

# SEEK HIS FACE

(Psalm 105:4: "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.")

## LEADER'S GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

These Small Group Bible studies are sponsored by Lutheran Hour Ministries and are based on the 2004 International Convention Theme: "*Seek His Face.*"



## INTRODUCTION

Face recognition, it's the latest technology. Ever since September 11, 2001, there has been an increasing demand for enhanced security. This need for security is seen especially in our nation's airports, and it is encroaching into other areas of life itself. Face recognition technology is the next logical step.

Officials at airports across the country are clamoring to implement additional safety measures to protect travelers and employees against potential terrorist threats. Some security experts, who believe better high-tech surveillance systems could have prevented the September 11 attacks, have said they are optimistic about the use of face recognition technology and other so-called biometric security devices. But civil rights advocates worry that out-of-date photos and poor lighting could result in numerous misidentifications.

It is abundantly clear that the security benefits of face recognition surveillance would be minimal to nonexistent, for a very simple reason. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the technology simply doesn't work. They cite a report from the Department of Defense that claims there is a high margin of error in pinpointing potential terrorists.

Iain Drummond, Chief Executive Officer of biometric company, Imagys, said that despite concerns, the public would eventually accept face-scanning devices as the norm in airports. Imagys is providing face recognition software to Oakland International Airport.

No doubt Drummond is correct. One needs to look back only twenty years or so, and one can recall a time when there were no X-ray machines at airports. Travelers have gotten used to them. While people grumble about the long lines and the time delays, people have accepted the increased security as a necessary step in protecting the flying public. It's only a matter of time before face recognition technology is perfected and operational in spite of the protests by civil rights groups.—Stephanie Olsen and Robert Lemos, *Can Face Recognition Keep Airports Safe?* CNET News.com.

Face recognition technology points out how important identity of people is. We all have our individual identity, and because of that we are known by Jesus. He not only knows our face, He also knows what is in our hearts and minds. Therefore, it is important for the Christian to seek His face. To seek Jesus' face is not merely to identify Him as an historic individual. It is to know Jesus on a personal level as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. To seek the face of Jesus also means to lead other people to identify Him as their Lord and Savior so that they know their sins are forgiven and their salvation is assured. These lessons are intended to equip and empower Christians to seek Jesus in much the same way as He has sought them out and identified them as His own. The themes for the lessons are:

Lesson One .....	Hang a Face on It
Lesson Two .....	The Face of Mission
Lesson Three .....	The Face of the Hungry
Lesson Four .....	The Face of Life
Lesson Five .....	Facing the Music
Lesson Six .....	Facing the Facts
Lesson Seven .....	Facing Forward
Lesson Eight .....	The Face of Love
Lesson Nine .....	The Face of Grace
Lesson Ten .....	The Face of Evil
Lesson Eleven .....	The Face in the Mirror
Lesson Twelve .....	Let's Face It

As always, these lessons come to you in two packets. One is the Learner's Guide, and the other is the Leader's Guide. They are designed to be covered in approximately one hour. However, the degree of discussion in your small group may shorten or lengthen the time you spend on each lesson.

This study has been designed for use in small groups and led by someone from within the group. Spiritual growth and increased knowledge will take place through discussion and Bible study. The leader may be the same person throughout the study, or others may share the leadership role within the group. Whoever the leader is, it is important that the leader be an attentive listener to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute.

Leaders are encouraged to consider the following before leading each session:

- DO pick the lesson most appropriate for your particular situation.
- DO NOT assume that you need to go through the lessons in any particular order.
- DO assign the lessons in advance. Participants will be better served if they are prepared.
- DO print out the Scriptural references. Doing so will save time.
- DO NOT force anyone to read out loud. Ask for volunteers.
- PLEASE DO NOT merely read the material word for word. These lessons are intended to *guide* your discussions.

If your group is pressed for time, PLEASE DO GIVE OUT the Leader's Guide. By doing this you will facilitate discussion more quickly.

Although each lesson has a different theme, they all share a common format. The format is: Opening and Introduction; Bible Base and Discussion; Challenge; Closing Thoughts and Prayer.

May God bless you through this study.



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## LESSON ONE: HANG A FACE ON IT

Tex Sample has been described as a man with a baseball in one hand and a copy of the philosopher Wiggstein in the other. He was born in the South, academically trained in the Northeast, and has grown to maturity in the Midwest. He is a Pastor who is as at home with a group of tough urban Job Corps participants as he is with a group of white suburban Sunday School class or with a group of distressed heartland farmers. To say he is down to earth, is an understatement. He has described people in the South as finding it difficult to understand a concept or a personality until they are able to hang a face on it. Hanging a face on something makes it tangible. Hanging a face on someone makes him or her identifiable and approachable.

**PRAY:** Dear Lord Jesus, help us to seek Your face always and in all ways. Send us Your Holy Spirit through our involvement in this study. Empower and equip us to be people who are driven by Your love. Help us to be people who let their light shine before others so they can see the good that we do and give glory to You and Your Father. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** The popular Gospel group, *The Florida Boys*, has a hit whose title is, “If You’re Happy, Notify Your Face.” It goes like this, “If you’re happy, notify your face, Take that frown off and put a smile in its place; If you love Jesus, well, show it to the human race, If you’re happy, notify your face. I go to many meetings, see Christians everywhere, We sing and talk of Jesus and how it will be up there; We talk of all the burdens confronting the human race, And say our Jesus is the answer with a frown all over our face. We claim we’ve got the answer to everything that’s wrong, Then sit in church impatiently when services take too long; Then we go out into the world with faces sad and mean, No wonder folks won’t listen that Jesus is supreme.”  
—Words and Music by Gary S. Paxton, Beasley & Baker Publications.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 33:1-17. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### **1. Why did Jacob arrange his family in the order in which he did?**

*Jacob approached Esau first. He was afraid of Esau, because Esau had threatened to kill him after their father was dead. He arranged his family so that the youngest or frailest would be the last to encounter Esau. Joseph would have been around six years old at the time, and Benjamin was not yet born.*

### **2. Do you think Jacob was surprised at the way Esau greeted him?**

*Probably so, because Jacob bowed down to Esau. Then he advanced a few paces and bowed down again, repeating the process a total of seven times. Jacob treated him as he would have treated a king.*

### **3. Why did Esau run to meet Jacob?**

*Esau ran, because all the bitterness that he had toward Jacob had disappeared over the twenty years that Jacob was gone. By running, Esau showed he had humbled himself. It was undignified for an adult wearing robes to run. This showed that he bore no ill will.*

### **4. Why did Esau ask Jacob who all the people were who accompanied him?**

*When Jacob left the land of Canaan, he left alone. During the time he was gone there was no communication with his family. Esau truly didn’t know who the people were who accompanied Jacob. That’s why Jacob introduced them all to Esau.*

### **5. How did Jacob hang a different face on Esau?**

*He said, "...I have seen your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably (verse 10)." The greeting Jacob received was not expected. The face he had hung on Esau from their earlier relationship no longer applied, so he had to hang a different face on him. Esau's face now reflected the mercy of God.*

### **6. How did Jacob demonstrate his absolute trust in God?**

*He insisted that Esau keep the very generous gift he had sent earlier. In verse eleven Jacob noted that he had plenty, i.e. everything. He knew that all he was and all he had was a gift from God.*

### **7. What further proof did Jacob give of his trust in God?**

*Esau had come with a guard of four hundred men. He offered to escort Jacob for the rest of the journey, but Jacob refused. He didn't even want Esau to leave any of the guard behind to accompany him. He had no need for the protection of a guard. He placed himself in God's care.*

### **8. Do you think that Esau hung a different face on Jacob?**

*Probably so, because Esau no longer had the animosity toward his brother that he had earlier. Remember, Esau had sworn to kill Jacob. When Esau hung a different face on Jacob is harder to determine. It may have been when he realized Jacob was returning, or it may have been longer ago. Nevertheless, he did view Jacob differently.*

**CHALLENGE:** Ask participants if they have ever had to re-hang a face on someone for whom they felt some animosity. Then ask them to try to hang a different face on someone that they might currently misunderstand.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** Sometimes the face of Jesus appears in the strangest, most non-traditional places one could imagine. It may even be shocking. "Are you ready to rip the face off this place?" screams the lead singer of Pillar. A hyped-up crowd of teens—6000 strong — goes nuts. The aggressive rap-rock band launches into a pummeling kickoff number, the surly singer pounding the stage with his steel-toed boot, sweating right through his baggy Army fatigues and black bandanna. He gestures like a member of some vicious street gang as he screams and roars into the mike, his arms swinging low as if on the way to the requisite crotch grab. This crude move, as integral to rap-rock as the blown kiss is to a lounge act, is usually accompanied by a testosterone-explosion of expletives. The singer's hand slaps down hard on his thigh—and stays there. Gripping his pants leg with conviction, he screams, "Jesus Christ!" Pause. "Is He in your heart?"

