

MAILBOX BIBLE COURSE

LESSON 1 – TEENS AND ADULTS BIBLE STUDY – WHAT ABOUT SERIES

Welcome to our Mailbox Bible Study Course. We trust you will enjoy these lessons as much as we did composing them. We are glad to be able to serve the Lord and you in this way. Many are being saved and helped through these simple Bible lessons. We suggest that you try to do one lesson each week; this will keep your interest in them active. This particular course contains five lessons on Teens and Adults Bible Studies – What about series. Please save this lesson onto your computer, read the lesson carefully, full in the answers in the blocks provided then attach this lesson into an email addresses to us biblelessons@uniserve.com and then push your send button. We will then evaluate and return any corrections to you with your next lesson. On completion of the full course, you will receive a beautifully presented certificate. Should you have difficulty opening or sending this file to us, please let us know by return email. We suggest that you print these lessons and put them in a binder for future studies.

May God richly bless you as you proceed?
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PREFACE

By Malcolm Horlock, Cardiff

The articles in this booklet deal with moral and sexual issues, which confront both single and married young Christians. Regrettably, little (if any) guidance is given in assemblies today about such matters. The subjects dealt with require careful and sensitive handling and I am very grateful to the authors for their readiness to tackle them. The range of subjects covered in this booklet is necessarily limited and the articles, which are included, concentrate on normal, healthy relationships. For Christian counsel on such matters as AIDS and homosexuality I must direct the reader to specialized publications to be found in good Christian bookshops. For example, those who require Christian advice and help on the subject of homosexuality will find a useful section in James Dobson's book Marriage and Sexuality. It is my hope that the following articles will prove to be of direct and practical help to those who, wishing to live in a way pleasing to the Lord, are prepared to invest the time to read them. I commend the booklet to all such.

LESSON 1 WHAT ABOUT FRIENDSHIPS? (By Peter Brino, Cardiff)

ANTHONY IS ALWAYS ON HIS OWN.

He looks at the ground and kicks the heads off the daisies as he walks along in the summer; in winter he kicks the fallen leaves. Its not that he is mentally dull: in fact, he is very bright. He is just lonely. He has not learnt the art of making and keeping friends. He looks unhappy and feels unwanted. God never intended me to be like Anthony. In fact, He made me to appreciate and enjoy friendship. He said, 'it is not good that man should be alone,' Genesis 2:18. There is certainly nothing wrong then with a Christian having friends. Many of God's finest servants are spoken of in scripture as having friends; consider Job 2:1; 2 Samuel 15:37; and 3 John 1:4. Even our Lord called His disciples 'My friends', John 15:14-15. It is significant that Solomon wrote no less than thirty-two Proverbs about the wise choice of friends. Friendship is a God-given gift. It is a positive force in my life, intended to enhance my pathway on earth. Friends are good for me; they are part of God's plan for me. However, as with so many of God's gifts, I must choose how I use it. So what about my friends? Whom should I choose? Does it really matter? Are some folk better companions for me than others? What advice does the Bible give? In this article, we will look at the biblical principles, which underpin the choice that I make of my friends, and try to draw some practical lessons from these principles.

POSITIVE FRIENDSHIPS

The first principle, which I learn from God's word, is that friends will always influence me. However strong my faith is; however 'spiritual' I think I am; however determined I maybe - I will be swayed by friends. Solomon wrote, 'Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul', Proverbs 22:24-25. Leighton made a profession of faith when he was fourteen. When I met him last, he was on remand, due to stand trial for thirty-seven offences! He had known that what he was doing was wrong but then all his friends stole cars and went ram raiding. He had to conform to their standards to belong to their group. He did not like doing it but pressure from the group demanded a certain kind of behaviour. He landed himself in prison because the friends he chose had influenced him to do what was wrong and he did not have the backbone to stand up for what was right. Friends put that kind of pressure on us. Spiritual friends encourage me in spiritual ways; carnal friends in carnal ways. It will be difficult for me to talk about improper and unprofitable things when my spiritual friends want to discuss the Lord; but it will be hard to mention the Lord Jesus if the current pop idol is the centre of the conversation! It goes without saying that I cannot go to harmful places in the company of spiritual friends who refuse to go, but unspiritual ones will encourage me to frequent such places. Spiritual friends will foster positive growth. To be spiritual is to be taught by the Holy Spirit, who produces 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' in my life, Galatians 5:22-23. My spiritual friends will create the atmosphere in which these qualities can develop. The study of 'friendship' in the Bible teaches me that true friendship is linked to obedience to God. The Lord Jesus said 'You are my friends if you do whatever I command you', John 15:14. 'How boring!' someone will say, 'Who would want to be a friend of someone who just does what God says? Where is the fun in that?' I can assure you - it is everywhere! In that very same passage, the Lord lists some of the benefits, which come from that kind of friendship:

- (i) 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love';
- (ii) 'These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you and that your joy might be full';
- (iii) 'No longer do I call you servants ... but ... friends; for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you'; and

- (iv) 'I chose you ... that you should go and bear fruit ... that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you', John 15:10-11 and , John 15:15-16. The rewards are tremendous.

