

Introduction

This study was prepared by Dr. Clay Ashley. Dr. Ashley is a 1991 graduate of Texas A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine. He and his wife, Tracy have been fieldworkers with Christian Veterinary Mission since 2000. They have two daughters, Maiya and Jade. During the Ashley's time as overseas fieldworkers, Dr. and Mrs. Ashley worked in both urban and rural areas of Mongolia and China. The Ashleys returned to the U.S. in 2008 where they now reside in Texas.

Dr. Christina Tolman, Director of Student Outreach for Christian Veterinary Mission, compiled the topics covered in this Bible study. Students involved with Christian Veterinary Fellowships in veterinary colleges from around the United States approached Dr. Tolman with the idea of creating a Bible study covering topics that were important to them. Therefore, this study was prepared with you, the veterinary student, in mind.

The purpose of the study is to look at what the Bible has to say about the issues that affect us in current times. I wrote this study with a Christian audience in mind, however I hope that non-Christians will also feel free to join in the study. I've tried to leave a lot of leeway for the leader to guide the study for both a Christian and non-Christian audience. With the discussion questions, I try to encourage participants to share their views and experiences but in the end, the final word comes from the Bible, the Word of God.

In leading this study, I've included a Leader's copy that has my ideas on how the leader can encourage and guide the discussion. It is my intention that the study would be a group effort to explore what God has to say about life's issues and not a single person teaching. The leader's job, therefore is keep the group's discussion focused and moving forward.

We at Christian Veterinary Mission hope that those who use this study will find it helpful in providing Godly wisdom for 21st century issues. For while some parts of the Bible were written over 2500 years ago, it's easy to see that the relationship and moral issues we deal with today were not new to Bible writers. The issues we face today are issues addressed by the timeless wisdom of God, our Creator. Enjoy your time studying God's Word.

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Christian Veterinary Fellowship Bible Study Series

Week 1

Topic 1 - Balancing Life's Priorities

Where is God's place?

Introduction

When talking about maintaining balance in life, we can use any number of metaphors. Some people use a linear ranking system as if life was a college football poll lining up teams for a bowl game. Some people use the picture of a simple two-sided scale used for weighing such as what we saw used in China in the meat market. When buying meat in China, we'd point to an appropriate sized piece and the seller would put the piece on a hook on one side and balance that with the appropriate measures on the opposite side in order to tell how much meat she was selling. This metaphor would work great in reference to life if we only had to balance two things such as vet school and family or vet school and your relationship with God. However, my experience of life hasn't been so neat and orderly to line up with such inflexible or simple metaphors. Let's discuss the following.

1. Make a list of some things that are important to you that you are trying to balance in your life.

Leader's notes:

Answers may include: relationship with God, vet school, family, work, relationships with friends, hobbies, etc.

1a. Using the answers given and knowing you only have 24 hours in a day, rank your list from most important to least important in an **ideal** setting.

2. What does the Bible say about life's priorities? Do you have any favorite verses that apply to this topic?

Leader's notes:

God should be at the top or at the center - Use the following verses for discussion to make this point.

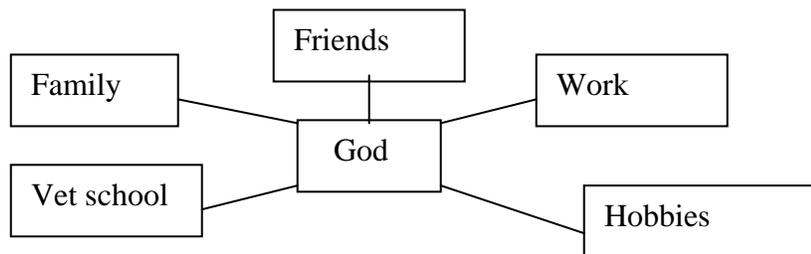
Matthew 22:37-38 – "Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment."

Jesus said in Matthew 10:37-39 – "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

3. *Honest assessment:* When thinking about the reality of your life, does your ideal ranking match up with reality? If no, why not?

Leader's notes: *I'm assuming that most people's ideals won't be identical to what's really going on in their lives. The Bible teaches that our relationship with God should come first or should be at the center. Therefore, all other priorities should stem off of your relationship with God.*

4. Instead of thinking about ranking priorities from most important to least important, how would your thinking change if God is at the center of your life and other priorities branch off of your relationship with God?