It's time to wreak havoc and give praise at Festival Con Dios, the first Christian alternative-rock tour. This is the sanctified answer to hedonistic summer blowouts like Lollapalooza and Ozzfest, an extravaganza where amped-up rock 'n' roll meets tamped-down self-control.

—Lorraine Ali, "The glorious rise of Christian pop," *Newsweek*, July 16, 2001, 40.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Father in heaven, we thank You for Your love. You displayed that love to us in the face of Jesus who sustains us. Help us to display that love so others can see it in our faces. Help us also to hang the best face possible on those we encounter as well as those we have known for years. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON TWO: THE FACE OF MISSION

People do a lot of complaining these days about the cost and size of government. It doesn't matter if it is local, state, or federal, the government seems like it is growing ever larger and sending its tentacles into more and more aspects of our lives. Most people, however, do not realize that an expanding government is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to World War II and the Great Depression of the 1930s, government was much smaller and leaner. People took care of each other. There was no welfare system at all. In fact, Aid to Families with Dependent Children was developed following World War II to take care of children who were half orphans, their fathers having been killed in the war. Things have changed a great deal in little more than fifty years.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, You have commissioned us to go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all people. We know that the fields are ripe for harvest. As we seek Your face of love and mercy, help us to see the need to proclaim that love and mercy in our little corner of the world, for people are in need of Your saving grace right around the corner. We pray in Your most precious Name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** In the beginning came the governor's challenge: If each of Mississippi's churches would help just one poor family back on its feet, welfare could end. God, not government, will be the savior of welfare recipients, Gov. Kirk Fordice likes to say. That's how Frances White, a jobless mother facing eviction from a crumbling house, suddenly found herself adopted by a suburban church. There were good deeds (church members paid White's bills), fellowship (they took her kids shopping) and finally redemption (through one congregant, White found a job as a hospital records clerk and now is partly off welfare).

Not long ago, no governor or politician could get away with asking churches to do the antipoverty work that is normally the responsibility of government. And it would have been the height of hokeyness to suggest that churches, synagogues and mosques could cure the drug addicted, feed the hungry, house the homeless, rehabilitate the criminal and lift the poor, better than government. Yet, there is talk of a second welfare revolution: let churches and charities, not government, provide more of the social safety net.

—Joseph Shapiro, Can Churches Save America? *U. S. News & World Report*, September 9, 1999.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read John 4:5-30. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

**1. Why was it unusual for the Samaritan woman to come to the community well to draw her supply of water at noon?**

*Noon was the hottest time of the day. The women in the village usually came to draw water either early in the morning, or later on in the afternoon when it was cooler. Moreover, the women usually came in groups both for companionship and for protection.*

**2. Why was the woman surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink of water?**

*John parenthetically writes that the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans, but the situation was more serious than what people think. There was a visceral hatred of Samaritans by Jews. They even prayed in the synagogues that God not allow Samaritans in heaven. To eat the food of a Samaritan was the same as eating swine's flesh. Samaritans were not considered to be neighbors. Therefore, they did not have to be loved. (On the origin of the Samaritans, see 2 Kings 17:24-33.)*

### **3. Why was the woman eager for living water when Jesus offered it?**

*She was thinking of physical water. She didn't want to have to come to draw water again.*

### **4. Why did Jesus tell her to go and call her husband to Him also?**

*Jesus was confronting her with her life situation. She was divorced five times and now was living with someone to whom she was not married. In spite of this situation, Jesus continued to minister to her needs. Obviously, the woman was embarrassed. What did she do? She changed the subject. She wanted to talk about religion.*

### **5. How was the woman similar to many people today?**

*She thought she was an expert on religion. Jesus even told her that she worshiped something about which she knew nothing. There are many people today who think they are experts on Christianity who know nothing about it.*

### **6. Jesus continued to minister to the woman. What was the result?**

*Ultimately she brought the truth of the Gospel that Jesus was the Messiah to the whole village where she lived. Even when someone with a reputation like the woman had can be used by Jesus as an instrument to expand the mission to others.*

### **7. What lessons can be learned from the way Jesus ministered to the Samaritan woman?**

*We can learn not to pre-judge people because of their appearance or reputation. All people need to hear the Gospel, because it is God "...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).*

**CHALLENGE:** Look around the neighborhood in which your congregation is located. Are there people who literally live in the shadow of the steeple whom you can help? Try to find a family with needs and help them. Don't forget to tell them about Jesus as you help them.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** The greatest mission field we face is not some faraway land. The strange and foreign culture most American evangelicals fear is not across the ocean. It's barely across the street. The culture most lost to the Gospel is our own—our children and neighbors. It's a culture that can't say two sentences without referencing a TV show or a pop song, and that can't remember what it was like to have to GET UP and change channels. It's a culture more likely to have a body part pierced than it is to know why Sarah laughed (Genesis 18:9-14). It's a culture that we stopped evangelizing, and have instead declared a culture war upon.

—Dwight Ozard in *Prism* (July/August 1996), quoted in *Christianity Today*, March 2, 1998, 62.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, You gave Your life so that all people could have life everlasting. Help us to seek Your face by proclaiming Your life, death, and resurrection to people in the entire world, but don't let us forget the little corner of the world in which we live. Open our eyes to see the opportunities You have placed before us. Then, open our hearts to avail ourselves of those opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel in word and deed. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON THREE: THE FACE OF THE HUNGRY

The United States of America is a nation of vast prosperity. We have virtually eliminated poverty. “But,” you protest, “what about all the people who get food stamps and all the children the media talks about that live below the poverty level?” While it’s true, there are people living below the poverty level in the midst of all this vast prosperity, even the poorest of households have at least one car, a microwave, a television, and other amenities. Our nation’s poor live much better lives than the poor of less-developed countries. Indeed, Walter Williams, a PhD in economics from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, has posited that if someone knew they would live in poverty before they were ever born, they would choose to be poor in the United States if they had a choice. So, what does the face of the hungry look like?

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, all that we have and all that we are comes to us as a gift from You. Help us to be truly thankful for all You give us. Give us a hunger for Your Word. Send us Your Holy Spirit to empower and equip us to seek Your face always through Your Word. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** The impact of giving can be far greater than you’ll ever know. A few years ago, I was buying a newspaper at the airport in Bangladesh when a man tapped me on the shoulder. I recognized his face but couldn’t recall his name. He looked at the two men behind the newsstand and told them, “This man saved my life.” He went on to explain: “Several years ago, I had lost two children, because I couldn’t feed them. This man gave me a job. Today, all six of my children are in school, and we don’t go hungry.” He hugged me and began to cry.

During my six years in Bangladesh working with locals to develop sustainable micro-enterprises, I was reminded daily of the value of providing people with income. Jobs that pay fair wages enable people to live with dignity—and to arrive at a point where they, too, can contribute to their community and to society.  
—Paul Meyers, Be more intentional about where you buy, *Fast Company*, December, 2000, 126.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read John 6:1-15. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### 1. Why did the crowd follow Jesus as He sailed across the Sea of Galilee?

