, no loss of nutrients. A lovely, relaxing Sabbath walk and meal, rolled into one. I wonder what they were talking about. We'll never know, because the Pharisees changed the subject immediately to No-No's. "What are you doing harvesting grain on the Sabbath?" they demanded.

Jesus reminded them of an Old Testament story and then said simply, "The Son of man [one of His names for Himself] is Lord of the Sabbath." In Mark 2:27, He gently reminds us, "The Sabbath was intended to be a gift for **you**. You were not created for **it**."

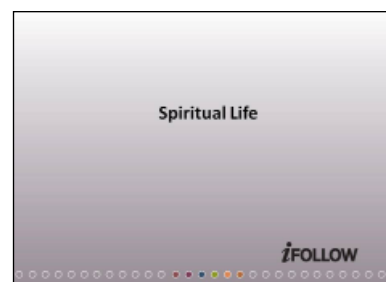
The next story in Luke 6 is of one of Jesus' many healing miracles that He seems to have deliberately chosen to perform on Sabbath. Could He be saying that weekly rest day is meant to be a day of healing? How much workaholic behavior, how many nervous breakdowns, how many burnouts would be avoided if everyone on the planet actually took full advantage of this gift God offers us all?

The way we treat our body has everything to do with stewardship. Whether our material possessions, our time, our talents, or our body; it is all God's property, and thus, we are required as faithful stewards to look after these gifts. But care for our body also is intimately related to the biblical view of the human person. Many Christians believe that we consist of an immortal soul that inhabits a mortal shell of flesh and blood. The Bible, however, depicts humanity as a unity of body, soul, and spirit, which cannot be separated. Our religion, therefore, does not concern just an immortal "something" but our entire being. It impacts all aspects of our existence.

Spiritual Life

The age-old question "What is the meaning of life?" has sparked endless debate and conjecture from the beginning of time. Some scientists say the answer is survival of the species. Atheist Richard Dawkins, who wrote *The Selfish Gene* proposes that life is just the way genes choose to replicate themselves. Other answers to the meaning of life range from the sublime to the absurd: enlightenment, individual success, power, pleasure, and even the number 42 (as Douglas Adams humorously proposes in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). Still other minds question whether the concept of "the meaning of life" itself has meaning.

When we ask how life came into being, ideas tend to be clearer and more distinct but still mutually contradictory and often full of gaps. Evolutionists, such as Dawkins, say evolution is as indisputable as gravity, but critics of evolution still persist in casting doubt on it.



Theorists closer to the fringe of acceptable belief suggest that life on earth was seeded by extraterrestrials, but they don't generally explain where the extraterrestrials came from. Advocates of intelligent design say there must be an Intelligent Designer, but in the current legal climate (at least in the United States), their lawyers won't let them say who that is.

As Christians we turn to the Bible, where we find clear, distinct, and coherent answers to both these questions. God created us to love and serve Him and to be loved and served by Him. We don't have all the answers to the mysteries of life, but His love for us is a very good start.

A choice to make: All inhabitants of this earth, whether they ever realize it or not, are already God's by birth. Yet, the life we all share in this world, as we all know, is very temporary. Sin has brought decay and death not only to every human being but to all life on the planet. Nothing is immune to the crushing devastation caused by sin. The good news, however, is that we have a choice as to whether this life is all we have or whether we will accept the wonderful gift of eternal life.

This eternal life, however, demands a turning around, a conversion. The Bible uses several metaphors to describe this crucial experience. The most graphic is that of a new birth, the image used to depict the turning point at which a person accepts the gift of eternal life in Christ. When this happens, the "old person" dies, and a "new person" is born. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Nowhere in the Bible is the need for this new birth described with greater clarity than in John 3. Verse 1-21 relate Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. The fact that Nicodemus was a teacher and leader in Israel may explain why Jesus went to more trouble than usual to really explain this concept. He told Nicodemus that even though an adult can't go back and be born again physically (the leader's contribution to the conversation) still, this new life is real, and is really new. It's as invisible and unexplainable as the wind, but it's also just as powerful. Imagine if someone said because they'd never seen the wind they refused to believe in it! They'd be a sitting duck for the next invisible hurricane.

The heart of this discourse from Jesus to Nicodemus is arguably the most famous Bible text of all time: John 3:16. Most people don't know verse 17 quite as well, but it states that the point of the new birth, contrary to many teachings to this day, is not to be perfect enough so you can safely be judged. "I didn't come to judge you," Jesus reassures the perfectionist Pharisee. "I came to save you, because I already loved you, and so did God." Understanding that, by the way, is the only chance we have of actually changing.

Of course the new life of the follower of Jesus, who has turned around from a life of self-service to a life of commitment to the kingdom, will be characterized by growth. Of course that growth will be in the direction of love (God's definition of perfection). In order to make that happen, the newly born spiritual person needs to feed on the right kind of

spiritual food and must gradually mature. The apostle Peter encourages us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, NIV).

Social Life

Humans are, by nature, social beings. Of course, there are moments we like to be alone. We need private time for prayer and contemplation. Some need more private space and private time than do others. But we tend to feel sorry for people who are always alone, and particularly for those who do not have sufficient social skills to establish bonds of friendship and who consistently fail to enter into meaningful relationships.