5. If you look at our relationship with God (and pleasing Him) as the central thing in your life, will that help or hinder your efforts at balancing the other things in your life?

Leader's notes: *The idea with this discussion question is to get people to realize that with God as the source of our wisdom, the source of identity, the source of character traits, we will strive to be wise with our time as Jesus was. We will strive to build within our lives the character traits of God (love, joy, peace, compassion, etc.) so we are able to provide the attention and love to our families and friends that glorifies God. We also need our identity to be in Christ so that our self worth is not found in what grades we make or how far we advance in our profession. Last, if we are gifted so that we do well in school or advance beyond our peers professionally, then God as our priority will allow to us to handle and balance this blessing to His glory as well. The bottom line is that if God is our priority, He will give us the wisdom to honor Him in all other aspects of our lives, at the different stages of our lives.*

Related verses for reflection -

- **Proverbs 3:9-10** – “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”
- **Proverbs 6:6-8** – “Go to the ant you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”
- **Proverbs 10:4** – “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.”
- **Proverbs 10:5** – “He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.”

Week 2

Topic 1 – Balancing Life’s Priorities

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

Life Balance and Time management

Getting Started - When dealing with balancing life’s priorities, the obvious thing that can help us is to look at how we spend our time. In other words, are there things that you do each day which “steal” time so that you have less time to give to your priorities?

1. Read the following verses and discussion questions in light of how they might apply to you today.

Proverbs 28:19 – *“He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.”*

Proverbs 12:11 – *“He who works his land will have food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.”*

- a. How does the metaphor of “working your land” apply to your time in veterinary school?
- b. What are the examples of “abundant food” as a veterinary student?
- c. As a veterinary student, what are some ways that you might waste time “chasing fantasies”?

Chasing fantasies can be thought of as “time stealers”. These are things that consume an inordinate amount of your time so that you cannot attend to the more important priorities you identified last week.

2. What are some things that steal time your time?

Leader’s notes: *This is wide open and can be different things to different people. When Tracy and I first married I realized I spent a lot of time watching sports on television, which prevented me from spending time with my new wife. Our television broke soon after we were married and we chose to not replace it because we didn’t have the money. However, once we didn’t have a television, I soon realized how much more time I had to spend with my wife as well as how much more time I could give to studying for veterinary school. For others, it might be surfing the internet, video games, hobbies, etc.*

3. Can things that steal time be a spiritual battle?

Leader's notes: *The idea behind this question is to bring up the fact that Satan is described as one who desires to “steal and destroy”. If he can do this through ruining our relationship with others by stealing away our time, he will. If we find that we are spending lots of time on things that are not on our priority list, we must ask ourselves “Why?” and “How do we correct it?”*

4. *Honest Assessment:* Are there things in your life that are “time stealers” that you should do without because they interfere in your relationship with God? Think and pray about it.

Week 3

Topic 2 – Making God THE Priority

Introduction:

When my wife, Tracy, was in high school she was not a Christian though she had a belief in God. A Christian friend of hers would frequently invite Tracy to church and Tracy always found a reason to say “No”. One day at lunch, Tracy was eating with her friend and her friend asked her if she believed in God. Tracy answered “Yes”. Then her friend asked her a question that changed her life. She asked, “If you believe in God, don’t you want to know what that God is like?” This was the first time that Tracy took seriously the question of what it takes to “know” God.

If we want to “know” God and not just know about God, don’t we have to spend time with Him like we would any relationship? No relationship will flourish if we don’t make it a priority. It’s the same with a relationship with God.

This story also shows how difficult it is for someone who has made God his/her priority to hide it from others. When God is our priority, others should see it in the things we do, the things we talk about, and the way we interact with others.

Spending time with God

When is the best time to pray or have a quiet time with God?

Read the following 4 verses in context with the above story, and then discuss this questions.