*In the case of many of the people, they were looking for entertainment. They had seen the miracles He was doing, and they wanted to see more. Modern Christians must remember that the people of Jesus’ day had few diversions. Miracles were something that fascinated them, and they were an important topic of conversation.*

### 2. Why did Jesus withdraw up on the mountain?

*Jesus was about to begin the final year of His ministry. He was seeking time for solitude for prayer. The solitude was also an opportunity for Him to have some time with His Apostles as He prepared them for the final months of His ministry.*

### 3. Why did Jesus ask Philip where they were going to buy bread for the people to be fed?

*Jesus was certainly not looking for advice or information. John himself tells us that Jesus was testing Philip. Philip and the other Apostles had seen many miracles before. Perhaps Jesus wanted them to recall some of those miracles. After all, He had turned water into wine.*

#### **4. How did both Philip and Andrew fail the test?**

*Philip concentrated on money. He concluded that they did not have enough money to buy bread to feed the people. Andrew found food. He concluded that the food was of insignificant quantity to feed the crowd. He dismissed what he had as being inconsequential.*

#### **5. What would you have thought had you been one of the Apostles when Jesus began to distribute the bread and the fish?**

*Reactions of participants could range from surprise to disbelief. Note that the Apostles acted as waiters for this huge banquet. Please also note that the number of men fed totaled five thousand. The number did not include women and children. No doubt the distribution of all the food took a few hours.*

#### **6. What was the significance of the leftover food?**

*The twelve baskets of food were not large baskets. R. C. H. Lenski and other commentators have suggested that the baskets were small ones used by travelers to carry one day's ration of food. Jesus calculated the leftovers right down to the last crumb. Ask participants to discuss whether the Apostles shared some of their food with Jesus.*

#### **7. What was the reaction of the crowd?**

*The crowd wanted to take Jesus by force and make them their king. The next day He chastised them for only wanting to be fed. The crowd wanted only physical food. They were not interested in the spiritual food that Jesus had to offer them.*

**CHALLENGE:** Consider hosting a picnic or potluck dinner for the people that live in the neighborhood around your church. This could be an opportunity to find out what needs there are in the neighborhood. It is also an opportunity to share the Gospel with your neighbors and show them that you really care about them.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** One of the patients at the community hospital in Milford, Connecticut, where I regularly visited, was a tough-looking man with long hair and a shaggy beard, not a member of my church, whose face was screwed up in pain from an intense headache. He was hurting so badly he could barely talk, but he managed to communicate that the hospital didn't know what to do for him. I offered a very simple prayer for healing, asking that God ease his pain and make him well. His eyes stayed closed after, more from pain than piety, and he gave me a nod of thanks as I left.

The next day he looked like a different person, and he greeted me with a big smile. The headache was gone, he announced, and the doctors didn't know why or how. Our prayer had been answered. Frankly, I was amazed. A little of God's power had flowed into the life of one man. Never again would I be casual with prayer.

—Faith Healing Goes Mainstream, *Presbyterians Today*, September, 1995. Prayer changed the face of a man who hungered for healing.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Dear God, move us to seek Your face always. Use us as Your instruments to feed the hungry both physically and spiritually. Help us to pray fervently for the things You want us to have and do. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON FOUR: THE FACE OF LIFE

October 21, 2003, was an interesting day in the life of people who live in the United States of America. On that day, two legislative actions were taken that directly affect life. The United States Senate passed a law that made partial-birth abortion illegal. It was a victory of sorts, because it was the first major pro-life action taken in this country in thirty years. While that was happening, the Florida State Legislature took action that empowered the Governor to replace a feeding tube for Terri Schiavo so that intravenous feeding could be resumed. The woman, now 39, has been in a persistent vegetative state for years. Most doctors maintain that people in such a condition have no cognitive functions. Her husband had sought the removal of the feeding tube since 1998, because he claimed she didn't want to be kept alive artificially.

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, You created this world and all life in it. Human life is so precious to You that You sent Your Son, Jesus, into the world to suffer and die and rise again to save human life. Teach us, O Lord, to seek Your face always. Help us to be Your instruments to communicate Your Gospel that leads to life eternal. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** It's a jungle out there. Just ask Jay Rathman. He was hiking on one of the wilderness areas near his northern California home. Passing along a rocky ledge, he sensed movement beside his face. A timber rattlesnake struck, just missing his right ear. Its fangs got snagged in the wool of Rathman's turtleneck sweater, pulling the snake onto his shoulders. He grabbed it just behind the head with his left hand, as they both tumbled down the slope through the brush and rocks. In this eyeball-to-eyeball encounter, he discovered that snakes don't blink. In about 20 minutes, he was able to throttle the reptile.

Reading that hair-raising account reminds us how closely it resembles life on a daily basis. At the most unsuspecting moment, something strikes at us. We are knocked off balance by the assault. Who hasn't been tumbled head over heels by demands and deadlines? Who hasn't done battle with poisonous irritations on the slopes of over commitment, underachievement, and burnout? Who hasn't had to fend off surprise attacks from criticism that strikes at us like hungry predators and rip into us like needle-sharp claws? They are frequent and varied: physical pain, emotional trauma, relational stress, spiritual doubts, marital conflicts, occupational disappointments, financial reversal, or demonic assaults.

—J. Walter Cross, *Under No Delusions*, Bradenton, Florida.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 7:11-17. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are provided to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

**1. Luke begins this account, “And it came about soon afterwards....” What happened earlier?**

*Jesus had been at His home in Capernaum. A centurion who lived in that same town had a slave who had been injured. The centurion was a believer in the God of Israel. A delegation of elders from the synagogue he attended came to Jesus to ask for healing on his behalf. Seeing the centurion's great faith, Jesus healed his slave.*

**2. Why do you think Jesus made the journey to Nain in the first place?**

*One must always remember that Jesus knows all things. There can be no doubt that He knew that a death occurred and that He had already developed a plan for what He was about to do. He timed His arrival so He would meet the funeral procession.*

### **3. Why was such a great crowd of people accompanying the young man's mother?**

*She was a widow. This was the second time she left the gates of that city leading a funeral procession. The first time was for her husband's burial. Everyone in the city was aware of her circumstance. It was a case of double grief.*

### **4. Why did Jesus feel such great compassion?**

*The Prince of Life met death head on. The compassion He felt was the same compassion He feels for all people because they have to die. It was the same compassion that moved Him to become a human in the first place.*

### **5. Jesus told the mother not to weep. Why?**

*He was about to remove the cause of her grief. One must remember that whenever Jesus gave such a command, He always gave the ability to obey it immediately. He empowered her to stop weeping.*

### **6. Why did Jesus touch the coffin?**

*First, it was not a coffin. The dead man was carried on a stretcher-like contraption. The Jews buried their dead on the same day they died. The body was placed in a rock tomb, not buried. They had no need for a coffin. Jesus touched the stretcher to signal to the crowd and the bearers to stop.*

### **7. How did Jesus raise the man?**

*He raised him simply by the power of His Word. With that same Word He calmed storms and cast out demons. His Word is all-powerful.*

### **8. What did Jesus do next?**

*He gave the young man back to his mother. That gesture eliminated her grief. It was a gift of life from the Prince of Life.*

**CHALLENGE:** Discuss ways to enhance the quality of life for others. What can you do to visit the sick or aging? Is there a day-care program at your church where you can help with the children?

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** A Turkish officer raided and looted an Armenian home. He killed the aged parents and gave the daughters to the soldiers, keeping the eldest daughter for himself. Some time later she escaped and trained as a nurse. As time passed, she found herself nursing in a ward of Turkish officers. One night, by the light of a lantern, she saw the face of this officer. He was so gravely ill that without exceptional nursing he would die. The days passed, and he recovered. One day, the doctor stood by the bed with her and said to him, "But for her devotion to you, you would be dead." He looked at her and said, "We have met before, haven't we?" "Yes," she said, "We have met before." "Why didn't you kill me?" he asked. She replied, "I am a follower of Him who said 'Love your enemies.'"

