

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INT.

Study to show "The Way of True life,"

BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE

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Joseph: Parenting in Tough Times - *Matthew 1:18-25; Z-13-23*

Do you sometimes feel that today's family is in decline? Television comedies picture weak parents with mouthy (but oh so clever) children. Newspapers shout threats of murder, rape and drugs. Support groups form almost overnight for single parents, families of alcoholics, and survivors of family abuse. And these can hardly keep up with the need. But even in the more simple era of two thousand years ago, Joseph's job as parent was no simple task. Joseph lived in an occupied land where political enemies did not target their hostilities at adults alone. Joseph had to move his family long distances—quickly and on short notice. And then there were the angels...

1. What do you think is difficult about being a father today?
2. Read Matt. 1:18-25. What unusual circumstances did Joseph face during his engagement and early marriage?
- 3- What alternatives to his planned marriage do you think that he considered?
4. Verse 19 says that Joseph was a righteous man. How do you think Joseph's righteousness contributed to the way he handled the events here?
5. What information did God reveal to Joseph? How might this information help Joseph in his work as husband and father?
6. Study the names given to the new baby. What do they reveal about the importance of Joseph's job?
7. Read Matthew 2:13-23. What new responsibilities faced Joseph at this point?
8. If you had been the father of this young family, what would you be worrying about during these events?
9. We have read of three instances in which an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph. What would it be like to have angels speak to you in this way? How do you think these experiences affected Joseph?
10. God used a human family to care for and protect the infant Jesus. Have you felt protected emotionally or physically within your own family? Explain.
11. We experience both love and pain in any family. Some families draw us to God by their example of faith. Others drive us to God by the emptiness they create. How has God used your family to nudge you toward spiritual maturity?

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Anna and Simeon: Growing Old with God

Luke 2:21-40

I wonder what Sheri will be like when she is old," mused my prospective son-in-law.

"I can't wait to see her then—all wrinkles, but just as much laughter as ever."

It seemed an odd comment from a twenty-two-year-old with decades of life ahead of him. But Joel planned a marriage that would last, and lasting power meant old age. "I want us to grow old together," he said.

Perhaps more of us will enter old age with greater grace if we plan for it before we get there.

1. What do you want to be like when you are old?
2. Read Luke 2:21-35. Why did Jesus and his family go to Jerusalem?
3. In what ways was Simeon already prepared to meet Jesus (w. 25-27)?
4. What did Simeon know about the past—and the future (w. 29-35)?
5. Simeon's prayer is the Nunc Dimittis, a Latin term meaning "now dismiss." Why did Simeon feel that he was ready for God to dismiss him from this life in *peace*?
6. What would you like to happen so that you could say at the end of your life, "Lord, now dismiss your servant in peace"?
7. Read Luke 2:36-40. Why might you say that Anna's life was difficult, but fulfilling?
8. How did God use Anna?
9. How did the next stage of Christ's life prepare him to do and be what Anna and Simeon had predicted (w. 39-40)?
10. What do you admire about the aging characters in this story?
11. What could you do now to prepare for an old age that is at peace with God?

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A Throw-away Woman: Redeemed by Christ - *John 8:1-11*

My friend "Tom" is a throw-away person. Not to me and not to God. But to most people, Tom is a nuisance, best jollied out of a foul mood or ignored like a pesky child. But Tom is a real man.

Plagued by mental illness, he has lost his home, his marriage, his church, and over seventy jobs. (Imagine the effort it took to *find* seventy jobs!) Sometimes Tom can barely get out of bed. At other times, he can't sleep—for night after night. Some days his mind flits at fast forward with no pause button for organization. On other days his mind plods so slowly that he can't figure out a sales slip. Tom is nobody's favorite dinner guest.

Some people are kind to Tom—though few admit him to friendship. Others simply use him: as low-paid worker, as the butt of a joke. To them, Tom is like Kleenex, used once and thrown in the trash.

Yet Tom is real. His laughter is real, and so are his tears. But he joins a host of others who can't quite function in today's society. If society were an assembly line, people like Tom would land in the discard heap.