- a. **Mark 1:35** – *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*
- b. **Matthew 14:22, 23** – *“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.”*
- c. **Matthew 26:36** – *“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane and he said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’”*
- d. **Luke 6:12** – *“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”*

Leader’s notes: *This is just a small sampling of instances of prayer in the Bible. I focused on Jesus’ times of prayer since he presents the best example for modeling how and when to pray. Things that should be brought out in discussion are:*

- *These examples show that Jesus prayed at differing times of the day, sometimes before “work” and sometimes after “work”.*
- *Jesus prayed before making important decisions, like before designating the apostles.*
- *Jesus prayed when he knew he was overwhelmed with the difficulty of his life.*

1. What time(s) of day did Jesus pray/have time alone with God?
2. Jesus found solitary places to pray. Why?
3. What kinds of life events drove Jesus to spend more time in prayer?
4. When is the best time for YOU to spend time with God?
5. Are you spending time with God on a daily or consistent basis? Why or why not?

Homework – Develop a consistent time with God starting this week.

Week 4

Topic 2 – Making God THE Priority

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

Influencing others for God

Read the following verse:

2 Corinthians 5:20 – “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.”

1. Who was Paul’s audience when he wrote the letter of Corinthians?

Leader’s notes: Direct the students to the opening of Chapter 1 where Paul identifies his readers. Paul was writing to the church at Corinth as well as other Christians.

2. What is the role of an ambassador?

Leader’s notes: Answers may be such things as one who represents a country or its government in a foreign setting or one who speaks on behalf of another usually higher entity.

3. Who is representing God here on earth?

Leader’s notes: Since Paul is writing to Christians, it’s apparent that the “we” in verse 20 is referring to the Christians reading Paul’s letter to Corinth. Therefore, all of us who are relying on Christ’s sacrifice for our salvation are now God’s representatives on earth.

4. If those of us who are Christians are actually representing God each and every day in all of our activities, how will that affect how we act towards our family, our friends, strangers, etc.?

Leader’s notes: We can use the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5 as a starting point. 1 Corinthians 13 is another good chapter or discussion.

5. What is the relationship between spending more time getting to know God and how you carry out your duty as God’s ambassador?

Leader’s notes: There should be a direct relationship. The more time we spend getting to know God the more we should want/be able to represent Him. Encourage discussion among the group.

Week 5

Topic 3 - How do we find God's peace in our life?

Anxiety and Stress

Introduction

Stress and anxiety should not be thought of as synonyms. When thinking of people, stress is outside of ourselves and acts upon us. Stress can be a good thing. We know in orthopedics that allowing some weight or stress in a correct and measured way will enhance the healing of a fracture. In physiology, we know that repeated stress on a muscle in controlled amounts will make that muscle stronger and healthier. Stress when encountered in school, such as the stress of finals or stress encountered in work causes our body to release endorphins, epinephrine, and cortisol. These chemicals help us concentrate, work faster, and work longer in order to overcome and relieve the stress.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is a state of mind or being where we cannot function well because we are distracted. It is within us. In many cases, we are anxious when we feel we are out of control. Stress can cause anxiety if it's unrelenting. Anxiety can shut us down so we can't do our work and when we allow it to control us, we may not be able to do even the simplest of tasks. Stress can be of God, anxiety is not of God.

Stress

Proverbs 12:25 *"An anxious heart weights a man down, but a kind word cheers him up"*

1. What are some causes of stress in your life?

While God has created our bodies so that we can deal with stress, I don't see anywhere in the Bible where God promises to keep us from stress. In fact, in the book of Job, we find an example of a man who endured severe stress in his life all for the purpose of being God's representative in a sort of wager with Satan.

In regard to stress, Job states in **Job 23:10** – *"But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."*

2. In this statement by Job, did Job expect stress in his life?

Leader's notes - Intended answer – *Yes. He didn't say "if" he is tested but "when" he is tested. I think we all need to prepare ourselves for stress in life. The question we have to deal with is "How will we respond to life's stress?"*

3. How did godly men or women in the Bible respond when dealing with stress?

a. Jesus - just before his pending arrest – Matt. 26: 27-46

b. David - when being chased by Saul – I Samuel 19-26

c. Paul - during his numerous arrests and beating – Acts 16-28

d. Are there any other examples from the Bible that you can think of?

Leader's notes:

You will want to look through the above chapters and pick out some specific stories that illustrate how these men responded when encountering stressful events. When dealing with David and Paul, don't assume that all of their responses were godly responses. Remember, just because these 2 men were godly men doesn't mean they weren't prone to sin and failure just like we are. In fact, with David and Paul, you might want to find instances where they did fail so you can discuss how they overcame their failures in ways that glorified God. Jesus, obviously, did not sin when he encountered stress. However, you can see and discuss how even Jesus didn't enjoy the stress of his pending death, how he asked it be removed, but in the end gave up his will for the Father's.