—L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 265-266.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, help us to seek Your face and see life through Your eyes. Lead us to see the value of life in others and help them to appreciate the fact that their life is a gift from You. Give us safety, protection, and prosperity in our time. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON FIVE: FACING THE MUSIC

Times have changed. People, even children are forgetting how to play. Some educators believe that play takes valuable time away from more important activities and allows children to hide in a fantasy world instead of facing the realities of life. As a result, playgrounds are empty. When children do get a chance to play, it is usually structured activity with adult supervision. Spontaneous play is disappearing. As spontaneous play disappears, the creativity of children and adults fades away. People need to be entertained constantly, or they don't know what to do. Forgetting how to play is a challenge that must be faced by current and future generations. It's time to face the music.

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, one of the gifts You have given us is the ability to find joy in our lives. Guide and direct us to seek Your face always. Teach us to enjoy life to the fullest, because it is a gift from You. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** Sometimes, no matter how ready we feel for the battle, our worst opponent turns out to be ourselves. Stanley Pinto was a professional wrestler who successfully faced a number of tough opponents, but during a match in Providence, Rhode Island, he lost to his most formidable opponent.

The bell rang. The opening minutes began ticking off, and Pinto found himself slightly entangled in the ropes. Eager to free himself, he began struggling wildly. Before he could stop himself, he had pinned his own shoulders to the mat. His shoulders stayed pinned despite his best efforts to free himself. While his opponent, who had not laid a hand on him, watched, the referee began the countdown. Pinto was counted out.

—Ross and Kathryn Petras, *The 176 Stupidest Things Ever Done* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 190.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 7:24-35. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

**1. What did Jesus mean by a reed shaken by the wind?**

*He was referring to people who are easily swayed by popular opinion. When popular opinion changes, such people change their opinions to suit what other people think.*

**2. Why did Jesus refer to people who are splendidly clothed, living in luxury?**

*Jesus was showing the contrast between people who lived in luxury and people who were like John the Baptist who was in a dungeon. People who live in luxury may often be the ones who are swayed by popular opinion and are rewarded for changing their minds.*

**3. Jesus said that John the Baptist was more than a prophet. What did He mean by that?**

*John was the only prophet whose work was prophesied by other prophets. He even quotes Malachi 3:1 to demonstrate His point.*

**4. Jesus said that the one who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John. Why?**

*Jesus speaks of John as one whose work is already completed. Those least in the Kingdom of God are greater than John, because John did not see the miracles of Jesus. Remember, Jesus is speaking to an audience that prized neither John nor Jesus.*

**5. Why were the people, even the tax gatherers, baptized by John but not the Pharisees and the lawyers?**

*The people who were baptized by John had repented. The Pharisees and the lawyers had not repented. In Matthew 3:7-12, John calls them a brood of vipers, and chastises them for trusting in their own righteousness for their salvation. John omitted nothing in his proclamation to them, but they rejected the message. Ultimately they rejected Jesus as well.*

**6. Why did Jesus characterize the generation of unbelievers to children at play?**

*The children at play in the market place changed the games they played according to their moods. One minute they pretended they were part of a wedding (played the flute), and the next minute they pretended they were part of a funeral (sang a dirge). They complained when the others didn't go along with their game. The Pharisees and lawyers complained that neither Jesus nor John the Baptist lived up to their standards.*

**7. Jesus noted that John was called demonic, and He Himself was called a glutton and a drunkard. What did He mean by that?**

*Neither John nor Jesus accommodated the fickle moods of their critics. When they went against the stereotypes foisted upon them, their critics turned against them.*

**8. What did Jesus mean when He said that wisdom is vindicated by her children?**

*Jesus and John were the children of wisdom, because they were the proponents of divine wisdom. In the forensic sense, they are innocent of all blame, because both were sent from God.*

**CHALLENGE:** Ask participants to discuss popular opinions that they are tempted to follow. Then, develop strategies that will be effective ways to counteract popular opinions.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** A generation which fails to transmit the light from one age to the next does not pass on anything. It transmits darkness.

Almost thirty years ago, when Nikita Khrushchev visited America, he gave a press conference at the Washington Press Club. The first question from the floor—handled through an interpreter—was: “Today you talked about the hideous rule of your predecessor, Stalin. You were one of his closest aides and colleagues during those years. What were you doing all that time?” Khrushchev’s face got red. “Who asked that?” he roared. All five hundred faces turned down. “Who asked that?” he insisted. “Nothing. That’s what I was doing.” he said.

—as told by Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1989), 195.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, send us Your Holy Spirit so that we will be able to recognize Your face of love and forgiveness. Drive us to Your Word so that we will use it as our guide to govern all that we do and say. Help us to be models of human behavior who emulate You in thought, word, and deed. Hear us for Your own sake, O Lord. Amen.

## LESSON SIX: FACING THE FACTS

Pessimism and optimism are not fixed personality traits. Rather, behaviorists point out they are acquired traits that people use to explain to themselves why things happen to them. Since they are acquired traits, pessimists can learn to be optimists. Looking at life optimistically may be more important than people realize. Pessimists have poorer resistance levels to disease, weaker immune systems, are more susceptible to depression, and age physically faster than optimists. Some psychologists even believe that pessimism causes depression. It's in the Christian's best interest to be optimistic. After all, Christians are forgiven. They are loved. They will inherit eternal life. It doesn't get any better than that. Face the facts.

**PRAY:** Lord God, You have demonstrated Your uncommonly great love to us by sending Your Son, Jesus, into this world. Help us to seek Your face always so that we may live our lives in ways that reflect that love. Teach us, through Your Word, to be optimistic, because we are Your redeemed, restored, and forgiven children. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** Sean took drugs and sold them to other kids. He befriended an elderly widow near his home, then stole her heirloom jewelry, pawned it and paid cash for a brand-new Porsche. As he'd done countless times before, Sean's dad intervened and fixed his son's problem.

One day at summer camp, Sean asked me if I'd go for a walk with him in the nearby woods. As we walked, he began to pour out his regret for his evil and perverse life. He asked if I'd pray with him. We found a large fallen tree and Sean climbed up, sitting cross-legged on the log. He prayed first, and I heard words of confession and remorse. This wayward and rebellious youngster cried out to God for grace and forgiveness.

I opened my eyes to see if this really was the same young man who hated everyone because they're all so stupid. Here's what I saw. Sean, the bad boy, was sitting in God's awesome presence with his hands and face turned upward. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. "I'm sorry, God, for the terrible things I've done," Sean prayed. "Please forgive me and help me to be new."

—Robert Wolgemuth, He cheated on everything, *Men of Integrity*, July-August, 2000.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 11:1-13. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### 1. Why did one of Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them to pray?

*Jesus had just returned from praying in a relatively secluded place. Since Jesus placed such a high priority on praying, no doubt His disciples concluded that it is a habit that they should imitate.*

### 2. Why did Jesus tell us to pray to the Father?

*Jesus addressed this prayer to His Father, because God is His Father and our Father as well. In this prayer He makes God accessible to us. (Please note that the Lord's Prayer is repeated here. It is first recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. Because Jesus repeated this prayer it takes on greater importance.)*

### 3. Why is the Third Petition, "Thy will be done" omitted here?

*The thought of God's will being done is embodied in the first two Petitions. As we pray for God's Kingdom, we pray for both the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Glory. God's will is done when the Kingdom of Grace is expanded as more and more people become part of His Kingdom.*

**4. How is our relationship with God contrasted with the relationship between the friends in the parable?**

1. *God is much more than a friend to us.*
2. *The request was made at midnight and was easy to refuse. God does not refuse us.*
3. *The request was made for a stranger. We are not strangers to God.*
4. *The request was a small one. Our needs are much greater.*
5. *The refusal was selfish. God gives us everything He knows we need.*

**5. Verses 9 & 10 are also repeated in Matthew 7:7 & 8. Why?**

*Jesus is demonstrating to us that we cannot pray too often. He does not want anything to discourage us from praying. He places no conditions on our prayers, and He excludes no one. Thus, the use of the word, everyone.*

**6. There is an obvious answer to the rhetorical question Jesus asks in verses 11 & 12. What is it?**

*The answer is NO. No father would ever give a son or a daughter something that would be harmful or even not helpful. Earthly fathers do not deceive their children in matters like these.*

**7. How did Jesus conclude His instruction for praying?**

*He used a logical argument that went from the smaller point to the greater point. If you conclude that earthly fathers take care of their children, then it follows that our Heavenly Father will do a superb job taking care of His children. He even promises to give the greatest gift of all, that is His Holy Spirit.*

**CHALLENGE:** Discuss ways to set goals to increase your prayer life during the coming weeks that are both qualitative and quantifiable.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** Jim Moore is senior minister at a church in Houston, Texas. A friend told him the following story. The friend, a sales manager, was driving his new boss around town when they happened to pass near the friend's home. The friend asked his boss if he would like to stop by his house and meet his family. His wife was baking an apple pie, and his children would be coming in from school. He asked his boss if he wanted to meet them.