The Bible pictures people as parts of various social networks. The family, friendship, ethnicity, community, and church are dominant themes. The Bible points to Jesus' Father as the Father of all humankind, which means we all are brothers and sisters in a very real sense (Acts 17:26) Living in relationship is the essence of human life. When Adam was created, God immediately created a partner for him. Family life was a divinely devised model for human happiness. The Bible repeatedly underlines the tremendous value of genuine friendship and the blessings of belonging to a wider community.

The various aspects of our Christian life are blended in our membership to the body of Christ: the church. The church is more than a place where like-minded people meet and enjoy fellowship. Nonetheless, for many the church is indeed the focal point of their social life. This has both positive and negative aspects. Without Christian friends we have few, if any, role models. Associating with others who also serve God and also have adopted a biblical lifestyle will help us to remain faithful and to grow in our Christian relationship. But if we have no friends outside the circle of fellow believers, we will have few opportunities for witnessing. In all parts of the world friendship evangelism is the most successful method of church growth.

The harmony and order that still can be seen in life, existence, and the natural world point to God as their Originator. In the same way, the body of believers known as the church—God's new creation—also should display the harmony that God intended among the beings He created. How do we display this harmony? The answer is simple. Put aside the self-seeking and self-promotion that the world tells us are necessary for survival. Love others more than self and seek to do them good. Embrace the selfless life of Christ as your own.

Churches are very similar to families in that members may have relatively little in common with other members. It will take care, effort, and intentionality to ease the tensions that inevitably arise and promote harmonious relations with one another. When it happens, that, says Jesus, is when the world will know you are a child of God. (See John 13:34, 35.)

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As we grow in our Christian life, we become more and more convinced that Christ does indeed offer us life “to the full.” We often have, however, a hard time explaining this to those who have not committed themselves to Christ. For them the Christian life appears to be rather boring. They dislike the fact that it seems to bring all kinds of restrictions. But Christians have learned that not all experiences one might have actually make our lives richer. Many things we might do carry a minus sign rather than a plus sign and contribute to an inner emptiness rather than a fullness of life.

Ever wonder why God created light before He created a light source? The sun doesn’t show up until day four of Creation week, nearly a hundred hours after light has been shining without it. Perhaps God wanted us to remember that before there was anything else, He—the Light of the world—was already there. His power, love, goodness, and the fullness of His life are underived; all stem from Him and from His very nature as God.

God has given us the fullness of His life through His Son. When Jesus says that He has come so that we “may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV), He is referring not just to physical life in its various aspects but to spiritual and eternal life, as well. The Gospel of John is quite emphatic from the beginning that Christ is the Source of that life (John 1:3, 4). John goes on to say that this Life is the “light of all people” (vs. 4, NRSV). Here John equates life with light, God’s first creation, suggesting that life shares the qualities of light. Even now we use it to symbolize wisdom and understanding, revelation and inspiration.

Life “to the full” is the kind of life full of that light of God. It is a life that has meaning; that brings inner peace. Its happiness does not depend primarily on external, material circumstances. It is a life lived in a responsible way, caring for our physical life as best we can. It is also a life lived in relationships, for God designed humans to live in communion with others. Most of all, it is a life totally renewed in Jesus, a life that will be changed and growing in God’s grace. It is a life that is connected to the Source of life and will, therefore, be eternal.

Handout in this Package

1. Participant Notes



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Additional Resources

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DVD and Video

- Martell, J. L. (Producer), & Ford, Mark (Director). (1989). *Fear No Evil*. United States: NAD Church Ministries. (Distributed by AdventSource. This is a 20-minute documentary designed for use with secular people.)

Discussion Questions

1. What difference does it make that God is the Creator of all life, including our own? Does our belief about the origin of life impact our views about things such as the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia?
2. Just as God gave us life in the beginning, we are born again into a new life in Christ. What has changed in your life as a result of your relationship with Jesus? Has He made your life more fulfilling? Explain.
3. How do you demonstrate that the focus of your life is to love and serve God?
4. What is the key to successfully managing our social relationships, in and out of the church congregation? How well do you manifest these principles?
5. God has given us many guidelines for taking care of our bodies: dietary recommendations, as well as broader lifestyle instruction. What do these guidelines say about the value God places on human life? While the Bible indicates that some foods are unsuitable for human consumption (see, for example, Leviticus 11), the kingdom is not to be reduced to a question of what we eat and drink (see Rom. 14:17). How do we strike the right balance, not just in diet but in all areas of healthy living?

Group Activities

Activity 1

Purpose: To consider some details about our “fearfully and wonderfully made” bodies.

Preparation: You will examine one of the amazing organs or systems of the human body with your group. The eye is a popular example (here is a site with reproducible material on the topic: www.bibleprobe.com/humaneye.htm). You can find online, print or audiovisual resources for any bodily organ or system you find amazing. Make copies of the reproducible handouts and/or have access for the group to watch online presentations, videos, etc.

Assignment: Either discuss pictures and handouts or watch online material together.

