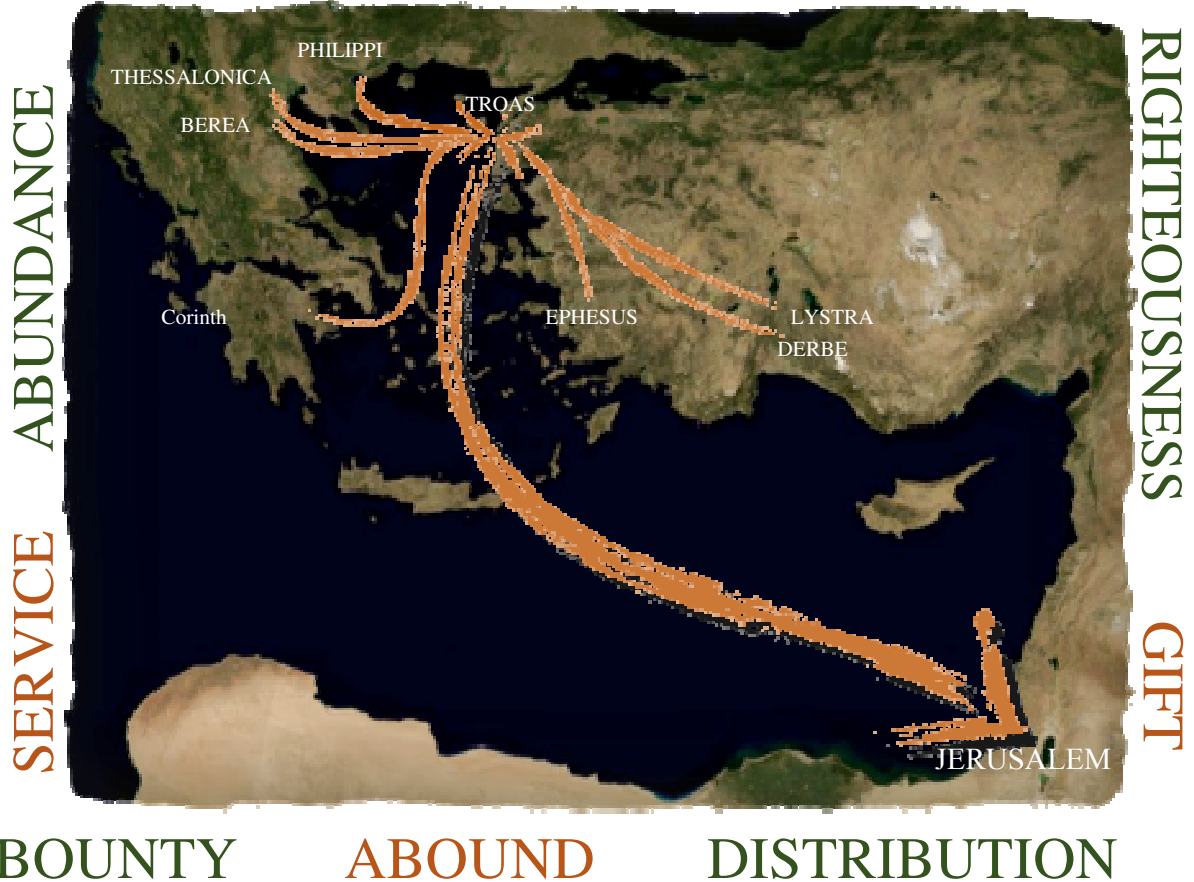


Manitoulin Youth Conference
2010

MINISTRATION

GRACE

LIBERALITY



“Thanks Be Unto God For His Unspeakable Gift”

The Story of the Jerusalem Poor Fund

Discussion Leaders Notes

Table of Contents

Day 1 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 1	1
Day 1 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 2	1
Day 2 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 3	1
Day 2 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 4	1
Day 3 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 5	1
Day 3 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 6	1
Day 4 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 7	1
Day 4 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 8	1
Day 5 - 1st Session - Scenarios	1
Day 5 - 2nd Session - Wrap Up	1

Day 1 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 1

Reading

- Acts 18:23-20:2, 1 Corinthians 16

General Advice

- A lot of ground to cover. Some of the lesson questions could generate hours of discussion. Keep it moving!