"Let's get one thing straight right now," the manager replied. "I'm not interested in your family. I'm not interested in your wife or your children. I'm not interested in you personally at all or any of the circumstances of your life. All I'm interested in are results. All I'm interested in about you is your sales record!"

The friend told Moore: "That really hurt. I felt as though someone had slapped me across the face, but you know, I realized something. I realized that God is the opposite of that...He is interested in all of the circumstances of my life."

—James W. Moore, *Christmas Gifts That Always Fit* (Nashville: Dimensions for the Living, 1996), 64-65.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Lord God, thank You for being our Father. You demonstrated Your love to us by sending Jesus into this world. Help us to seek Your face every day of our lives. Remind us to pray to You always, because You know most of all what we need. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

## LESSON SEVEN: FACING FORWARD

Have you heard about the Australian Aborigine who got a new boomerang and spent the rest of his life trying to throw the old one away? Besides being humorous, this man and his dilemma speak to a familiar problem. How many of us have spiritual boomerangs that keep returning, intruding, on our lives? We fail to terminate bad relationships, and so replay patterns of dependence or self-absorption. We return to bad habits, hurting ourselves and the ones we love. We rely on old reactions in the face of new circumstances, refusing to grow spiritually or emotionally. By ridding yourself of spiritual and emotional boomerangs you will finally be able to face forward.

**PRAY:** Dear Jesus, in Your Word You have told us that we can look forward to a life that will last forever with You in heaven. Teach us to seek Your face while we live. Send us Your Holy Spirit to empower and equip us to rid ourselves of bad patterns and habits in our lives, so we can live to Your glory. In Your Name we pray, O Lord. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** What's the future look like? I'll tell you: It's about tough choices. For example, this morning I noticed that my electric razor had spilled its entire collection of whiskers all over the inside of my fashionable leather toiletry bag. I had two choices. I could laboriously remove those whiskers individually cleaning each of the other contents of the bag, thus missing at least an hour of useful work, or I could say to myself, "If I didn't mind having those whiskers on my face, why should I mind them in my little traveling aspirin bottle?"

I chose the latter. After all, I already got used to the toothpaste all over everything in the bag. How bad could a few hairs be? That's what the future looks like—a bag filled with toothpaste, whiskers and unidentified containers. We're entering an age when the things we need to do and want to do are absorbed and overwhelmed by other things we need to do and want to do. We'll make random, often stupid choices because we don't have the brains or the time to do better.

—Scott Adams, *The Dilbert Future: Thriving on Business Stupidity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1998), 89.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 21:5-19. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

**1. What did Jesus mean when He said that not one stone of the Temple would be left as they saw it?**

*Jesus was talking about the destruction of the Temple. This was a remarkable statement for the disciples, because the Temple was already fifty years in the building. In A.D. 70, the Romans would destroy the Temple and all of Jerusalem as well. It would be left desolate.*

**2. The disciples asked when these destructive events would take place. How did Jesus answer them?**

*Jesus was concerned for His disciples. He warns them to be alert and not to allow themselves to be deceived. People will use Jesus' own name in an attempt to deceive other people. Some would be small sects. Others would be out for cash. Still others would have great networks. The point is that they would be successful in their deception.*

### **3. Jesus' description of the world sounds like current events. Was He speaking about today?**

*Yes. The end times began when Jesus ascended into heaven. They will continue until He returns in judgment. Wars and other turmoil are to remind us that the world is not permanent, but they do not signify that the end is near.*

### **4. How did Jesus continue His description of the future?**

*He went on to present the whole matter in more detail. He spoke of impending natural disasters. They also point to the fragile nature of life on earth, but do not specifically point to Jesus' return. He points to a time of fear and uncertainty.*

### **5. Why did Jesus speak of physical harm to the disciples?**

*There will be enemies of the Gospel that will be intolerant of the proclamation of that Gospel. In an attempt to silence that Gospel those who proclaimed would be arrested. When the arrests happened, it would give them an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to a different audience.*

### **6. Why wouldn't the disciples have to prepare for their testimony?**

*Jesus would give them the words to use and the wisdom that would disarm their accusers. They would never have a loss for words. There would not be stuttering or stammering. Thus, they would be acquitted.*

### **7. What protection and assurance did Jesus offer the disciples?**

*He told them that not even a hair of their head would perish. This must have been a great comfort to the disciples. They may suffer persecution, even death, but they would still be under God's care.*

### **8. What was the final promise Jesus gave them?**

*He told them that they would be saved if they persevered. This promise is for all Christians in all ages. Salvation is the result of faith. If Christians remain in the faith, their salvation is assured no matter what happens to them in this life.*

**CHALLENGE:** Discuss what spiritual or emotional boomerangs are in the lives of people that they have been unable to throw away, and how recurring actions and attitudes affect their value system.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** Charles Lubin enjoyed both eating and making cheesecake. He was pretty good at both, so good that he decided to open a cheesecake store on the north side of Chicago. It flourished, so he opened a second store in South Chicago. That store did not do so well. Eventually, he lost them both.

Discouraged, he sat in his room one night and while eating his cheesecake, thought, "This is pretty good cheesecake!" He opened his original store again. Soon, he opened another store, but it failed and once again he lost both stores. Less than a year later he opened his original store again. After opening a second store, he went bankrupt. He tried and failed to open cheesecake stores a fourth time. Then he had another idea. He wanted to open another store, but this time he named it after his daughter, Sara Lee. It became the largest bakery in the world.

—Source unknown.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Dear Lord, we know that we live in troubled times. Sometimes the future looks dark and scary. Help us to seek Your face so that we may look to the future with confidence that You will protect us and guard us no matter what we may encounter or endure. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON EIGHT: THE FACE OF LOVE

Some days are disasters, broken, dreary, failures. You walk out of your place of work feeling low and depressed. As you get into your car, you sink into the driver's seat with a sigh. You've tried so hard to be a success, to please your boss, to be respected. You want to feel important, to be respected. Then you arrive home or pick up your child at the day-care center. As soon as your child sees you, he or she gets excited and runs to you, jumps into your arms for a hug. You discover that all the love you think you need to earn is right there in your arms. Your performance at work is unimportant. You have love offered as a free gift without any conditions.

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, You demonstrated Your love to us by sending Your Son, Jesus, into this world to be our Savior. Send us Your Holy Spirit to remind us to seek Your face always. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** Carl Coleman was driving to work one morning when he bumped fenders with another motorist. Both cars stopped, and the woman driving the other car got out to survey the damage. She was distraught. It was her fault, she admitted, and hers was a new car, less than two days out of the showroom. Coleman was sympathetic, but he had to pursue the exchange of license and registration data.

She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve the documents that were in an envelope. On the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband's distinctive hand, were these words: "In case of accident, remember, Honey, it's you I love, not the car."

—Paul Harvey Jr., *Paul Harvey's for What It's Worth* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 31.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 7:36-50. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### 1. Why did the Pharisee invite Jesus to his house for a meal?