Week 6

Topics 3 - How do we find God's peace in our life?

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week's study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

Anxiety

1. What are some causes of anxiety in your life?

2. How does anxiety manifest itself in your life?

3. **Philippians 4:6,7** – “Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.”

a. In this famous passage on anxiety and prayer, how does Paul teach us to deal with anxiety?

Leader's notes: The point here is to get the students to study the passage for answers to the questions. The answers may seem straightforward but we can't assume the students know that the Bible provides such practical and easy to find answers to our daily problems. Be open to discuss other responses that differ from what I bring up but make sure that all answers have Biblical backing.

Intended answer – We should present our anxieties to God in prayer.

b. If we do as he recommends, what does he say will happen to us?

Leader's notes: We will receive God's peace in regard to the problem that is causing the anxiety.

c. Is this a natural response or a supernatural response?

Leader's notes: This is a supernatural response because it should “transcend all understanding”. In other words, as a Christian our response to anxiety should be very different from a non-Christian's because it is God who is giving us His peace. We are not relying on our own peace or our own strength to overcome.

Final thoughts – When dealing with life’s stress and anxiety, I have found comfort, strength, and wisdom in regularly praying through passages, chapters, or books of the Bible that deal with stress and anxiety. Sometimes, I’ve spent up to 5 months, praying through the same Psalm. Amazingly enough, most days I found something new that God’s Holy Spirit would reveal to me or lead me to pray even though it was the same passage.

Exercise – If you feel overcome by stress and anxiety, find a Psalm to pray through and meditate on each morning. *Psalm 25* helped me when we unexpectedly had to come home from China. You can use this one or find one that God is showing you, but try it! I think you’ll learn something and be blessed.

Week 7

Topic 4 – Is there a moral standard or standard for truth?

Introduction

When learning Mandarin Chinese, a person who uses the correct tones on all the words is said to speak “standard” Mandarin. Since Mandarin is a tonal language, using the correct tones is very important in order to be understood. Pronouncing the word correctly but using an incorrect tone is analogous to singing the correct words to a song but using the wrong melody. You hear the words, they sound familiar, but you can’t recognize the song because the melody is incorrect.

The best example of standard Mandarin is found on Chinese television. Actors and actresses typically speak very “standard”. However, when you live in China, you find that every province or city or even village has its own version of Mandarin. This has happened because Mandarin has no alphabet and no “hints” on which tones you use with a certain character. It’s all memorization and it’s very easy to forget the standard pronunciation. In a region, when a critical mass of people disregard or forget the tone for a character and assign a different tone to that character, then that becomes the accepted way to pronounce that word for that area. So, when you come from a different area that uses a different “accepted” way to pronounce a character, the two different groups cannot understand one another even though they are supposedly speaking the same language. Therefore, in effect, since most people ignore or have even forgotten the standard way to speak Mandarin, China is now a country made of people who speak thousands of “sub-languages”.

This begs the question, “If no one follows the standard, is there a right or wrong way to speak Mandarin Chinese?” (NOTE: Obviously, if everyone is allowed to make up their own way to speak a language then that language will never become widely used and may eventually become obsolete. This could explain why Mandarin, while being the most spoken language in the world based solely upon the fact that there are more Chinese than any other nationality, has never caught on as a “world” language.)

The Standard

Leader’s notes: With these next two questions, I want the students to see that if there is truly no moral standard, then in the worst case scenario a society would devolve into anarchy. In other words, if each person were to make up his/her own right or wrong, then there could be no laws and certainly no law enforcement. If there is no standard, then the biggest, strongest, richest, etc. could freely take from the smallest, weakest, and poorest without recourse. Unfortunately, you see this happen all too often when laws are disregarded or a society’s morals are not based on God’s consistent, unchanging standard.

1. Using the illustration of Mandarin Chinese, discuss the possible outcomes if there was no “standard” of morality or truth for people to follow.

2. Where do we typically get our moral standard?

Leader's notes: Possible sources for moral standards that students might mention are religion, culture, personal feelings, laws, societal pressure, peer pressure, education, etc.