1. What kinds of people does our society tend to "throw-away"?
2. Read John 8:1-6a. What events lead to Christ's meeting with the woman?
3. What evidence do you see that the temple leaders were using this woman for their own purposes?
4. When have you sensed that you were being treated like trash? What effect did that experience have on you?
5. Leviticus 20:10, "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death," is the law that these religious leaders had in mind. In view of that law, why do you think that they brought the woman—but not the man?
6. Verse 6 refers to a trap. Why was their question a trap? (See also John 18:31.)
7. What underlying problems were not being addressed by the accusations against the woman?
8. Read John 8:6b-11. How did Christ's actions show that the woman was no a throw-away person in his sight?
9. Jesus spoke to both the woman and the religious leaders about sin. Why?
10. Jesus showed that he valued the woman even though the temple leaders did not. What words or actions help you to feel valued?
11. What difference does it make to you that Christ values you—no matter what you have done?
12. The religious leaders used the woman to gain what they thought was a greater good. What is wrong with using people in this way?
13. Many people are almost faceless to us. We see them only for what they can do for us. With other people we avoid them because their problems are too big for us to fix, or because they embarrass us. Think of some of the "throw-away people" who enter your life. How might you treat these people in a way that mirrors Christ?

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A Blind Beggar: Seeing Jesus with Open Eyes - *John 9*

*Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus. To reach out and touch him, and say that we love him.
Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen, Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus.* BOB CULL

We want to see Jesus, hear him, know him. But sometimes we feel almost blind and deaf and unfeeling to his touch. Yet, if we review our history with Jesus, we will find times when he has indeed opened our eyes. And bit by bit he has grown our faith. This was also true of a first-century blind man, blind both physically and spiritually. But Jesus opened his eyes. And slowly, step by faltering step, the blind man "saw" Jesus.

1. What are some of your earliest mental pictures of Jesus? '
2. Read John 9. What do you admire about the blind man?
3. What do you think Christ's words in verses 1-5 meant to the blind man at this point?
4. How would you describe the beggar's faith as he responded to the situations in verses 6-12?
5. Study the beggar's conversation with the Pharisees in verses 13-34. What pressures did he have to cope with?
6. Notice the references to sin in verses 1-2, 29 and 34. Why are these kinds of accusations particularly painful? What is wrong with the view of sin portrayed by these accusations?
7. Verse 16 says that the Pharisees were divided in their opinion of Jesus. Why?
How did the beggar draw on the debate he had heard between the Pharisees as he developed his own view of Jesus?
8. Study Christ's closing conversation with the beggar in verses 35-41. How did the events leading to verse 34 prepare the beggar for this second meeting with Jesus?
9. Study the beggar's statements of faith in verses 11-12, 17, 25, 27, 30-33, and 36-38. How does each statement reflect a gradual opening of his spiritual eyes?
10. What are some of the stages that your own faith has passed through?
11. If you were to explain to the Pharisees Christ's statement about blindness and sight in verses 39-41, what would you say to them?
12. The beggar spent many years in darkness preparing to see. How have the "dark times" of your own life prepared you for deeper faith in Jesus?

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Lazarus: A Man Who Died Twice - *John 11:1-44*

In the spring, crocuses bloom on my daughter's grave. It's the fourth spring now, nearly four years since a car wreck took her life and the life of her unborn child. That first fall, just weeks after her death, I dug dried bulbs into the ground, willing myself to believe that by spring they'd blossom and convince me of life within their earth-bound cage. Each fall, I've added more bulbs, a garden of hyacinths, scilla, daffodils, snowdrops, red tulips (her favorite color). And each spring, I pick around in the grass, finding the first shoots that reassure me of resurrection—theirs and hers. The early numbness that had me standing over her wrecked car and sobbing, "No, it's not her. It can't be," has been replaced. And I have had to know that Sheri is indeed gone from this life. Yet somewhere inside, even after all these years, I resist that fact. Just this week, I dreamed that Sheri was alive and well and talking with me—planning for her future. Death is hard to accept.