I remain in His love in a world of hatred, selfishness and greed, His love surrounds me. It is not a love, which is dependent upon the things, which I possess, see Proverbs 14:20. This love is constant and unchangeable. Good Christian friendships also produce joy. Our Lord spoke of 'full' JOY. In fact, if I have never had spiritual companions I do not know what real joy is. My own home is often full of young people. Every Tuesday evening between twenty and thirty of them, come round, most of whom are seeking positive, spiritual friendships. The house is full of happiness and laughter. It is never boring and dull. Love is very evident and there is a delight as each one tells of what he or she has learnt of the Lord during the past week. Friendships based on obedience to God are not just holy friendships. They are happy, solid, lasting friendships, saturated with His love, vibrant with joy and delighting in God's blessings. They are friendships which stand firm in the trials of life; for a true friend will even 'lay down his life for his friends', John 15:13. One more piece of biblical advice about the friends to choose. Choose the same kind of friends for yourself as God does for Himself! These are those who believe and trust Him. James reminded his readers that, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Moreover, he was called the friend of God', James 2:23. Abraham trusted God to give him as many descendants as there were stars - at a time when he did not even have one son. In addition, what made his faith the more remarkable, both he and his wife were really old. Nevertheless, he knew God, and God walked with him every step of the way. He guided him through life's problems, blessed him with food and land, finally did the impossible, and gave him a son! That is the kind of friend to seek one who, believing God, is a friend of God. Abraham learnt to 'walk by faith, not by sight', 2 Corinthians 5:7. That is not easy, but imagine the comfort and support of having the kind of friend who, in the middle of a terrifying sea storm, can stand tall on the ship's deck and say 'Take heart... for I believe God', Acts 27:25. Luke must have been very glad of a friend like that!

FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD

I was once told of a family whose Christian father was so concerned that his children would make friends with 'the wrong people' that he schooled them at home and set up a home-based business in the converted loft of their home making sporrans for kilts! The father was the only one in the family who had any contact with the world outside Well, how do I balance the command 'Do not love the world', I John 2: 15, with the fact that, 'God so loved the world that he gave', John 3:16? Alternatively, how do I balance the statement, 'friendship with the world is enmity with God', James 4:4, with the fact that our Lord was 'a friend of tax collectors and sinners', Matthew 11:19? It is important to understand what the New Testament means by 'the world'. The Greek word for 'world' is used in various ways. It can refer to:

- (i) The earth, the physical world in which we live. This had its beginning, Matthew 24:21, and its foundation, Matthew 25:34. The 'world' can also signify
- (ii) Humanity, the world of people. This is the world which God loves, John 3:16, and of which Jesus is the light, John 8:12. Then there is the 'world' which consists of
- (iii) Man's sinful actions, attitudes, and lifestyle.

This is the world, which is dominated by the devil and characterized by sinful passion and pride, John 12:31; 1 John 2:16. It is with this 'world' that I must not make friends! Paul wrote about 'the basic principles of this world' and made it clear that sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed all belong to those basic principles, Colossians 2:20; and Colossians 3:5. He also included such things as anger, temper, malice, slander, filthy language and lying, Colossians 3:8-9. All these things belong to the 'world'. They are opposed to God. The 'world' is spoken of by Peter as a place of corruption, 2