Key Principles and Points

- Five pillars of Ecclesial life - stress the importance of each, and examples for today
- What are “Alms”? (Righteousnesses)
- The spirit of the first century Ecclesia “All things in common” versus the literal “all things in common”. This model literally speaking was not consistently followed in the first century. But the spirit of it is important - the result of being of “one accord”
- Qualifications for those who serve in welfare capacity. The administrators of such need to be already bearing Godly fruit in their lives based on God’s word. Looking after welfare should not be an afterthought, but handled in harmony with scriptural directive by those most capable of discerning and properly applying it
- Preaching the truth to convert sinners is more important than providing “silver or gold” and more important than “serving tables”. This doesn’t mean we don’t provide for others needs (as we will see in our studies), but one has lasting, eternal benefit, the other is temporary.
- Understanding that Stephen’s defense marked an inflection point in the first century ecclesia. His articulation of the history of Israel, their disobedience to God, and God’s power to save outside of the Law was too much. Now the persecution is on!
- The abundant healing and signs of the apostles would have followed the pattern of Christ’s works with the purpose that “they might believe” (John 20:31)

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Bring out discussion on Q14, Q30
- Discussion on Q16-17 - The spirit of “all things in common”
- Discussion on Q18 - Materialism/Covetousness is a modern form of Idolatry Col 3:5.
- Giving with the wrong motives is Pharisaical.
- The dangers of elevating those who go above and beyond to do good works (e.g. missionaries, compelling speakers, etc.)
- Do we have the same compassion as exhibited by Christ and the Apostles? Why is it that sometimes we feel indifference or ambivalence? How can God’s word help us?

Neat Points

- Pentecost (Acts 2) - 3000 men “put on Christ” as a covering for sin, the first Pentecost would have been around the time when Israel was encamped at Sinai, receiving the Law, 3000 lives lost due to sin (Ex32:8), who were “naked” (v25)

Day 1 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 2

Reading

- Acts 9-14 ... Don't read this in the group :-)

General Advice

- The "model" fund part is a must. Dedicate at least half the session on Q38-53

Key Principles and Points

- God's intervention necessary for his purpose to be worked out. The mysteries of the Gospel are now revealed, in this case, the "fellowship of the mystery of the Gospel" that the Gentiles were also to be called
- Recognize the enormous shift in thinking necessary for the Jews now!
- Discuss the character of Saul and his conversion
- Be sure you have done the research on "the way" Q10 so it can be properly explained
- The lessons of Cornelius are important and relevant, especially his "alms". Discuss Q22-26
- The issues facing the early Ecclesia Q42 - discuss and share references
- Discuss "determined to send relief"
- Discuss the guiding principles for the fund

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Bring out discussion on Q14 - Damaskan experiences. Be careful not to let the discussion run wild or have this topic take most of the session! Emphasize that while we are not superstitious, it is important for believers to see the providential hand of God in their lives, and to listen when he is trying to show us we are going the wrong way. In addition, emphasize that this is an introspective exercise... we don't want to be like Job's friends trying to come up with specific reasons why some things happen to others... fine for ourselves not fine for others.
- Talk about Q16 a and b. It is important to have spent some time mastering the first principles and be able to articulate the hope of Israel from the scriptures. It took Paul 3 years before he was ready... is it really right to burden our brethren in far off places with our inadequate preparation? Are we really able to help? Missionary work starts at home and in our local area... Paul's case was no different.
- Perhaps can have an exercise where everyone writes down 3 areas they want to change, and put it in their Bible in a passage from the New Testament reading 3 Sundays from now.
- The lesson from Q29 about jumping to conclusions without having the full story
- The practical questions from the model fund: Q48, Q49, Q52, Q53

Neat Points

- Paul's connection to "Saul" the failed king of Israel is unmistakable, including his persecution of God's "anointed". His decision to rename himself as "Paul" meaning "Little" has an interesting connection to "Mordecai" of Esther's day who had a similar connection to "Saul" and the Benjamites. "Mordecai" means "little", yet was able to wipe out the Amalekite (Haman and his family) which Saul had not done... and save God's people outside the land. Additionally, Paul considered himself as the "least" of all the Apostles.

Day 2 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 3

Reading

- Acts 15, Galatians 1-2

General Advice

- It can be tempting to draw a comparison between Ecclesial rules and regulations, and “Judaizers”. Hopefully this study helps avoid that wrong conclusion.
- Spend around half the time on James and Q16 since these are principles directly related to our attitudes and responsibilities regarding our brethren and sisters in need.

Key Principles and Points

- It is important that the definition of what is a “Judaizer” is understood. A “Judaizer” is someone who believes and is baptized into Christ, but still wants to keep the Law of Moses as a basis for righteousness. Those Jews who did not believe in Christ were not “Judaizers”... they were “unbelieving Jews”. Also note that the corrupted practices of the Jews at that time were quite far removed from what was intended by “the Law”.
- Q8 - remember that the “New Covenant” is really the “Abrahamic Covenant” and the token of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision. This is why the issue was so contentious, and why it would need special exposition. Bring out the point and lessons of Q15
- Titus - Character study... was he Luke’s brother? Q9
- Paul had 3 years to digest, study, and come to terms with the mystery of the fellowship of the Gospel. His background as a Pharisee made him ideal to address this topic...
- Silas - Character study
- The decision of the Jerusalem conference Q19-21
- Paul’s commission Q22-24
- Important to see the connection between the Jerusalem conference and Paul’s work with the Fund. He is directed to remember the poor... yet there is all this acrimony amongst the Jewish brethren with respect to their Gentile brethren as well as with the keeping of the Law... so Paul comes up with a way to fulfill his commission and hopefully demonstrate what Grace can inspire as opposed to what Law can compel.