1. Why is the reality of death so hard for us to grasp?
2. Read Jhn 11:1-16. What does this passage tell you about the relationship between Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Jesus?
3. If you had been one of Christ's disciples, what would you be thinking on your walk south to Bethany?
4. How might Christ's words soften the disciples' fears about the trip?
5. Read John 11:17-37. What signs of a home in grief do you see in this section
6. If you have experienced the death of someone near you, what kinds of help did you particularly appreciate at that time?
7. What all did Martha include in her personal statement of faith (w. 24, 27)? Study Christ's conversation with his friend (21-27). What comfort could she find in Christ's words of verse 25?
- 8- What comfort did Jesus offer to his friend Mary (w. 33-37)?
9. Look again at the accusations in verses 21, 32 and 37. What did these people know and not know about Jesus?
10. Read John 11:38-44. If you had been in the crowd outside the tomb, what thoughts and feelings would you have had? What questions would remain in your mind?
11. If you were Lazarus, do you think you would want to be raised from the dead? Explain.
12. Although we can't raise the dead, what are some ways we can follow Jesus' example and comfort those in grief?

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Mary Magdalene: Loving Jesus in Practical Ways

Luke &1-3; Mark 1237-47;John 20:1-18

Twelve men followed Jesus. He chose these disciples early, while his ministry still centered in Galilee; all but one of them came from that region where Christ himself grew up. These men followed Jesus for three years listened to his teachings, assisted in his acts of kindness. So special was their role in Christ's ministry that later writers called them "The Twelve." But Jesus had other followers too. The women. Some are nameless. Others, appear with their sons' names. And some walk through the pages of text with their own names intact. These women also assisted in Christ's work. They too learned from his teachings. And they served Jesus in practical ways that some of the men seemed to forget. Mary Magdalene was one of these.

1. What are some practical ways that you have seen people express love?
2. Luke 8:1-3- What can you know about Mary Magdalene from these verses?
3. Read Mark 15:37-47. Why do you think Mary Magdalene chose to be present at Christ's death?
4. What would she have seen and heard and learned and felt as she watched Christ die?
- 5- What changes had to take place in Mary Magdalene for her to move from a person inhabited by seven demons to the person who followed Jesus all the way to his death?
6. Jesus delivered Mary Magdalene from seven demons. What influences of evil has Jesus defeated in your own life?
7. Read John 20:1-18. If you were a detective observing all the events in these verses, what "clues" would you record?
8. What variety of feelings do you sense in the meeting between Mary Magdalene and Jesus?
9. Study Vs 17. What does it reveal about the relationships between the various people Jesus mentioned here?
10. What effect would Mary Magdalene's message have on the disciples—at on the future church?
11. Meditate for a moment on the ways Christ's death and resurrection have¹ influenced your own life. How are you different because of the events Mary Magdalene witnessed on those days?
12. Briefly skim all three passages. What all do you find that shows Mary Magdalene as a person who exercised her love for Jesus in practical ways? What are some practical ways that you can show your own love for Jesus?

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Thomas: Disciple of Doubt - **John 14:1-7; 20:19-31**

It descended one day like a dark cloud. The niggling questions that had pricked at the back of my mind for months suddenly clumped into one large doubt. Maybe Jesus didn't really rise from the dead. Maybe it was all a skillful hoax. Maybe I, along with other deluded Christians, was one whom the apostle Paul had described as "to be pitied more than all men." I prayed. I read the Scriptures. I talked with believing friends. I read commentaries about the resurrection. Still I doubted. One respected friend laughed her own form of disbelief—at me. "No Christian of three decades' standing could seriously ask such questions," she said. Did she think I was playing some school-girl game? In the end, the doubts settled. And my faith strengthened—even more than before.