*He wanted to observe Jesus closely. The Pharisees were constantly trying to find fault with Jesus. They believed that they deserved eternal life, because they kept the letter of the law perfectly. They believed that other people could not be saved, because they did not keep the law. Since Jesus condemned them, they constantly tried to prove He was a sinner. Moreover, the Pharisee did not show the common courtesy he provided the rest of his guests (see verses 44-46).*

### 2. What does it mean that the woman was a sinner?

*It means that she was like everybody else the Pharisees looked down on. One would certainly not assume she was an adulteress as is commonly assumed. One may infer that she had a reputation for repeating a certain sin (e.g. gossip), but one should not go beyond that. She simply did not live up to the standards of the Pharisee.*

### 3. How did the woman gain access to the Pharisee's house?

*It was quite common for other people in the village to observe the festivities at such an occasion. The Jews always reclined when they ate, lying on cushions, leaning on their left elbow, and eating with their right hand. Their feet pointed away from the table toward the wall. The woman thus gained access to Jesus' feet.*

### 4. Why did the Pharisee refer to Jesus as "this man"?

*It was a derogatory reference. He didn't even use Jesus' name. However, one must remember that he was not speaking out loud. No one else in the room knew what he was thinking besides Jesus. How surprised he must have been when Jesus answered his thoughts.*

**5. When Jesus referred to the two debtors, what point was He making?**

*His reference was not to the numbers of sin, but to the consciousness of sins. Simon did not think he sinned at all. The woman, on the other hand was highly conscious of her sins.*

**6. The woman took care of what Simon had neglected. Why?**

*She was demonstrating her humility and repentance. She went beyond common courtesy, weeping out of sorrow for her sins. By kissing Jesus' feet she demonstrated her love for Him. The whole house would have been filled with the aroma of the perfume.*

**7. Why did Jesus say that her sins were many?**

*That's the way the woman felt. She was highly conscious of her sins, and they were a burden to her. As Jesus noted, she loved all the more, because she was so acutely aware of her sins. Simon should apply the rule to himself.*

**8. Why did the other guests express shock that Jesus forgave sins?**

*They didn't believe that Jesus was God. They believed He was a mere human being. Rightly, they believed that only God could forgive sins. Jesus has also given the authority to forgive sins to His Church. Whenever there is repentance, forgiveness must always be offered.*

**CHALLENGE:** Make a private list of those people whom you find difficult to forgive. Develop a strategy by which you can develop ways to demonstrate God's forgiveness and love to others.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** Many years ago, when a famine was bringing misery in Russia, the writer, Leo Tolstoy, passed by a bridge in Moscow where many beggars gathered. They were on the verge of starvation and were asking him for alms. Seeing a beggar, Tolstoy searched in his pocket for a coin, but discovered that he had nothing with him, not even a copper coin. Embarrassed, Tolstoy took the beggar's hands in his own and said, "I'm sorry, brother. Don't be angry with me. I have nothing with me today." The thin face of the beggar became illuminated, and he said in reply, "But you called me brother—that was a great gift, sir."

—Ronald E. Vallet, *Stepping Stones of the Steward* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 129.

Jim Arends of Trinity Lutheran Church in Spring Grove, Minnesota, tells of an old cartoon that pictures a preacher at the pulpit and a deacon sitting behind him with a grumpy expression on his face. The preacher says, "So until next Sunday, remember that God loves you, I love you, and Brother Al here is working on it."

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Teach us to love, O Lord. Empower and equip us to love not just those who love us, but also to love the unlovable. As we bask in the glow of Your love, help us to seek Your face always. Help us not only to tell others of Your love and our love for them, but also by showing them the face of love. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON NINE: THE FACE OF GRACE

In his book titled, *What's So Amazing about Grace*, Philip writes: “*Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more*—no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries and divinity schools, no amount of crusading in behalf of righteous causes. *And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less*—no amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.”

—(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 70. God’s face is truly the face of grace.

**PRAY:** Gracious Father, look upon us with Your unflinching grace. You see all our evil, imperfections, and shortcomings. There is nothing we can do to gain Your favor. Help us to seek Your face as we cast ourselves upon Your throne of grace and beg for mercy. Hear us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** Bob Olmstead of Reno, Nevada, tells of the experience of colleague Bill Welsh, a pastor in Desert Hot Springs, California. Members of Welsh’s congregation had a child who was subject to sudden seizures. These seizures were violent and painful, not only for the child but also for the parents and those who witnessed the child’s suffering.

The father and the child would come to church regularly and the father’s practice was to hold the child. One Sunday morning in the midst of worship, the child was seized [and] writhed painfully...The father lifted him caringly, carried him ...to the back of the sanctuary, where he stood still rocking the child tenderly, speaking to him gently until finally the seizure relented...There was no sign of embarrassment or frustration on the father’s face, only love for the hurting child. And then Welsh said, “In that moment, while I was preaching, I was preached to. I heard God speak to my heart and say, ‘That’s the way I love you through your imperfections. I’m not embarrassed to have people know that you are My child.’”

—Bob Olmstead, Reno, Nevada, 30 August, 1992.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 23:32-43. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### 1. Why was Jesus crucified with two criminals?

*It was necessary to fulfill the prophecy in this regard (see Isaiah 53:12). Jesus also made reference to this in Luke 22:37. No doubt Pontius Pilate intended the arrangement to be a slap in the face to the Jews who so badly wanted Jesus dead. He wanted the Jews to see what kind of a king they had brought to him.*

### 2. Were the criminals nailed to the cross as Jesus was?

*There is now substantial evidence to show that the Romans always used nails in crucifixion. Moreover, scourging was also commonly used in an effort to weaken the person to be crucified so that death would come sooner. Crucifixion may be the most gruesome way to kill that has ever been invented.*

### 3. How did Jesus display His face of grace to the Roman soldiers?

*He prayed for them. It is important to note that His prayer of forgiveness was said out loud. So often Christians have the notion that Jesus prayed silently. Since His prayer of forgiveness is recorded, people, including the executioners, had to hear it. How the soldiers reacted to Jesus’ prayer for them is not recorded. Nevertheless, the thought of the prayer is for them to be forgiven of all their sins, not just the sin of crucifying Jesus.*

#### **4. How did Jesus show grace while suffering?**

*He endured not only the pain of crucifixion, but also the mockery of the crowd. It appears that a goodly number of the Sanhedrin who had condemned Jesus to death were there. They were determined to see the end of Jesus with their own eyes. They were convinced Jesus was powerless to save Himself, because they believed He was merely a man.*

#### **5. Why did Pilate's inscription declare Jesus the King of the Jews?**

*The title proclaimed that Jesus was innocent of any crime. The inscription was intentional. In fact, the inscription was accurate. Not only is He the King of the Jews, He is also King of kings and Lord of lords.*

#### **6. Why did one of the criminals rebuke the other criminal?**

*Obviously he saw Jesus' face of grace. Perhaps it was the mercy Jesus showed the executioners when He forgave them. It may have been the way that Jesus bore all the mockery so graciously. In any event, he knew that Jesus was innocent. By stating that Jesus was innocent, he confessed his own sin.*

#### **7. What did the criminal mean when he asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His Kingdom?**

*First, one must note the use of the verb come. The use of the word was messianic. Therefore, the criminal wanted to be remembered, not forgotten when Jesus comes in judgment. It was an appeal for forgiveness and salvation. Obviously, the faith of this criminal surpassed that of those who condemned Jesus. He truly saw the face of grace.*

**CHALLENGE:** Develop a strategy for your group to invite people to come to your study that you would not ordinarily invite.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** With our hand clenched in a fist we cannot so much as pick up an orange or a boiled egg from the breakfast table. With a fist we cannot open a water faucet to wash the dishes or our face. Cooking and laundering cannot be done with hands closed in a fist. In terms of everyday human operations our fists are singularly ineffective. We use our open active hands to do almost everything that we do. The fist, so unpractical and ineffective, is a symbol of power. The world lives under the shadow of two huge fists, but its healing is in the open, nail-pierced hands of Christ.

