






This week we will learn:

-  we often start well, but then fail and get discouraged.
-  to understand that God is a God of second chances.
-  to put our trust in God and resist discouragement.

Points for Discussion

(Unless otherwise noted, all scripture in this Study Guide is taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright International Bible Society, used by permission).

THE PROBLEM:

 **We often start well, but then fail and get discouraged.**

The Bible Says . . .



John 18:10 *Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)*

1. What does this Scripture tell us about Peter?

John 18:26-27 *One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow."*

2. What new insight does this Scripture give us about Peter?

THE BIBLICAL SOLUTION:

 **We need to understand that God is a God of second chances.**

The Bible Says . . .



John 21:15 *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'*

3. What is Peter's "status" with the Lord at this point – after having denied Him earlier?

The Bible Says . . .



Lamentations 3:22-23 *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

4. What does this passage teach us about God?

**APPLY IT TO
YOUR LIFE !!!** **Put our trust in God and resist discouragement.**

5. Looking back to questions 1 and 2, do you recall times when you have been committed to something important and failed at it? Write your experience here or in your journal:




6. Looking back to questions 3 and 4, what can you see that God is teaching you about Himself - and yourself? Write that here or in your journal:

7. Commit yourself with God's help to this challenge during 2008.

Summing it Up

Our life-change goal for this week is to understand that God is a God of second chances.

This week we learned:

-  we often start well, but then fail and get discouraged.
-  to understand that God is a God of second chances.
-  to put our trust in God and resist discouragement.

Will you commit to striving to do this?

Going Deeper to Grow

If this week's topic has challenged you to grow in this vital area, read:

- *Rebuilding Your Broken World* by Gordon MacDonald



My Personal Praise and Prayer Time

**This Week's
Prayer Focus**

Pray that God will show you an area in your life you have been avoiding because of fear; then pray for His hand upon you as you challenge that fear.

| NAME | PRAYER REQUEST | COMMENTS |
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My Memory Verse **Lamentations 3:22-23** Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Daily Scripture Readings

- **John 18** – Peter's transformation
- **Acts 1** – Peter as a preacher
- **Acts 16** – Paul's conflicts on his second missionary journey
- **Acts 17** – More conflicts for Paul
- **Acts 18** – Even more conflicts for Paul. Despite all the conflicts and possible discouragement that Paul had – God used him mightily.

NOTE: If you are using this Study Guide but are not in a SCBC Small Group, why not consider trying one out? It will give you the opportunities to explore these life-changing topics with others - in a casual and friendly setting - with no obligation to continue if it doesn't "work for you". To find out more, just contact the church office and they'll be delighted to find the right group for you!



Answers to Last Week's Study Questions

These answers are provided for those who are using the Study Guides, but are not in a Santa Cruz Bible Church Small Group. Items in shaded boxes provide additional insight on the topic.

THE PROBLEM:

We can become apathetic in our pursuit of Christ.

1. **Matthew 25:1-13** What warning does Jesus give us in these verses?

Answer: That we should be looking and ready for His return at all times.

Insights: Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, we must remain watchful while we serve Him and grow. His return may be at any moment. We need to be watching and paying attention, as signs warn of His return to take His church home. We also need to study and understand Scripture.

2. **Matthew 13:18-23** Of what is Jesus warning us?

Answer: That we need to not only hear the Word, but also understand it, and bear fruit.

Insights: Note that this is not a one-time effort. We are to seek God continually, looking to Him for wisdom and direction. The world, the flesh, and the devil work to distract us from God and His plan. We cannot do anything apart from Christ. God gives the increase.

THE BIBLICAL SOLUTION:

We learn from the wise men how to seek after Him. We need to examine the signs and then experience joy from the Holy Spirit and Scriptures.

3. **Matthew 2:1-11** a. What example did the wise men provide for us as we look to Christ?

Answer: They sought the Christ to worship Him and presented valuable gifts to Him.

Insights: These "Wise men", or magi, likely came out of Mesopotamia - which is east of Israel. They probably learned of the prophesied Christ (Messiah) from Jews (people from Judah who knew of the Scriptures). Some theologians think that Daniel, in his dealings with the astrologers and soothsayers as mentioned in Daniel 2 shared the prophesies of the Scriptures with them. Long after the captivity, they were still aware of the prophesies and looked for a sign, finally seeing and following the star which led them to Jesus.



b. What tangible evidence of their devotion did they present?

Answer: Treasures. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Insights: All were valuable. In that culture, presentation of valuable gifts was required when visiting a person of greater importance. Gold symbolizes high value. Frankincense is used as a fragrant offering to God. Myrrh is used in embalming, which foretold Jesus' death on the cross.

4. **1Thessalonians 1:6** What is the evidence of our imitating Paul and Jesus?

Answer: That we experience joy from the Holy Spirit by studying God's word.

Insights: When we receive Jesus, He gives us His Holy Spirit as proof that we are His. The Holy Spirit gives us a desire to study the Scriptures and helps us to understand them. When we do, we experience the joy of understanding God's word and knowing His perfect will.

**APPLY IT TO
YOUR LIFE !!!!**

 **Read through the Old Testament prophecies pointing to Christ this week and watch The Nativity Story movie.**

5. Read the each of the daily scripture readings both Old and New Testament and note here or in your journal how God miraculously prophesied and fulfilled those prophecies.

Insights: The probability of all the Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled by one person, Jesus, are so great that it is impossible without God's knowledge and provision.

6. Share with others how those verses or others proved to you that Jesus is the Messiah the Christ.


Insights: Other verses that point to Jesus' purpose of becoming God Incarnate can be found in Isaiah 53 telling of His suffering and death.


Summing it Up

Our life-change goal for this week is to seek after Christ for this Christmas - and for a lifetime - as shown to us by the Magi in Matthew 2:1-12.

This week we learned:

 we can become apathetic in our pursuit of Christ.

 we learn from the wise men how to seek after Him. We need to examine the signs and then experience joy from the Holy Spirit and Scriptures.

 to read through the Old Testament prophecies pointing to Christ this week and watch The Nativity Story movie.

Will you commit to striving to do this?