Debrief: Discuss what you have learned. Pay particular attention to whether anyone present does not, in fact, have a well-functioning eye (or whatever). How has this affected their life? What does it mean to them that God created this organ or system and will recreate it one day?

Time: This will vary widely, depending on the nature of the materials you have to share. Probably allow at least 20 minutes for discussion following the audiovisual presentation.

Activity 2

Purpose: To deepen understanding of just what living an abundant or full life really means.

Preparation: Make tent signs of the following four Ps: Possibilities, Peace, Plan, Purpose. Place one sign on each of four tables. If you have too many people to fit into four groups, prepare four pairs or sets of tables. Supply each table with poster boards, markers, paint, magazine, scissors, glue, etc.

Assignment: Divide the total group into breakout groups, one group at each table. You may do so arbitrarily or allow the participants to choose, but the latter will take more time. Tell them their task is to work together to create a poster or posters which demonstrate the richness of their P word in a life animated by the Spirit of Christ.

Debrief: Bring the total group back together and ask someone from each table to

share their poster. Then discuss reactions, insights, etc.

Time: Allow five minutes to get organized, at least 20 minutes of work time at the tables and about five minutes per table group for sharing.

Activity 3

Purpose: To learn more about one's true state of health and what might be done about it.

Preparation: Print copies for each participant of HealthStyle Quiz found at www.rxtm.co.nz/cardiovascular_disease/prevention/healthstyle_quiz.htm. They will need to be seated at tables or desks and have writing materials.

Assignment: Have each person take the test.

Debrief: Discuss the results, as far as each one is willing to discuss openly. If there are changes needed, see if some people might be able to partner or work together as an ongoing group to help and encourage each other.

Time: Allow 10 minutes for to complete the quiz, and at least 15 minutes for discussion. Add another five to 10 minutes to choose partners and make plans, if you do this.

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Key Concept: Life

Participant Notes

Scripture Focus: Genesis 2:7; Psalm 139:13, 14; John 1:1-3; John 3; John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 2:1-5

Concept: Our lives—both physically and spiritually—are a gift from our Creator. Our goal should be to take care of this gift in order to live a long life here, as well as spend eternity in Heaven.

Connecting with Scripture

- A. Write about some of the ways you take care of your body. List any areas in which you would like to make changes, and choose one thing to begin on.
- B. Write about some of the ways you take care of your soul. List any areas in which you would like to make changes, and choose one thing to begin on.
- C. Journal your results.

Sharing and Receiving Scripture

Read Psalm 139:13-16. Most everyone can find things about their physical bodies that they don't like and wish were different. How does this text make you feel about yours?

1. I was created by God. That makes me unique and special
2. God was involved in my life when I was still in my mother's womb
3. Once born, my body represents my choices and should not be blamed on God
4. God had a plan for my life before I was born
5. These words are about David's relationship with God, they're not about my creation
6. Other....

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. How is it possible to become a "new creation"?

1. We become spiritually new on the inside which influences our motives
2. The old us is gone—and we don't have to bring him or her back again
3. This happens as a result of being "in Christ" and forming a close relationship
4. Our physical bodies become new, too, as we stop old habits that hurt us

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5. I honestly don't feel I can become new. I've done too much damage in my past
6. Other....

Read Philippians 2:1-5. According to this text, in what ways should our attitude toward others be the same as Jesus' attitude?

1. We should be "like-minded"; agreeing on love for one another
2. This isn't always possible because some people are just too difficult to love
3. We should be one in our purpose to prepare the world for Jesus' return
4. Our motives should never be selfish ones
5. We need to look out for each other, in the same way that members of a loving family do
6. Other....

Read John 10:10 and 2 Corinthians 4:18. How could these two texts bring hope to discouraged people?

1. Jesus not only came to give us eternal life, but a better quality of life while we wait for Heaven
2. By following Jesus' example, our lives become healthier mentally, spiritually, physically and socially
3. We know that the troubles of this world are temporary
4. Although we live in the here and now, we long for what we know is coming
5. As good as this life is, when troubles come we're reminded we're not in heaven yet
6. Other....

Applying the Message of Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If you have opportunity, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: Someone you sit with on the church board seems to always oppose you. That person is an irritant to you, yet you want to follow Philippians 2:1-5. Is it possible to become "like-minded?" If so, how?

Option 2: It's so easy to look at the pain, fear and suffering in the world. It can be discouraging and seem endless. What are some ways in which we can fix our eyes on what is unseen, as 2 Corinthians 4:18 suggests?

Option 3: Plan a Health Fair for your community. Have local professionals set up booths to give free advice and materials. Reaching the physical needs of your community opens the possibility of reaching spiritual needs later.

Valuing Scripture in Your Life

A. Ask God to show you any unhealthy habit that keeps you from living an abundant life. Too much caffeine? Not enough sleep? A lot of junk food snacking? Make a commitment to the necessary changes you need to make to live healthfully.

B. Contemplate your life. Are you happy? At peace? Living life to the fullest? If your answer is “no,” consider increasing your friendship with Jesus as a possible solution. It might also help to visit with a trusted friend or pastor to discuss the burdens that keep you from an abundant life.

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