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Q12 - The false teachers weren’t allowed to give (as it were) one “bible class” on their views. The challenge today is our society is all about giving the chance to hear “all voices”. This is why our Ecclesial shepherds remove from speaking duties those who are introducing incorrect ideas into the meeting.
- Cover the practical lessons from Q16
- Q23 - Paul jumped on this, and took their simple directive to astonishing lengths. Talk about ways we can make mundane chores into something much more (on a spiritual level). Come prepared with examples!

Neat Points

- Who read “The Harlot of the Ephah”?

Day 2 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 4

Reading

- Acts 13:30-Acts 18:18-22 (Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey)

General Advice

- The key Gentile Ecclesias that will eventually take part in the fund are established during this journey (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth) While not the only participating Ecclesias, they feature prominently in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Key Principles and Points

- Character study of Timothy
- Q2a Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Because he was going to be bringing him with him... "to the Jew first" so they would be entering the Synagogue first at every city and his circumcision would avoid that being an issue and a stumbling block. Timothy was a Jew through his mother, Titus was a Gentile and Paul would use Titus in his work with established Gentile Ecclesias (Corinth, Crete, etc.) . Some will see Paul as a vacillating hypocrite but it was the right thing to do at the Jerusalem conference, and it was the right thing to do in the case of Timothy and the mission.
- Q3 The decrees were the results of the Jerusalem conference
- Be prepared with Paul's policy on accepting support Q5, and why he made an exception in Philippi
- The spirit of the Philippians would have had an effect on the Macedonian Ecclesias... and we see the same spirit evident in their amazing response to the Jerusalem Poor Fund (in 2 Corinthians 8). This background section gives us insight into the characters and their story who would beg to participate, and gave beyond their means to "fellowship" the ministering of the saints.
- Cover the establishment of the Corinthian Ecclesia, and the background of Corinth - the gross immorality they were known for.

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Consider the practical lesson raised in Q2b
- The lessons of providence from Q4 praying for not only doors to open... but also for doors to close!
- The lesson from Lydia - who opened her heart? Q10d, principles of hospitality and genuine care Q13, see how Lydia's house became a "safe" place for Paul to stay, where he didn't have to worry about being "chargeable" to the brethren because they understood the scriptural principles of hospitality.
- The lesson of the Bereans Q22. How can we be commended in the same way? Isolate the difference between earnest searching of the scriptures to confirm a doctrine versus the antagonistic spirit of "questioning everything"? God doesn't give us a firm yes or no / right or wrong on every issue... he expects us to apply the spirit thinking developed from knowing his word!

Neat Points

- Q4b - providence had the wind filling their sails!
- See the connection between Lydia and the woman of 2 kings 4:8? Dig a little and you'll find lots of connections.

Day 3 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 5

Reading

- Acts 18:23-20:2, 1 Corinthians 16

General Advice

- This section covers the 3rd Journey up until Paul heads to Macedonia
- We have only mentioned a couple of items here, but they should take 2/3 - 3/4 of the session. When done, feel free to start on Section 6 since that is a long one!

Key Principles and Points

- The third journey starts with Paul methodically visiting the Ecclesias “in order” - most likely collecting for the fund
- Review the table from Bro. Ron Abel’s book outlining the charges against Paul
- It is important that you try to get a good understanding of the number of letters, when they were sent, who delivered them, and the travels of Paul, Timothy, and Titus during this time. Some might be confused by this so perhaps you might help by writing up a timeline to hand out. Read the reference materials suggested. Be prepared to walk through the sequence of events
- Q11 - the fund was collected for during memorial meeting (1st day of the week). This is a good example of practices that may not have an explicit commandment, but we take up the spirit of the first century Ecclesias... have a copy of the reference from the Ecclesial guide handy in case some weren’t able to get it

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Q5 The ways of providence - just because God closes a door today, doesn’t mean it won’t be open some time in the future. Obviously, he does expect us to use our spiritual discernment as to whether an open door is appropriate for us to go through!
- Q7 What kept Paul going and how can we do the same?
- Q12 This is an important question around “scriptural precedence” vs. “what everyone else does”. The basic point is that the closer we adhere to first century practice, the better. There is nothing wrong with trying new approaches... but we should be very careful to analyze the impact... The “secularization” of the Ecclesia is a subtle but real challenge today. Have some pros and cons prepared around things like fund raising via novelty events versus fund raising by spiritual appeal.