3. According to the following verses, is there ONE standard of morality and truth that all of mankind should follow?

Psalms 25:4,5 – “Show me your ways O Lord, teach me **your paths**; guide me in **your truth** and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”

John 14:6 – Jesus said, “I am the way, and **the truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Leader's notes: Obviously, this is a leading question considering I've highlighted the words truth and paths. I want the students to read for themselves that God does have a standard of truth.

4. There are many Biblical passages that state what God expects from us regarding truth and morals. Look up the following passages and paraphrase what you read about God's standard.

a. **Exodus 20:1-17**

b. **Galatians 5:19-23**

5. Do you think God's truth and moral standards are common to all people and cultures regardless of whether they've read the Bible are not?

5a. Read **Romans 1:18-25** and then discuss the above question in light of this verse.

Leader's notes: Romans 1:18-25 is one excerpt showing that everyone in the world can know of God and can even know God's standards regardless of whether or not they have read the Bible. Therefore, God's standards are a worldwide standard and should not change from culture to culture or country to country. Another verse you can consider is Genesis 1:27 where it says God created man in “His own image”. Bible scholars believe that one outcome of this is that of all the created beings, God gave a conscience only to man, which inwardly gives an indication of right and wrong. Obviously, not only from Romans 1 but also from experience, we know that God has also given us the freedom to ignore what we know is right and do our own thing if we so choose.

6. In today's world, people are reluctant to say that what someone does is right or wrong. No one wants to commit to a standard. Read the following two verses and discuss whether you agree with them or not.

Proverbs 20:11 – “Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.”

Proverbs 14:34 – “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”

Week 8

Topic 4 – Is there a moral standard or standard for truth?

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

Dealing with ethical issues

1. Can we discuss ethics if a society does not have a moral standard?

Leader’s notes: *No we cannot. Ethics requires a moral standard or everyone’s ethics would be deemed “right in his own eyes.”*

2. Think back to the answers given last week regarding where our moral standard comes from. Is there anything wrong with a people whose moral standard comes from their culture or history or education or science? Read **Proverbs 14:12** and discuss with this Proverb in mind.

Leader’s notes: *The main problem with anything other than God’s standard setting people’s moral standard is that cultures, education, and science change and history becomes outdated. Secondly, all these institutions are created by imperfect, sinful beings, which lead to an imperfect and many times unjust standard.*

3. On what should we as Christians base our ethics? Read **Psalms 25:8-10** and discuss.

Leader’s notes: *You can also bring the previously mentioned verses found in Galatians 5 and Exodus 20 into the discussion. Obviously, God’s word is where we find God’s standard and this is what we should follow.*

4. Many people will state that the Bible is outdated and that relying on an outdated document in order to set modern ethical standards is crazy. How would you answer this statement? Read **2 Timothy 3:16** and discuss.

Leader’s notes: *This question may generate lots of discussion with some very emotional viewpoints. Be prepared to answer people’s questions with Bible verses showing God’s standard being right and just. All the verses in this study show that. This discussion might also bring to light people being uncomfortable with the thought of all being “sinners”. Many modern cultures and most non-Christian religions believe that mankind is basically good so that we would have no problem setting and re-setting ethical standards. When encountering Mongolian and Chinese friends who were skeptical of their sinfulness I would give them a test. I would challenge them to go one week without “sinning”. In addition, they could use their own standard for good. The result was that 100% of them could not even live to their own standard for good, much less a perfect standard, for even one week. (I’ll admit that most of these folks were not pathologic or deranged so they would use a reasonable “accepted” standard of morality. However, from my work with prison inmates, they too had a standard of morality that they were unable to live up to. The bottom line is that our own personal experience verifies that we are all sinners as the Bible states.)*

Week 9

Topic 4 – Is there a moral standard or standard for truth?

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

The importance of accountability

1. Unfortunately, life’s issues are rarely black and white. Read the following verses and discuss the questions below:

Proverbs 13:20 – “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

Proverbs 15:22 – “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

Proverbs 15:31 – “He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.”

Proverbs 19:20 – “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.”

Proverbs 13:10 – “Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.”

Hebrews 10:24, 25 – “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Leader’s notes: This group of questions provides you the opportunity to emphasize the importance of your CVF group as a place where you can find accountability or an accountability partner.