1. What would you say or do if you had a close friend who was encountering serious doubts about the Christian faith?
2. Christ's followers had been with him for three years. Though they did know it, his death was a mere day away. John 14 begins Christ's last recorded conversation with his disciples. Read John 14:1-7. What all do the disciples know, from these words, about Christ's future and their a (w. 1-4)?
3. What value did Thomas's question have for himself and the others who heard Christ's words (w. 5-7)?
4. What difference does it make that Jesus said, "I *am* the way, the truth, and the life," instead of "I know" or "I taught you the way, the truth, and the life - What words here comfort you? Explain.
6. Jesus died (as he said he would) and was buried on Friday. John 20 record what happened on Sunday. Read John 20:19-31- What all did Thomas miss not being present with the rest of the disciples on Sunday night (w. 19-23
7. In view of the differences between what the ten disciples had experienced and what Thomas had experienced, how do you think Thomas and the others differed in the way they spent their next week?
8. How did Jesus deal with Thomas's doubts (w. 26-29)?
9. What internal changes had to take place for Thomas to say the words of verse 28?
10. What is your own place in the picture described in verses 29-31?
11. How might a period of doubt, such as Thomas experienced, have a long-term positive effect?
12. John 20:31 says that "by believing you may have life in his name." How has belief in Christ's death and resurrection given you life?

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Simon: Bargaining with God - *Acts 8:9-25*

There are no atheists in foxholes," wrote William T. Cummings in 1942 his *Sermons on Bataan*. While crouched in a trench with bullets zinging overhead, even the most reluctant heart begins to bargain with God—just case he might exist. "God, if you'll only get me out of this alive, I'll. . ." B foxhole faith rarely lasts. The crisis passes, and thoughts of God recede toll background. To the foxhole "Christian" God is there mostly for emergence But foxholes are not the only bargaining fields with God. Too many of relate to God mostly for what we think we can gain from that relationship, In ancient Samaria, a man named Simon stands as an example of all that is wrong with attempts to use God for our own designs.

1. Why do people try to bargain with God?
2. Read Acts 8:9-17. What words here reveal the kind of man Simon was (9-13)?
- 3- What danger was Simon to the people who followed him?
4. What indications do you see that Simon's practice of sorcery would not fit with his new faith in Jesus?
5. Why did Peter and John go from Jerusalem to Samaria (w. 14-17)?
6. Read Acts 8:18-25. What precisely did Simon want, and how did he propose to get it (w. 18-19)?
7. What uses might Simon have planned to make of this gift?
8. What did Simon's offer suggest that he believed about God? About the abilities God gives to his people?
9. What all, according to Peter, was wrong with Simon's attitude and his offer (w. 20-23)?
10. Study Simon's response in verse 24. Do you think this represented genuine repentance or another attempt to bargain with God? Explain.
11. What, other than money, do people use to try to get what they want from God?
12. Take a moment to name a dozen or so of God's attributes. For example, "God is holy, God is kind, God has all power," and so on. How might you adjust your praying so that it better reflects what you know to be true of God, rather than what you hope to get from him?

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A Prison Guard: Getting Free from Internal Prisons - *Acts 16:6-40*

In the first century, in what is now the country of Bulgaria, lay the city of Philippi. It was ten miles inland from the Aegean Sea, on a plain between two rivers with gold-rich Mount Pangaeus to the west. The city straddled a major trade route, the Via Egnatia, which headed for the seaport Neapolis. Philippi had earned its name in 356 B.C. from ruler Philip II, who named it, of course, for himself. But in 167 B.C. the city became a Roman colony. By the time of Christ's birth, Philippi was home to many retired Roman Army veterans who had fought on the wrong side of internal political wars. It also housed a famous medical school, the probable alma mater of Luke, author of the book of Acts. Like many ethnocentric Roman communities, Philippi had little tolerance for "odd" faiths and practices. The ruins of an arch one mile west of town still stand as reminder of that intolerance. Outside that gate lay cemeteries, meeting sites of foreign religions, and all else that Romans classified as "impure." The River Gangites flows nearby, a likely spot where the apostle Paul met a woman named Lydia. The city of Philippi was not a friendly place to start a church. But Paul did just that.