Neat Points

- Character study on Apollos. See if anyone did this and if they have any lessons. Why didn’t he stop the issues at Corinth? Because he wasn’t there! (1 Cor. 16:12)

Day 3 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 6

Reading

- 2 Corinthians 8

General Advice

- Important to realize that if Paul couldn't get the Corinthians onside, his plan for the fund would lose its effectiveness
- We believe that this was an earnest appeal and not Paul playing one Ecclesia against another just to further his agenda. He appeals to them on every level to finish what they had started - but it had to be of their own willingness and conviction otherwise the power would be lost.

Key Principles and Points

- The three key words. Here is Bro. Roger Lewis on the 3 key words:
- The first word, is the Greek word 'charis' (5485) the word translated 'grace' on the part of the bestower, that which conveys the friendly disposition from which the kindly act proceeds. It's a word that stresses the 'freeness', 'the spontaneous character of that which is given', and on the part of the receiver, a sense of a favour bestowed and a feeling of gratitude for that grace which has been received. A word that's found as we discovered occurs 10 times in the course of these two particular chapters. Grace x 2 extended to both Jew and Gentile, so there really is the key word that the apostle builds his arguments around in these two particular chapters. But it's only one of 3 key words.
- The second is the Greek word 'perisseia' (4050), it's a word translated 'abound or abundance' and it's found on several occasions throughout these particular chapters. It's a word that means literally 'an exceeding measure above the ordinary'. That which is superabundant in quantity and superior in quality, a word which denotes that which is preeminent, that which is beyond measure, that which is overflowing; you can almost sense the idea of 'perisseia' here, a word that bubbles up and overflows above and beyond that which is deemed to be necessary.
- The third key word is 'diakonos' (1249) the word translated quite commonly, of course, 'minister or ministration'. A word that means to act 'as a servant' or an 'attendant', 'to wait upon or to minister to the needs of others'. In these three words, we believe we have, the whole spirit of what this fund was all about and what spirit the apostle wanted to inspire in the hearts of the brethren. What he wanted was that spirit of grace that would so act in a person's life, that they would spontaneously abound in an overflowing spirit of ministering to the needs of others. That's what the apostle is talking about in these two chapters. That the spirit of grace at work in the life of the individual, would inspire them to overflow in a spirit of ministering to the needs of others; and if we can just focus on those three words and get that down into those two chapters, we really have the whole spirit of what the apostle is trying to deal with in this particular section of 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9.
- The secret to the success of the Macedonian brethren - Q23
- Q30-31 Talk about the use of "I speak not by commandment", and how it was important that he not "command" them to give... it would defeat everything... how could the 3 key words come into play if they were compelled by force?
- Q33 be sure you have examples and can explain how Christ was rich / poor
- Talk about the principles and lessons of the Manna and how it applies
- The principle of delegates is an important one that Christadelphians have long used for inter-ecclesial issues/planning/coordination, etc. When wisely appointed by the Ecclesia, we can trust that they represent the Ecclesia.

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Q7 - Discuss the tactics used by Paul to encourage the Corinthians, and the lessons/application
- Begging for the favor. Discuss Q20, if our motivations are right, we shouldn't wait around to be asked.
- Q25 - Talk about getting our priorities in life. We give ourselves first to God.
- Discuss the true "riches" Q37
- The difference between "performance" and "readiness". Not enough to be ready or of a willing mind, but we need to do! Discuss Q41, Q42, Q81 should generate good discussion about the importance of follow-through and perhaps you could come ready with some tips for the group on how to ensure we follow-through. For instance, one tip could be making yourself accountable to someone - that way they can both be inspired by your initial enthusiasm, but also challenge you if you fail to follow-through. Perhaps also talk about some of the reasons our faith, enthusiasm and conviction wanes, especially if we stop the daily intake of the word, skip Ecclesial functions, and fall back into bad habits... then focus on remedies!
- The principle of "earnest care" (Q59-60) God puts it into our heart by his word, and when we consider His gift of Christ and the grace extended to us, and His earnest care for us, we seek to manifest it towards others.
- Q62 - The spirit of Titus - "Here am I send me" - how can we emulate?
- The principle of appearances Q68-75. Talk about how these principles are important for us to follow. Prepare some scenarios for possible discussion. For instance, how does this apply to young people when they are dating? How about at school, work, or the places we go for leisure/entertainment?

Neat Points

- The Macedonian example - did you notice the Spirit of Lydia at work?