- a. What is accountability?
 - b. If you want someone to hold you accountable, what characteristics should that person have?
 - c. Describe godly accountability.
 - d. Do you have accountability built into your life?
2. Does your experience of “going to church” constitute accountability?
3. Re-read Hebrews 10:24, 25 and discuss what “meeting together” means.

Week 10

Topic 5 – God is a God of Relationships

Introduction

In Eastern cultures, relationships are what get things done. (I have had similar experiences while living in both Mongolia and China.) Almost any law can be overlooked or any deal can get done if a person has the right relationship with the right person. If you don't know the right "someone", then the outcome to whatever quandary you encounter is left up to the willingness of the person helping you to navigate endless tangles of bureaucracy. The Chinese word that describes this emphasis on relationship is "guanxi". The closest word we might have in modern American English is "networking" but that word doesn't do justice to the importance of relationships to the Chinese and other Eastern cultures. In the East, "who" you know truly is more important than "what" you know.

This picture of "guanxi" can be used to describe our relationship with God, our Creator. Over the millennia, mankind has created many religious bureaucracies that emphasize knowledge and duty in order to try to make ourselves acceptable to God. However in a much purer sense than China's "guanxi", through Jesus, God emphasized that it really is "Who" you know (Jesus) and not "what" you know that gets things done with God. In this study, we want to look at relationships through God's eyes.

Relationships with Others

1. If God made us for relationship, why are relationships so difficult?

2. In order to find a solution to any problem, we must first diagnose the cause of the problem. Read **Genesis 3:6-13** which describes humanity's first act of disobedience toward God. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, what happened to the relationship between God and man?

Leader's notes: Direct students to verses 8 and 10 if no one speaks. Instead of the close, personal relationship they had previously enjoyed with God, they now hid from Him (v.8). In v.10, we also see that they were afraid of God.

3. How did Adam and Eve feel about themselves after they disobeyed? Did this affect their relationship with God?

Leader's notes: In v. 10, we see that they felt shame because they realized they were naked. This may be an overlooked aspect but I believe it is important because so many relationship problems have shame and insecurity at the root of the problem. It certainly caused a rift in their relationship with God. Ask students if they agree or disagree with this thought.

4. When God confronts Adam and Eve about their disobedience, how did this affect the relationship between Adam and Eve?

Leader's notes: *This is fun because it shows that nothing has changed over thousands of years. Adam blames Eve and then Eve turns and blames Satan. Their response so resonates with our response today when we've been caught doing something we shouldn't. We don't take responsibility and we look to blame others, which of course destroys relationships.*

5. **Colossians 3:13** *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."* If we are all infected with this "sin disease", what will it take for us to have positive, godly relationships?

Leader's notes – *You should use Col. 3:13 and others verses like this to answer this question.*

Assignment – Pray for someone who has caused you hurt and pain.

Leader's notes – *This does not have to be done at the study. This is more for people to take home, consider, and pray about.*

Week 11

Topic 5 – God is a God of Relationships

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

We’re All in this Together

1. Read **Matthew 7:1-5** and discuss the following questions in relation to this verse.

a. When Jesus is talking about “specks of sawdust” and “planks,” to what is he referring?

Leader’s notes: The sawdust and plank is referring to the sin in all our lives. It is common to everyone.

b. Supplemental verse – Proverbs 20:9 - “Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?’”

c. Knowing that we all have sin, what is Jesus saying we should do when we see sin in a friend’s life? See v. 5.

Leader’s notes: Many people use this verse and say that no one should judge anyone else’s life. We all should “live and let live”. However, that is not what this verse is saying. Verse 5 says we should **FIRST** examine ourselves and remove the plank from our own eye, **THEN** we should help our brother remove the speck from his eye. We do have the responsibility of pointing out to our brother when he is living against God but we do it in an attitude of humility knowing that we are “co-sinners” not in an attitude of pride because we are sinless.

2. If we as Christians recognize that everyone shares the same “sin trait”, how should that help us in our relationships with Christian and non-Christian friends?

Leader’s notes: Again, this passage is not about “not judging” but more about helping a friend that is living contrary to God with a heart of compassion and empathy because all share the same condition.

3. Read **Galatians 5:22-26**. In veterinary school and in veterinary practice, we are going to be interacting with many people who don’t share our faith in God. If the characteristics cited in these verses define you, talk about how people might respond to you and/or how will your actions shape their ideas about God?