Peter 1:4; by Paul as a place of moral darkness, Philippians 2:15; by James as a place of defilement, James 1:27; and by John as a place full of lust, 1 John 2:16. These are John's words, 'all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world', NASV. No wonder then that James says that 'friendship with the world is enmity with God', James 4:4. Nevertheless, our Lord came into the world of men and became known as 'the friend of sinners.' He befriended them because He had come to call sinners to repentance, Matthew 9:13. Our Lord cared for sinners; He had meals with them; He talked with them; He listened to them. He had come 'to seek and to save that which was lost', Luke 19:10, and seeking takes time, effort and patience. I had a friend in my early teens. He often called to my home and I went to his. We had meals together, played sport together and talked endlessly. The greatest thrill of our friendship was when I led him to the Lord. Shortly after he was saved, his family emigrated to New Zealand where he was baptized, received into fellowship and married a daughter of one of the elders! It was a friendship, which led to salvation. The wise man said, 'He who wins souls is wise', Proverbs 11:30, and a lot of wisdom is required in friendship evangelism. When the Lord sought those He regarded as lost sheep, He went to where they were, and I will need to go to the same place! Generally speaking, our society is one, which is un-churched and unconcerned about religion. It is my responsibility to show that God cares for the individual, and forming a friendship somebody is a positive way of doing that. It will mean that I give time to people - that I will get to know them and their problems. It will mean that I will need to go to where they are - to their home and to their circle of friends. It may involve playing badminton with them or going out for a meal with them. However, it will not involve clubbing, pubbing or partying with them. Friendship with that 'world' is still enmity against God. Being a friend of sinners is not an excuse for worldliness. Friendship does not mean that I will always agree with the person that I am trying to win for the Lord. Nor does it mean that I will always do what they do or go where they go. Worldliness will give me wrong views of Christ and engender wrong attitudes and emotions. Paradoxically, therefore, although I am not to 'love the world' (of ungodliness) because God says so, 1 John 2: 15, I am to 'love the world' (of people) because God did and does, John 3:16!

SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS

When I was thirteen, I noticed that girls were not silly creatures to be ignored or avoided at any cost but were very interesting and, indeed, stirred my emotions! Many of my school friends were beginning to go out with girls and some of my Christian friends were, too. Here was a new dilemma in my life. What was I to do about girls? I had been taught that the Bible has the answer to all life's problems and so it was the obvious place for me to turn for help and counsel. However, I searched in vain to find anything, which dealt directly with the kind of relationships, which are a common part of our society. In Bible times, your dad usually chose your wife for you, Genesis 24:4, or at least did the formal bit and got for you the one you chose, Judges 14:3. I did find some principles, however, that I could apply to the situation, which faces most of us today. These are:

1. Any special friends of this kind need to be formed between believers. The Christian must not be 'yoked' to an unbeliever in marriage; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17. This is fundamental.
2. The relationship must result from pure thinking, pure actions, and pure motives, Philippians 4:8; 1 Timothy 5:2; 1 Peter 4:2. Anything, which produces lust within me, cannot be from God. That belongs to the life that I lived without God, Titus 3:3, and which has been totally changed by the 'kindness and love of God our Saviour', Titus 3:4.
3. One important rule laid down by Paul for Christian living was, 'Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything permissible but not everything builds up', 1 Corinthians 10:23

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(my rendering) Here then is the test 'Will this special friendship build me up? What effect is it likely to have on the other person?' We have enough trials in the Christian pathway as it is without adding to them unnecessarily. It is wrong to flirt with members of the opposite sex; such activity leaves emotional scars and damages rather than builds up.

4. When I have offered my body as a living sacrifice, holy and well pleasing to God, Romans 12:1, the follow-on is that I then 'prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God', Romans 12:2. Before going out with someone, I need to ask, 'is God in it? Is it His will for me?'

There are then four questions, which should be asked before entering into any boy-girl relationship:

1. Is my friend a believer? If the answer is 'No', the special relationship must not continue.
2. Is my thinking pure? If the answer is 'No', then lust will certainly lead me into sin; any relationship built on such a foundation must stop.
3. Is it beneficial? Does it build up both me and the other person?
4. Is this God's will for me? If I am satisfied that the answer is 'Yes' then I can continue with it knowing that He will bless it.

The last two questions are usually the hardest to answer and will need much prayer.

Conclusion

In summary, I need to ask, 'What kind of friends am I making? Are they helping me spiritually or do they pull me down to their level of worldliness and spiritual poverty?' I finish with a different kind of question you might like to ask yourself, 'And what kind of friend am I to others?' Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the New King James Version.

TEST - LESSON 1 – TEENS AND ADULTS BIBLE STUDY – WHAT ABOUT SERIES

1. What happens when you make friends with an angry man?

2. Name three fruits of the Spirit?

3. What condition did Jesus say made them His friends?

4. What man in the Bible is called "the friend of God?"

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5. What does the word "world" mean in John 3:16?

6. What are some of the basic principles of the world?

7. How did Peter describe the "world?"

8. What does Prov. 11:30 teach as wisdom?

9. What is the main thing to know about choosing a "special friend?"

10. What one thing has helped you most in this lesson?

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