1. Read Acts 16:6-15. How did the Christian church in Philippi begin? What attracts you to your particular church congregation?
2. What does this passage tell you about Lydia's character and her services towards the member of that church?
3. Since the slave girl was telling the truth about God, why do you think that Paul told the evil spirit to leave her (w. 16-19)? What influences (good and bad) complicate your own life?
4. Christ's power is *greater* than any power of evil—which is why Paul commands the evil spirit to leave the girl in the name of Jesus Christ. As we reflect on the power of Jesus, what practical steps can we take in your struggle against the evil that touches in our own life?
5. Look again at verses 19-21. What problems for the new church in Philippi were the charges against Paul and Silas likely to create? How did Paul's method of leaving Philippi act as further protection for the church he had founded (w. 37-40)?
6. The prison guard was himself a prisoner: a prisoner to his job, and a prisoner to his inner fears. What all did God do to free him from each of those prisons?
7. Paul told the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." What freedoms does this new relationship with Jesus provide? If Jesus is your Lord, what structure does this bring to your life?
8. From what you can see of the jailer's actions, why do you think that he would be a valuable addition to the new Christian church in Philippi?
9. When you think of the future of your church, what worries come to your mind? What can you do to help protect your church from the kind of harm that you envision?

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Priscilla and Aquila: Practicing Hospitality - *Acts 18*

*She makes you feel when you arrive
How good it is to be alive.
She promptly orders fresh-made tea
However late the hour may be.
She leads you to a comfy room
With fire ablaze — and flowers abloom.
She shows you cupboards large and wide,
No hats or frocks of hers inside!
A writing-table meets your eye,
The newest novels on it lie.
The bed is just a nest of down,
Her maid puts out your dinner-gown.
The water's hot from mom 'til night,
Her dinners fill you with delight.
She never makes you stand for hours
Admiring children, dogs or flowers!
What better way to please her guest?
The Perfect Hostess lets you rest.*

ELIZABETH PAGET, in *The Perfect Hostess* compiled by Rose Henniker Heaton, 1931

We smile at this gentle expression of hospitality from a past generation. Today's fast-paced host or hostess may order pizza and rent a movie -and please the guest just as well. But, though the preparations differ, the warm feeling of hospitality doesn't change. Hospitality was a gift even in the apostle Paul's era. And he was the recipient.

1. What do you do to prepare for houseguests? When you are a guest, what forms of hospitality do you most enjoy?
2. Read Acts 18 and Romans 16:3-5a. In what different ways did Priscilla and Aquila show hospitality?
3. Focus on Acts 18. Why would Paul be a difficult houseguest?
4. What local controversies do you think Paul discussed with Priscilla and Aquila around the kitchen table at night (Acts 18:1-17)?
5. What evidence do you see that, in spite of the hostility, God was using Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:8-11)?
6. What do you think Priscilla and Aquila's hospitality contributed to Paul's ability to do God's work in Corinth?

7. What do you think Priscilla and Aquila gained from Paul?
8. When have you grown spiritually or emotionally because of the presence of a guest in your home?
9. What further examples of hospitality do you see among the early Church in this text (Acts 18:18-28)?
10. Why do you think Priscilla and Aquila traveled with Paul to Ephesus—then stayed there (Acts 18:24-28)?
11. What reasons did Apollos have to be grateful to Priscilla and Aquila?
12. Look again at Romans 16:3-5a. What would be difficult about having the church meet in your home? What would be rewarding?
13. What are some practical ways by which you can use your own home (or phone) to accomplish God's work?

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Governor Felix: Saying "Wait" to God - *Acts 24*

The apostle Paul and the Roman Governor Felix marched toward each other on a collision course. Paul had returned to Jerusalem from his third missionary trip. In an attempt to mend relationships with the Jews, he worshiped in the temple, being careful to observe the most strict religious purification laws. But Jews, who knew that Paul had spent the last decade teaching Gentiles about the new Christian faith, incited a riot. Roman soldiers eventually rescued Paul by protecting him in their own barracks. When forty Jews plotted to neither eat nor drink until Paul was dead, the Roman commander took four hundred and seventy troops and escorted Paul by night sixty miles north to Caesarea for safe-keeping—and for trial. Felix, governor of Caesarea, had moved from slavery, to freedom, to high government power. He married at least three times. His third wife, Drusilla, was a mere girl who had married the King of Emesa at fifteen, but whom Felix seduced for himself a year later. Historian Tacitus described Felix as "a master of cruelty and lust who held the power of a tyrant with the disposition of a slave." He would decide Paul's fate.