Leader’s notes – The idea here is that if people know we are Christians and we are living our lives in joy, with peace, having patience and kindness, etc. you will stand out from most other people.

Week 12

Topic 6 – Value and Identity

Introduction

Lyrics from the song “Lose My Soul” by Toby Mac

*The paparazzi flashes and that they think that it's you
But they don't know that who you are is not what you do
True, we get it twisted when we peak at the charts
Yo before we part from the start where's your heart?
You're a pimp, hustler?
Tell me what's your title
America has no more stars now we call them idols
You sit idle
While we teach prosperity
The first thing to prosper should be inside of me
We're free ...
Not because of 22's on the range
But Christ came in range we said yes now we changed
Not the same even though I made a fall
Since I got that call no more Saul now I'm Paul*

Worldly Identity

1. In the above lyrics, what is Toby Mac saying about our culture’s view of a person’s value and identity?

2. Do a quick self-assessment. What are you relying on to make yourself valuable to others? To God?

Leader’s notes: I’m sure we all struggle with wanting to be seen as relevant or important or valuable in the eyes of others. Possible things people may discuss are: value in good grades, value in professional standing, value in money, value in looks, value in sexuality, value in being religious, etc.

Below are some areas where we might be tempted to find our self-worth. Notice that even though these verses were written over 2000 years ago, we’re basically still struggling with the same things. Read the following verses and discuss the questions under each topic.

3. Finding our value in pride

A. Proverbs 15:25 – “The Lord tears down the proud man’s house, but he keeps the widow’s boundaries intact.”

B. Proverbs 16:18 – “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

3-1. Is pride bad? Why or why not?

3-2. In veterinary school and life in general, what things might make us prideful?

Leader's notes: *Since most students who enter veterinary school are high achievers and have always done well academically, one area that might be brought up here is pride in grades. Doing well in school is not bad. However, if our self-worth is in doing well in school then we are setting ourselves up for a big fall. If this is brought up, you can use such verses as **Proverbs 12:24** – “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.” You can also use **Proverbs 22:29** – “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.”*

Other possible areas of misplaced pride are academic achievement or progression, looks, wealth, cars, athletic achievement, etc.

4. Finding our value in wealth

A. I Timothy 6:9,10 – “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

B. Proverbs 11:27 – “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.”

C. Proverbs 18:11 – “The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall.”

D. Proverbs 10:22 – “The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.”

E. Proverbs 11:25 – “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

F. Proverbs 31:16-18 – “She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable . . .”

4-1. Compare the ideas in verses A-C with D-F. How do you reconcile the different ideas concerning wealth in these two sets of verses?

Leader's notes: *There are many directions this discussion can go. However, the point which needs to be brought out in relation to our discussion of identity is that when our wealth defines us or gives us our self-importance, as shown in vv. 1-3, the Bible says we will face many problems. Vv. 4-6 show that wealth in itself is not bad and can be used to glorify God and bless the person.*

Week 13

Topic 6 – Value and Identity

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

Finding our value in outer beauty

A. Proverbs 31:30 – “Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

1. Compare this proverb with today’s cultural obsession with emphasizing outer beauty. (Note: In context, Proverb 31 is describing the attributes of a godly woman. While this proverb mentions women, I would say that the idea of fleeting “good-looks” pertains to men as well.)
2. If outer beauty is truly fleeting, how might that lead to self-value problems when you are no longer young?

Finding our value in religion or religious activity

To better discuss this topic, we must first define the term religious. Many people think that being religious is synonymous with being a good Christian or someone who consistently goes to church, doesn’t drink, doesn’t swear, etc. However, this is a very myopic view of the term. There are many religions in the world, so being religious must be thought of in the context of a particular religion, country, and culture. For example, a Christian living in a mono-cultural, theocratic Muslim country might not be thought of as religious at all since the standard for being religious in a Muslim context is much different than the standard in a Christian context. A Buddhist living in diverse, secular America or Europe might be considered as very religious by some and “heathen” by others depending on who was being asked.

America and American culture has become extremely secularized over the past 50 years. In the 1950’s and 60’s, people typically accepted Christianity as truth and at least practiced a religious form of Christianity. Now most Americans view Christianity as one of many options. In addition, during these decades America has become more culturally diverse, so people coming from other cultures move here with their own religions and ideas about “being religious.” Since they do not experience a “better” option here in their new country, many continue to practice the religion of their home country. As we have previously studied, since present day America has no standard for seeking God, we must now consider the value of being religious in much broader terms.