Day 4 - 1st Session - Workbook Section 7

Reading

- 2 Corinthians 9

General Advice

- In chapter 9, the Apostle Paul continues his appeal to the brethren and sisters of the Corinthian Ecclesia to rekindle the enthusiasm and zeal they once had for the fund. He appeals to their conscience and example. He also appeals to scriptural principle, and draws a direct line to the prime directive of the Gospel: God Manifestation.
- In this part of his appeal, Paul uses a plethora of Old Testament examples. This serves a number of purposes, including a demonstration that the principles involved are not just Paul's ideas but are consistent with God's word, and the practices of the faithful of old. They also teach that even under the old covenant, Yahweh sought to inspire His people to raise their thinking to the motivation behind their actions. How much more then ought the believers who had a full knowledge of the "unspeakable gift" which the Law foreshadowed, be able to demonstrate the operative principles of the new covenant, by providing for their brethren and sisters in need?
- Spend at least 1/3 of the session on the principle of reaping and sowing

Key Principles and Points

- In this chapter, Paul emphasizes both the speed of their collections as well as the size of their contribution.
- Every term is used except "money" why? (Q13)
- God manifestation becomes the focal point of his argument. (Q28-31 and beyond) When we follow Christ and his character, we are manifesting the Father.
- The relationship between "almsgiving" and "righteousness"... Q35-36
- How does God "multiply" our seed and "increase the fruits" of our righteousness?
- Be able to explain Q43 "enriched in every thing"
- Q47 start the discussion about the priestly ministration of Paul - wait until the next session to deal with it fully
- Q53-Q54 2 Cor. 9:13-14 is a king-pin verse for Paul's intentions with the fund!
- Be sure to cover Q55-59 about the "gift of God", which is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is really the theme of the study: All of our blessings are based on God's love in giving. Read John 3:16. So whatever we are able to give, we can never match what God gave because God Himself is the perfect example of giving. We will never be able to give what God has given and even if we endeavor all our lives to give for the needs of others, it will only be a small resemblance of the greatness and superiority of what God has given and offered to each of us. So when we give for others, all we are really doing is following the example of Yahweh Himself and uniting with the Apostle Paul in saying, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!"

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Reaping and sowing (Q17-27) - both the principle of the kind/amount as well as the application. The fact that Paul uses the phrase "do not be deceived" in Gal 6:7 means that we probably are deceived. If we are honest, we often live our lives as though some day we will not reap what we are sowing (Ecc 8:11) this is a great deception!

- Practical out workings of the principles Paul teaches in this chapter regarding how Yahweh blesses the generous hearted. Talk through Q34, Q40-42
- Q44 - when we make concern for others a habit, focus on self is diminished
- Q52 - Talk about the power of our example to others, and how it can reflect back praise to God!

Neat Points

- Q14 when we give our money or possessions to God (by giving them to the Ecclesia), they are sanctified for His use.

Day 4 - 2nd Session - Workbook Section 8

Reading

- Romans 15, Acts 20:2-21:26

General Advice

- Start by having everyone follow the route back to Jerusalem, point out Q14 and Q15 how Luke has joined them as one of the delegates, Paul walks across the shortcut perhaps to contemplate the events ahead... see the type with Christ?
- Be sure not to spend any of this session still on 2 Cor. 9 discussion, there is a lot of material in this session!

Key Principles and Points

- Paul as Christ to the Gentiles - Discussion leaders should have done Q35 - it would be great if you could put it in a table and pass out to the group
- Our attitude towards the Jews, even in their blindness, should be one of thankfulness, gratefulness, and longing for the peace of Jerusalem - for the time when Yahweh will turn away ungodliness from Jacob and all Israel saved (Q9) Christadelphians have long provided for the Jews in ways they can from clothes/money for Aliyah to housing Jewish children from the kinder-transports during WWII.
- Be sure you have worked out and can explain Q3 - Q6. Romans Expositor, John Carter's book on Romans can help on Romans 15
- The whole work of the fund, especially in these last chapters is a journey of spiritual atonement for Paul. He was responsible for the persecution that arose after Stephen, and taking it to greater levels. The brethren and sisters now desolate had been subject to persecution, confiscation, and no portion in the welfare provided by the synagogue. Expand and elaborate on this. What drives him? Acts 20:3
- Be prepared with an answer for Q18 "bound in the spirit"
- The presentation of the fund. Talk about Q31-32 - perhaps there is some disagreement on the conclusions reached in the workbook. Talk them through. The key is how you interpret "zealous for the Law"... based on all of our studies, we know that these brethren had multiple opportunities to realize the principle of 2 Cor. 3:6.