1. When do you have trouble making decisions?
2. Read Acts 24. What words show the effort Tertullus made to gain the favor of Felix (w. 2-8)?
3. What charges did Tertullus bring against Paul (w. 5-6)?
4. If you had been a lawyer for Paul's defense, how would you counter this kind of prosecution?
5. How did Paul answer the charges against him (w. 10-21)? (What did he admit and what did he deny?)
6. How did Paul's belief in resurrection influence his life (w. 15-16)?
7. If you believed that a person who dies simply ceases to exist in body and soul, how would you conduct your life differently? Explain.
8. What would it mean for you to keep your conscience clear before?
9. What can you know of Felix's attitude toward the Christian faith by the way he handled Paul's legal case (w. 22-27)?
10. Verse 25 says that Felix was afraid. Why?
11. What part does fear play in your own faith or lack of faith in Jesus?
12. Paul was in the custody of Felix for two years. What opportunities did Felix have during that time?
13. What did you consider in making your own response to the Christian faith? (Or, what do you need to consider before you respond to Jesus?)
14. What is dangerous about saying "Wait" to God?

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Study to show "The Way of True life,"

BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE

Directions: - You should read and re-read the passage(s). You must know what the passages say before you can understand what it means and how it applies to you. Be ready to share constructively, what God is teaching us in the passages. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. By all means participate! But allow others to have equal time. The teacher will not be lecturing, but will formulate diverse questions in order to dig deeper into each of the questions and would encourage people to discuss before he gives his biblical views of it.

Philemon: Bridging Barriers to Brotherhood

Philemon

During my several decades of Christian faith, I have held (and sometime overcome) a variety of barriers to close fellowship with other believe high-school student, I favored people of my own church denomination indeed those within a small fragment of that denomination. During! years, my social conscience kicked in, and I became convinced that» people were almost subhuman, and certainly sub-Christian. At another time (a health awareness era), I found myself disdaining people who were over weight. And then there was a stage when "kooks" really bugged me. h my associates to think straight. I have almost laughed at myself (and at God), as I have seen him deal with these prejudices of mine. It is as if the minute I have maneuvered myself into one of them, God puts his hand into his many-faceted bag of believe pulls out one who illustrates exactly my current favorite prejudice. The lays his hand on that person's shoulder and says to me, "This is my c love this person. Notice all of his/her wonderful qualities? See, I am sh them to you. You can love this person too." And the barriers have begun to fall.]

1. God brings all sons of people into the Christian faith. What kinds of b keep them from feeling like brothers and sisters to each other?
2. In a society where slavery was an established institution that Christians had no authority to change, Paul wrote of how to behave within that framework. Read the book of Philemon. If you were Philemon, would you want to receive this letter from Paul? Explain.
3. Study the greeting of Paul's letter in verses 1-3, What can you know about the writer, the receivers, and the relationship between them?
4. How do Philemon's faith and love form a basis for what Paul is about to ask him to do (w. 4-7)?
5. What all can you know about Onesimus from verses 8-21?
6. In what different ways does Paul express his love for Onesimus throughout the letter? How does he express his love for Philemon?
7. When have you particularly enjoyed the love and acceptance of God's people?
8. The name Onesimus means "useful." Yet Paul admits in verse 11 that Onesimus had been useless to Philemon in the past. What steps does Paul take to convince Philemon that Onesimus will now live up to his name (verse 11- 15)?
9. What gentle pressure does Paul exert to ensure that Philemon treats Onesimus as he has requested?
10. If you had been Onesimus, how would you feel returning some one thousand miles to Philemon—with this letter and under these circumstances? (What would you fear? What would you hope for? What temptations would you face?)

11. The Christians mentioned in this letter had to cross many social, economic and geographic barriers in order to relate to each other. When have you benefited from a relationship with a Christian who is vastly different from yourself?

12. How could Paul's instructions in today's study help you rethink your relationship with Christians who don't easily fit into your natural circle of friends?

13- Think of a Christian you know who is on the other side of some pot barrier to your accepting each other as a "dear brother or sister." What can you do to begin to bridge that barrier?