Therefore, in order to apply the word religious across borders and cultures, we must define the term in a more inclusive context. A broader definition of the word “religious” that could be applied to any religion is *“Following a set of activities, laws, and/or rules*

that strive to make a person more acceptable to God, a god, or a worshipped spiritual being.” During our discussion, I will be using this definition for the word religious. However, since this is a study of Jesus’ message, we will be comparing our present day value of being religious with the value he put on being religious.

Read **Luke 18:9-14** – The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector -- *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.*

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

I tell you the truth that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Leader’s notes: *Not wanting to assume a particular level of Biblical knowledge in your group, you should let the participants know that a Pharisee was a very religious and respected leader in the Jewish religion and culture. He may or may not have been a priest but he certainly was a respected leader whom people looked to as an example of how to practice correct religion. In contrast, someone in Jesus’ time who was a tax collector usually was a Jew who worked for the occupying Roman government. He frequently collected more taxes than was required in the form of bribes or outright stealing. His own people considered him a traitor to his country.*

3. Would you describe the Pharisee as proud or humble? Why?

4. Would you describe the man who was a tax collector as proud or humble?

5. Which one did Jesus point out as being more acceptable to God? Why?

6. So, considering our definition of religious, regardless of which religion we talk about, what value did Jesus put on being “religious”? Will being religious make us more acceptable to God?

Leader’s notes: *Jesus told this parable to make a point. Obviously, the Pharisee was proud of his religious activity and believed that being religious made him better than others. His attitude shows that he believed God probably accepted him as righteous based on his being religious. Conversely, the tax collector had no such illusions about himself. However, strangely enough Jesus pointed to the tax collector as the more righteous in God’s eyes. You need to stress the point that being religious, no matter the religion (even religious Christianity) does not make us acceptable to God. If we put our value in religion or being religious, we’re still missing the boat.*

Week 14

Topic 6 – Value and Identity

Introduction – This is a continuation of last week’s study, take a minute to review the important ideas discussed in your previous study.

Godly Identity

Galatians 2:20 – *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

Consider the Apostle Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:20 and answer the following questions.

1. In light of this verse, where do you think Paul received his self-worth?
2. Was his self-worth a result of anything he did or any particular talent he had?

Ephesians 2:8-9 *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Ephesians 2:8-9 is a statement written by Paul found in his letter to the new Christians in Ephesus. According to his statement here, answer the following questions.

3. What is grace?
4. Can we earn God’s grace?
5. Can we do anything to make ourselves acceptable to God?
6. In light of Jesus’ parable about the Pharisee and tax collector and Paul’s statement about how he was made acceptable to God, do you think Jesus came to start a new religion or did he do something that was totally different from what had ever been done before?

7. What is the difference in what Jesus taught and did compared to what well-known men who started new religions did? (These would be historically well-known men such as the Siddartha Gautama (Buddhism – 6th century BC), Mohammed (Islam 600 AD) as well more recent men such as Joseph Smith Jr. (Mormonism – 1830 AD).)

Leader's notes: *Hopefully the students will see that Jesus' goal was not to start a new religion but was to reconcile fallen mankind to their Creator God. If we think back to the definition of religion I gave in this study, we see that really all religions are the same in the sense that all require followers to do some activity in order to make them acceptable to God(s). Jesus taught something totally different. He basically said that man can do nothing, short of living a perfect life, to be acceptable to God. Therefore, it would take an act of God, a sacrificial gift free to all people, to reconcile mankind to their Creator. Stress that this makes Christian faith and grace a polar opposite of any of the world's religions INCLUDING religious forms of Christianity.*

8. We've spent a lot of time looking at the sources of our self-worth and our identity. If our self-worth and value are found in a relationship with God, how will that affect the way we live our lives?

Leader's notes: *Be sensitive to people in your group who seem to find these concepts new. There may be people in your group who are not relying on Christ for their salvation. Be available to these people to talk about Jesus' work and encourage them to rely on Christ and his completed work for them. Remember, you don't have the ability or the responsibility to "convert" anyone to Christ. Your job is to represent Christ and let the Holy Spirit work on other people's hearts.*