Key Practical Lessons and Questions

- Making prayer a habit (Q21) look who was praying over this mission! (Q10)
- Placing practical concerns over spiritual ones. Discuss Q26
- How do we react when our efforts are not appreciated? (Q33). Perhaps having a perspective like Romans 12:1 or Luke 17:10, etc. Or remembering that we are being shaped by God and this is probably good for our character! Look at how Paul talks to the Romans about the fund! (Q7)
- Interpretation of results. Spend some time discussing Q34. Think up some examples ahead of time for the group, have some passages ready to go on the scriptural principles (1 Cor. 3:6-7, Isa. 55:11, etc.)

Neat Points

- Our study started with Pentecost and Agabus and so it ends with Pentecost and Agabus!
- The connection with the two loaves of Pentecost... Jew and Gentile baked from the multiplication of Abraham's seed. Paul is so determined to be there for THIS feast!

Day 5 - 1st Session - Scenarios

General Advice

- We have provided a list of scenarios. Choose several to discuss in-depth in the group.
- It is recommended that you use the “mind map” format to help research all the “angles”, find the passages, establish the principles, and come to a conclusion. See the next section for an example.
- The purpose of the scenarios is not to generate debate or acrimony. The scenarios are also not intended to point out any specific groups, efforts, or individuals from the brotherhood today. Keep to the scenarios and the passages involved.
- The scenarios are all relevant to aspects of our studies. Most of the scenarios we face in daily life are multi-dimensional... that is there are multiple issues to consider. We have deliberately kept our scenarios simple so the key issue can be readily discerned.
- Challenge everyone in the group to express themselves without using the phrases “I think” or “I feel”!
- In some of the cases, the proposal may be more scripturally acceptable by making a few provisions and amendments. It is best to wait until all the relevant issues and scriptures have been considered before coming to that conclusion though.
- Feel free to make modifications to the scenarios if you feel that would help!
- Discuss the process of bringing the “whole council of God” to bear on our decisions, and how important it is to take the time to search the scriptures for advice on any subject. There may not be an explicit “thou shalt / thou shalt not” but Yahweh has given us His word and a mind with the mental capacity to work things out, and the moral capacity to willingly develop and manifest His character.
- Come prepared with your own list of issues and scriptural passages so you can keep things moving if your group is having difficulties coming up with passages. Bring a concordance to the session!
- Have your group members share the discussion results with others during the break and report back on any surprising *scriptural* insights developed by other groups.

Scenarios

Scenario #1: Appeal for brethren and sisters in poverty

A brother from your Ecclesia has just visited a “3rd world” country and returned with shocking reports of the poverty of the brethren and sisters there. He is very enthusiastic about sending relief to the brethren and sisters, and believes that everyone in the meeting should be required to give 10% of their income to the cause. He opens a bank account and sends appeals letters to every Ecclesia in the area, along with a moving video showing the squalid conditions they are living in. His goal is to personally deliver the funds within 2 months. The suggestion is made that he discuss his ideas and plans with the Ecclesia, and receive Ecclesial endorsement/support for his endeavors, perhaps bringing along with him some brethren from other Ecclesias who have also pledged support. The brother doesn’t take to this idea well, stating that the Apostle Paul went around wherever he wanted - and didn’t need “permission” from any Ecclesia so why should he. Besides, he says: “something needs to be done right away and it will take too long to explain everything and make everyone happy.”

The scenario: Independent welfare initiative. What are the issues involved? What scriptural passages and principles come to bear? Should he be left alone to do his own thing? Or should he be entreated to do things differently?

Scenario #2: Alms for the poor

The Ecclesia is soliciting ideas for outreach in the local community beyond the usual lectures and seminars. One idea is to open a soup kitchen on Friday nights to feed the homeless and the poor in the neighborhood. Instead of CYC, the young people can learn about community service and being a “neighbor” to those around us, letting our “light shine”. The idea is expanded to also offer free blood pressure and health check by several of our sisters who are nurses. The Ecclesial elders are concerned about this idea, but note that the most enthusiastic proponents of the idea are brethren and sisters who typically are not engaged much in Ecclesial life, and may feel disenfranchised if their idea is turned down.

The scenario: Good works proposal. What are the issues involved? What scriptural passages and principles come to bear? Can you reach a scripturally based conclusion whether to move ahead with this proposal?

Scenario #3: Prosperity gospel

A good friend in the Truth is spending a lot of energy working multiple jobs and overtime to be able to give money away so that eventually, it will “come back to her” in spades when God blesses her generosity. You personally know of several poor families in the Ecclesia who she has helped, and another whose way she paid to go to Bible school. However when you discuss her “generosity”, she embarrassingly reveals that she has also taken out a loan to be able to give away more money but has run into a situation where she can’t make the payments because she just paid for a sister’s college books. She knows you have the cash to help her make the payment, and asks you to donate a few payments. When you don’t jump all over the idea, she becomes upset, and quotes 2 Corinthians 8:6: “he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully.” She seems more focused on what she will get for being generous than having a spirit of genuine care for others, and accuses you of “shutting your hand from your brother” (Deuteronomy 15:7-10)

The scenario: Do you help your friend or not? What are the issues involved? What scriptural passages and principles come to bear? Can you reach a spiritually based conclusion about what is the best way to help your friend?