Jesus reaches out to us with hands painfully open; He could not have been crucified with a clenched fist. Thus God is 'open,' not ideologically fixed. This God is not afraid of 'losing face.' This God waits patiently, ready to respond to human response...God rules over history but does not monopolize history. Here is suggested the painful openness of God. Our history is touched by the hands of Christ painfully open.

—Kosuke Koyama, "The Hand Painfully Open," *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 22 (1987), 33 & 36.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Lord God, keep us in Your grace. You have opened Your hands to receive us just as we are. Empower us to seek Your face always and use us as Your instruments to communicate Your grace to others. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON TEN: THE FACE OF EVIL

*Kill Bill* premiered in October, 2003. The movie is rated “R.” It features seven arm severings, five leg severings, two hatchet deaths, and a close-up scalping. 45 individuals are slain by swords, and a pregnant woman gets shot in the head. The film’s director, Quentin Tarantino, had this to say about the film: “If you’re a 12-year-old girl or boy, you must go and see *Kill Bill*. You will have a d—n good time. Boys will have a great time, girls will have a dose of girl power. If you are a cool parent out there, go take your kids to the movie.” The bad news is that *Kill Bill* is an outstanding success because people are lining up to see the movie. Thus, for evil to triumph, it takes only a few good people to do nothing.

**PRAY:** Father in heaven, when we pray to You as Jesus taught us to pray, we ask You to deliver us from evil. Help us to seek Your face, because we live in a world in which we are surrounded by evil. O Lord, deliver us from evil for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** Bad news seems exempt from the laws of the universe. You can follow the rules, eat right, exercise daily, sleep well, love your neighbor, love yourself, go to church, be honest with the IRS, give blood, vote, attend PTA meetings, remember your mother’s birthday, tell no ethnic jokes, write thank-you notes, recycle, clean your refrigerator, read the Bible, serve dinner at the shelter, wear clean underwear, get your teeth cleaned—and still bad news happens to you. Like an obnoxious relative, bad news just keeps showing up again and again.

—Howard Hanger, “Chutzpah!” *Vision*, January 24, 1997, 3.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read John 8:31-47. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### 1. Who was Jesus addressing in this discussion?

*Jesus was addressing a crowd of Jews in the Temple. There were some in the crowd who had a change of heart and believed in Jesus. To them He immediately speaks a word of grace. He told them to continue in His word and they would know the truth and the truth would set them free. As soon as He spoke that word of grace, the hostile Jews in the crowd raised their objections.*

### 2. Why did the Jews mention that they were the Seed of Abraham?

*This claim was a spiritual claim. By calling themselves the Seed of Abraham they spoke of a spiritual kingdom and not a political kingdom. Thus, they could claim honestly that they had never been slaves in spite of the fact that the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Romans had enslaved them politically. Yet even though they had spiritual liberty, they were still enslaved to their evil pride.*

### 3. What does it mean to be a slave of sin?

*Because all people sin, all people are slaves to sin. No human being can break out of that slavery under his or her own power. The effect of sin is as certain as night following day. “The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).” Even the pagan philosophers knew that. Plato maintained that liberty is the name of virtue and bondage the name of vice.*

#### **4. How did the hostile Jews betray their spiritual heritage?**

*Even though they were physical descendents of Abraham, they were spiritually depraved. They demonstrated this in their criminal determination to kill Jesus. Not only were they vile enough to plot murder, but also they were plotting murder of the Son of God whose day Abraham longed to see (verse 56), and for whom they were made. Jesus pointed out that the reason they had such an attitude was because His word did not have free course among them.*

#### **5. Why did the hostile Jews make the claim that they were not born of fornication?**

*Jesus had said that they were not doing the deeds of their father. They missed the point. They thought Jesus was talking about a situation where there was a biological father and a father in whose house they were raised and whose name they took. They would still have the nature of their biological father. This was not what Jesus suggested.*

#### **6. Why did Jesus tell them that they were children of the devil?**

*They were children of the devil in the spiritual sense. That is to say, they were inflamed with the same evil lusts with which the devil was inflamed. Since their relationship was moral and spiritual, they were inflamed with that evil by their own consent and not by some accident of birth. Through their unbelief they made themselves children of the devil.*

#### **7. How did Jesus describe the devil?**

*He described him as a murderer and a liar. Lying was the means by which the devil brought evil to the human race. When humans embrace evil, they also embrace death. That is why the devil is a murderer. Truth and the devil are opposites, even antagonistic.*

#### **8. Jesus and the devil are opposites. How?**

*Jesus is the truth. He brings the truth of God's love and grace and mercy. Those who believe Him will be saved and are His children.*

**CHALLENGE:** Talk about what your group can do to help your congregation find ways to combat evil like that which is seen on movies and on television.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** Rape, murder, homophobia, misogyny, wanton drug abuse—in the course of the 70-minute disc, 26-year-old Eminem (a.k.a. Slim Shady, nZ Marshall Mathers) raps about it all in graphic detail. And the youth of America are listening—avidly, in great numbers. Already, The Marshall Mathers LP has become the fastest-selling hip-hop album in history, with more than 5 million copies bought since its release. The disc is red hot in every sense, drawing the ire of gay-rights groups, feminists, parents and pundits outraged by its content.

Of course, lyrically scandalous rap and rock albums are nothing new. What distinguishes the Marshall Mathers LP—and what has a growing cross section of shocked adults asking the rhetorical question, Eminem: Clown Prince or Menace?—is the sudden ease and enthusiasm with which a mainstream of teens and preteens is absorbing its corrosive vision.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Almighty God, Your Son has revealed to us that He is the Way and the Truth and the Life. Send us Your Holy Spirit to empower us and equip us to resist evil. Help us to seek the face of Jesus, and use us to reflect the light of Christ to shine the truth in this world filled with evil. Envelop us in Your grace and keep us safe from all evil attempts against us. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON ELEVEN: THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

The letter that St. James sent to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire is a study in practical Christianity. In the first chapter, verses 22-24 he writes: “But prove to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of a person he was.” St. James is describing what might be called spiritual Alzheimer’s disease. Alzheimer’s is a terrible disease that affects a person’s short-term memory. Spiritual Alzheimer’s disease causes people to forget they are Christians.

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, we confess we have sinned and come far short of the expectations You have for us. Help us to use Your law as a mirror to show us our sin. Then send us Your Holy Spirit to renew us with forgiveness so that we will be empowered to seek Your face always. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** Michael Jackson’s 1987 *Man in the Mirror* is one of his best. As the video begins, Jackson sings, “Gonna make a change for once in my life,” while newsreel footage flashes images of riots in South Africa and doe-eyed, bloated-bellied African children with flies crawling across their faces. Jackson responds to these images by singing that he sees, “the kids in the street/with not enough to eat... /Who am I, to be blind, pretending not to see their needs?”

The tempo of the song picks up as the viewer sees shorter clips of a crying Lech Walesa and Desmond Tutu. Jackson then sings the chorus of the song, “I’m starting with the man in the mirror/I’m asking him to change his ways...”

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 18:9-14. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### 1. Why did Jesus use a Pharisee as an example in this parable?

*Pharisees were the Jewish sect that put the most stress on strict outward observance of the Law. Their definition of the Law also included the rabbinical traditions that include ceremonies, tithing, fasting, alms giving, etc. The Pharisees had insulated the Law with those traditions so that they could appear to keep the letter of the Law while completely ignoring the spirit of the Law.*

### 2. Why did Jesus use a tax-gatherer as an example in this parable?

*The tax-gatherers were at the opposite end of Jewish society. They were considered traitors because they collected taxes for Rome. They were widely known as extortionists. They belonged to the most disreputable class of people. To have a tax-gatherer in the family was a public disgrace. Promises to tax-gatherers need not be kept. Their alms were not received, because they were considered to be ill-gotten.*

### 3. Why did they go to the Temple to pray?

*They went at one of the regular hours of prayer. Because they are in the Temple, we see them going into the presence of God. Most likely they went into the court of the men. The Pharisee represented those who think like this Pharisee, and the tax-gatherer represented those who think like this tax-gatherer.*

#### **4. What was the problem with the Pharisee's prayer?**

*We see him as he really is, and we hear the actual thoughts that he entertained. He is an example of full-blown self-righteousness. He may be a Pharisee, but he could be anyone who thinks the way he does. The Jews had memorized prayers like the ones we teach our children (Now I lay me....), but they also prayed extemporaneous prayers. He thanked God, but he had nothing for which to be thankful. He was using the wrong measuring stick, his own, not God's.*

#### **5. Why did the Pharisee fast twice a week?**

*God commanded His people to fast only on the day of Atonement. Private fasting had been introduced since the exile. Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday as a special mark of holiness.*

#### **6. How was the prayer of the tax-gatherer different?**

*His prayer and his person was the exact opposite of the Pharisee. He did not take a prominent stand as the Pharisee. He stood at a distance, because he felt he was too unworthy to go nearer. He didn't lift up his eyes but looked to the ground. He was utterly ashamed of himself. He compares himself to no one. Rather, he confesses his sin, and he asks for mercy.*

#### **7. How did Jesus view these two men?**

*Jesus saw them as they really were. Using the voice of authority ("I tell you"), He announced a verdict. The tax-gatherer was justified. That is to say, the Almighty Judge of all his sins acquitted him. Jesus declared him righteous. The Pharisee was not justified, because he put himself up in a high and false way that was contrary to God. The Pharisee's righteousness was a fraud.*

**CHALLENGE:** Discuss ways that modern day Christians see Pharisees when they look in the mirror. Then find ways to change the face in the mirror to look more like the tax-gatherer.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** I heard a silversmith talk about refining silver. He said, "I must sit with my eyes steadily fixed on the furnace; for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured. I never take my eyes off the silver in the furnace. If I take it out too early, it won't be purified. If I leave it in too late, it will be injured. When the silver is in the fire, I focus. I don't let anything distract me. I watch that silver carefully waiting for the right moment to take it out." "When is the right moment?" I asked. He said, "I know the silver is pure when I can see my face reflected there."

When I'm in a storm, as soon as the storm comes, I'm saying, "Okay God, bail me out. Find me. Rescue me." Sometimes he doesn't rescue me. He doesn't come. But He is the great silversmith. When I'm in the furnace, He focuses and watches. His job isn't a quick rescue mission. His job is to purify. He holds me until the right moment, and then He comes—never too early, never too late—right on time.

—John Maxwell, quoted in *Men of Integrity*, March-April 2000, [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com)

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Almighty Father, You created us to reflect Your image, because in Your image we see the face of Jesus. Yet we sin against You daily. This we confess with shame and without excuse. Have mercy on us sinners. Send us away from this study justified. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

## LESSON TWELVE: LET'S FACE IT

Let's face it. We all have a terminal disease. It's called sin. The prognosis is death. We may not know the method death will come or the time, but rest assured, we will all die. That is why life is so precious to us. We have been advised to live every day as if it were our last. Fortunately, death is not the end for us. Even though we rebel against God with our continued sinning, God is not willing to leave us alone. He sent Jesus into the world to be our Savior and Lord. Jesus sends His Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps us in faith in God. That is how God has prepared us for a life that will last forever. That is another fact that we must face.

**PRAY:** Father in Heaven, You have made us and we are Yours. Thank You for directing Your love toward us through Jesus. Do not let the light of faith in our hearts ever go out. Rather, use that light to shed the truth of Your love in our sin-darkened world. Empower and equip us to seek Your face always. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION:** "The only essential difference that I can tell between Christians and non-Christians is not necessarily morality, it's that Christians have acknowledged that we're sinners and we can't make it on our own. We're failures and will continue to fail. And the church in the year 3000 will be just as full of problems as the church in the year 2000, as it was in the year 1000. No other institutions that I know of recognize that. Governments don't, a lot of other religions don't. But that's the baseline of Christianity. If we deny that, and try to put on a good face, then we fall into the trap of the original Pharisees of just trying to make ourselves look good and even make God look good. But God didn't seem all that concerned with it. He became sin for us, as Paul said."

—Philip Yancey, quoted by Doug Duncan, Thoughtful Evangelical: Philip Yancey Interview, *The Door*, May-June, 11.

**BIBLE BASE:** Ask a volunteer to read John 20:1-18. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

**DISCUSS:** (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

### **1. Why doesn't John tell us only about Mary Magdalene and not the other women?**

*John is an eyewitness, and he intends only to talk about what he saw and heard. He reports only what Mary Magdalene said. John accurately reports in verse two that Mary said, "we do not know where they have laid Him." Thus, John is aware that there was more than one woman at the tomb early in the morning.*

### **2. Why did Mary report that the stone was already taken away from the mouth of the tomb?**

*The stone was a source of concern for the women. The stone was a solid piece carved in the shape of a wheel. It was rolled back and forth in a groove in front of the tomb to give people access. Matthew tells us that an angel removed the stone and sat on it. It would appear that the stone was thrown away from the tomb with some force for the angel to be sitting on it.*

### **3. What did Mary think had happened to Jesus' body?**

*She thought the body had been stolen, probably by the very people who hated Him enough to kill Him. At this point it did not occur to her that Jesus was alive. She and the other women were focused only on performing the final preparations needed for a dead body.*

### **4. Why did Peter and John run to the tomb?**

*They probably met the other women after they started for the tomb after speaking with Mary. It is possible that they thought what Mary said was nonsense. Then, after they heard the same story, they ran the rest of the way to see for themselves.*

### **5. When Peter and John got to the tomb, what did they see?**

*They saw the linen strips that were carefully wrapped around Jesus' limbs and torso lying on the rock shelf still in the shape of His body. But His body was no longer in the wrappings. The wrappings were undisturbed as Jesus' body, albeit a glorified body, passed miraculously through the wrappings. Moreover, they also saw the head cloth rolled up separately next to the other wrappings. The empty wrappings were the empirical evidence that Jesus was alive. With that same glorified body Jesus passed through the solid rock walls of the tomb before the angel threw the stone away.*

### **6. Why did Mary not recognize Jesus when He appeared to her?**

*There are several reasons. First, Mary was consumed in grief. Her statement to the angels indicates that she still thought His body had been stolen. Second, her grief even caused her not to recognize the angels. It is not reported that she was afraid. Moreover, the encounter was brief. When Jesus appeared, the angels would somehow have acknowledged Jesus' presence. That probably caused Mary to turn around. Third, Jesus had a glorified body. We cannot describe the change, but it seems the face Mary saw was somewhat different or altered.*

### **7. After the encounter with Jesus, how had Mary changed?**

*She was filled with joy over the objective truth that Jesus was alive. She hurried back to the disciples once again, this time announcing that she had seen and spoken with the Lord.*

**CHALLENGE:** Talk about what your group can do to communicate the objective truth of the resurrection in this post-modern age that denies there is any objective truth.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS:** Two millennia [after the birth of Christ], two billion people call themselves Christians. It is the world's largest religion, and in more than 20,000 sects and denominations, it offers an astonishing variety of ways to worship. Since the beginning, Christianity has been outlawed, persecuted, split, split again, warred against and—in the face of scientific advance—declared obsolete. But it has reshaped itself and mended itself, and even at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a century that has threatened Christianity in new and unpredictable ways, it lives. “What is Christianity's greatest accomplishment in our century?” asks Peter Gomes, preacher to Harvard University. “It has survived.”

—Robert Sullivan, 2000 years of Christianity, *Life*, December, 1999, 53.

Yes, Christianity has survived because of the objective truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Face the facts. Because Jesus lives, all those who believe in Him will also live, now and forever. Times may change, but neither God nor His plan of salvation will ever change.

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, we cannot begin to thank You enough for our forgiveness and salvation. You felt the pain of Your Father's wrath over the evil we are and have done. You died for us. Now You live so that we might have life also. Only because of Your forgiveness are we able to seek Your face. Preserve, O Lord, our faith in You so that we can live with You. In Your Name we pray, O Lord. Amen.