Scenario #4: Honesty in the sight of God and men

A woman colleague from work has been coming to lectures and other functions for a while now, and would like to study for baptism. Being most comfortable with the brother from work, she asks him if he can come over once a week to help her studies. While not married yet, the brother is in a committed relationship with a sister who lives across the country. The plan is to be engaged when she finishes college in the spring. The brother realizes that it isn’t a good idea for him to be the one to help her one-on-one for a number of reasons, but is concerned that she might not be comfortable with someone else.

The scenario: How should he respond? What are the issues involved? What scriptural passages and principles come to bear?

Scenario #5: All the congregation are holy

The arranging brethren have made some recent decisions that are of concern. A popular sister has been disfellowshipped, and everyone is shocked and surprised. The situation seems to be a classic “he said” / “she said” and now that the news is out, people are taking sides without having all the information. Besides the issue at hand, a number of people begin to question the wisdom of even having elders in the ecclesia as arranging brethren. Shouldn’t every decision be made by the will of the majority? It is suggested that the Ecclesia undertakes a study of the scriptural principles involved.

The scenario: Does the Ecclesia need an arranging board? What are the issues involved? What scriptures come to bear? In our studies on the JPF, we saw first-hand the first-century Ecclesial practices. Are we able to model them in these days without the Apostles and the Holy Spirit Gifts?

Scenario #6 Outside professionals

Welfare and other pastoral issues in the Ecclesia are typically handled discretely by the Arranging board. However, a few are concerned that the brethren on the board may be of honest report and full of the wisdom of the scriptures, but they lack the professional training and credentials to deal with such sensitive issues. A suggestion is made to hire on retainer a “professional” counsellor for sensitive pastoral issues. Note: issues can range from substance abuse to marital problems to mental illness, to absence/attendance to welfare needs.

The scenario: Hire an outside “professional” to handle sensitive pastoral matters in the Ecclesia? What are the issues involved? What scriptural passages and principles come to bear? Can you reach a spiritually based conclusion whether to move ahead with this suggestion?

Scenario #7: Hard times family

A family in the Ecclesia has fallen on hard times. The father has lost his job, and their savings has run out. He is having difficulties landing another job since his skills are out of date. The mother is capable of working with her degree in education, and the local school board is hiring, but they are determined that she continue homeschooling their middle-school aged children. They sell some of their “toys” like the motorboat and the harley, and their home on the market, but soon are in need of help to pay the bills and put food on the table. They approach the Ecclesia for assistance as bankruptcy looms. The Ecclesia agrees to provide money every week for groceries and to help with the mortgage while they get back on their feet. A few months go by and the situation hasn’t changed. It seems to some that the father has given up trying to find a job. Those aware of the situation are concerned that the Ecclesial welfare fund is getting depleted, and there are other families in need too. It’s also hard not to notice the new iPad the children are toting around, and resentment starts to set in. The issue comes to a head at the monthly arranging board meeting during the welfare review. Options are discussed from telling the family they have one more month and they are on their own, to sitting down with the couple and discussing the situation. Others feel strongly that they should account for the iPad and other discretionary purchases.

The scenario: What to do about the Hard times family? What are the issues involved? What scriptural passages and principles come to bear? Can you reach a spiritually based decision?

Sample Mind-Map Diagramming Process

Sample scenario:

- You've become close friends at school or work with someone of the opposite gender and they ask you out.

Step 1:

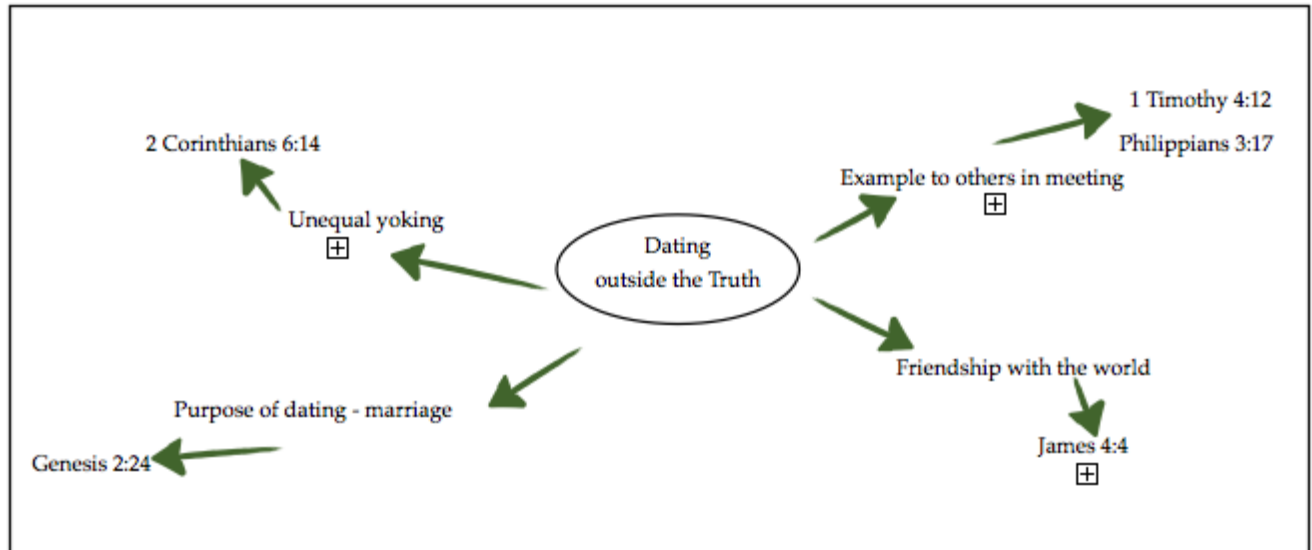
- Distill down to the heart of the issue. Try to focus in on a short phrase or word that represents the issue
- Place the phrase in the middle of our diagram (on paper or whiteboard or chalkboard) and draw a circle around it
- *For our sample, the scenario issue is: Dating outside the Truth.*

Step 2:

- Brainstorm the various issues that are involved with or directly/indirectly related to the primary issue
- Write down a word or short phrase to represent the issues - write them all around the circle and draw lines from the main circle in the center to each of the issues
- Try to consolidate the issues as you go along if some are really similar
- For our sample, the issues might be: dating (in general), friendship with the world, our example to others in the meeting, our example to the person in question, learning the truth before relationships, unequal yoking, etc.

Step 3:

- For each of the issues, write down the scriptural passages that come to bear on that issue
- If no scripture supports it, perhaps it isn't important? either that or we just can't come up with one on the spot :-)
- For our sample, here's an example of the mind map created with a couple of issues and scriptures:



Step 4:

- Return to the original scenario and see if you can come to a conclusion on the scriptural direction given to that scenario

Day 5 - 2nd Session - Wrap Up

General Advice

- Hopefully you are not reading this for the first time on Thursday evening :-)
- This may be the most important session from the perspective that the last impressions may stay with us the longest, and perhaps help is needed pulling everything together
- A suggestion is to take notes every day, as well as look through these notes to come up with a list of key take-aways from the week from a learning as well as practical perspective.

Key Principles, Points, and Lessons

- It should be obvious that one of the key themes of the study is God manifestation. This needs to be our driver for benevolent acts. Paul never once mentioned the poor, sick, malnourished children in Jerusalem.
- And of course, the “gift of God”, which is the Lord Jesus Christ is really the theme of the whole study: All of our blessings are based on God's love in giving. (John 3:16). So whatever we are able to give, we can never match what God gave because God Himself is the perfect example of giving. We will never be able to give what God has given and even if we endeavor all our lives to give for the needs of others, it will only be a small resemblance of the greatness and superiority of what God has given and offered to each of us. So when we give for others, all we are really doing is following the example of Yahweh Himself and uniting with the Apostle Paul in saying, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!”
 - Discuss ways we can assist ourselves and others to be thankful
 - Discuss scriptural strategies for avoiding being unthankful and losing sight of God’s gift
- Another important theme is about raising the bar on our service in the Truth. Paul’s commission to “remember the poor” was not likely expected to result in the Jerusalem poor fund. We can apply the same spirit to our own service by turning mundane Ecclesial service into edifying and unifying spiritual events.
 - Some ways (to get you thinking... come up with some more yourself and discuss in the group)
 - Playing the piano/organ for CYC? research the scriptural references in the hymns and prepare a handout that includes the words and the references
 - Responsible for hall work day? Organize workers into families from Nehemiah who built the wall... start the day with a devotional from Nehemiah
 - Did you organize a study group for completing the workbook? How about trying to keep the group going by starting right away on an independent study of next year’s topic?
 - etc...
- Have everyone in the group contribute something they “determined” this week as a result of the study that they are going to do/not do / finish / etc. when they return home. It can be a nice touch to write it all down and e-mail out to everyone that is part of the group in a few weeks or months after conference.