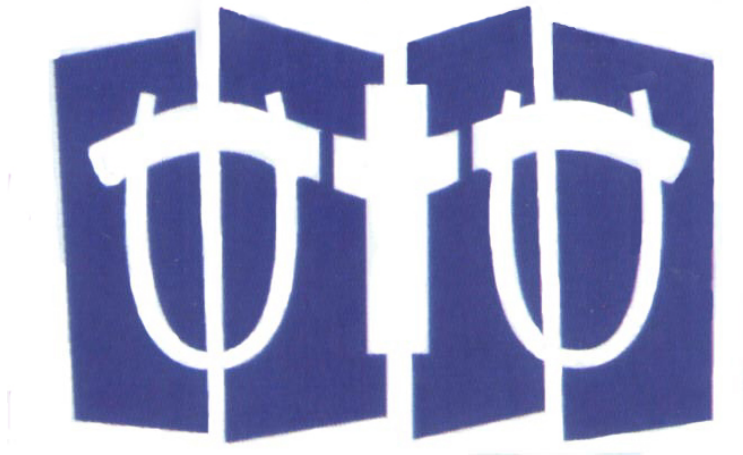


Study and Discussion Guide For Yokefellow Disciplines



Created by

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FOR

YOKEFELLOWSHIP PRISON MINISTRY

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*"Come to me,
all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

JESUS – MATTHEW 11:28-30

IN MEMORY OF
Nancy G. Sickler

Nancy Sickler was one of the first of many who joined the Yokefellow's Movement in the 1950's. The Yokefellow's Movement was started by Dr. Elton Trueblood to work within churches to encourage the growth and vitality of Christian faith and implementation through small groups. While reading daily devotions, Matthew 11:28-30, "Take my **yoke** upon you..." struck Trueblood as the clearest call to commitment. His philosophy can be summarized in this written statement.

"What the church represents is not a repository of unchanging truth, but an open-ended search for God's will in our lives, both individually and in the redemptive **fellowship**. Instead of an unchanging certainty of the kinds presumed by those whose faith is a collection of infallible proof-texts, finite men have the awesome responsibility of sharing in possession of the liberating keys. What is laid upon us is neither a peculiar wisdom denied to others nor a doctrine in which we can take pride, but a responsibility to share in a difficult task."

Interested in Trueblood's teachings, Nancy became involved in a small Yokefellows group and attended the annual Yokefellow Conference in Richmond, Indiana many times. At the persistent encouragement of Rev. John Mostoller, Nancy agreed to join a Yokefellowship Prison Ministry group inside Muncy Correctional Institution for Women. It wasn't long before she felt part of the true Christian fellowship behind bars.

Nancy subsequently moved to Ohio where Yokefellowship was not active, though she remained in contact with the national organization and continued to attend annual conferences. In 1995, after retirement and returning to Pennsylvania, Nancy joined the board of directors at the invitation of then executive director, Wayne Benjamin. She worked with Wayne to put together the Yokefellowship video with inspiring testimonies from prison volunteers and former inmates. In 1997 she was elected board chairperson and served in that capacity until 2005. During her tenure Nancy worked tirelessly to make Yokefellowship a more vibrant organization. Reverend John Rauch, fondly recalls his predecessor:

"Nancy was a very intelligent and progressive-looking person. A person of significant detail, she prepared an excellent manual of resources for the use of volunteers, and updated numerous organization documents. Nancy was an excellent chairperson. She listened more than she spoke and had the knack of crystallizing in a few sentences what had been discussed. She possessed the gift of diffusing controversy in her quiet, reflective manner. To summarize, Nancy Sickler was a gifted person who in turn gifted all of us. Yokefellows is a stronger, more vibrant organization, or as Trueblood would put it, organism, because of her gentle presence among us."

Nancy also served as secretary of the Yokefellowship SUN Area Council for many years.

Nancy continued to serve on the state board until her resignation in April 2005. Nancy was diagnosed with cancer in September 2005 and passed on to meet her Savior December 1, 2005. We mourn her passing but rejoice in her victory and all that she did for God's kingdom.

Written in 1999 during her tenure as board chairperson, the following study and discussion guide is a result of Nancy's love of Christ and extensive study of almost all of Trueblood's writings. To her we owe the continual knowledge of Trueblood's Yokefellowship teachings.

This Discussion Guide is designed for use by YOKEFELLOW small groups in any setting.

Each section deals with one of the Yokefellow Disciplines and includes:

- Bible Texts followed by Discussion Questions
- Quotations about the Disciplines from books by Dr. Elton Trueblood
- Discussion Questions about the text.

YOKEFELLOW DISCIPLINES

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

To pray everyday, preferable at the beginning of the day

THE DISCIPLINE OF SCRIPTURE

To read reverently and thoughtfully, every day, a portion of Scripture, following a definite plan.

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

To share, at least once each week, in the public worship of God

THE DISCIPLINE OF MONEY

To give a definite portion of my annual income to the promotion of Christ's Cause.

THE DISCIPLINE OF TIME

To use my Time as a sacred gift, not to be wasted, striving to make my daily work, whatever it may be, a Christian vocation.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

To try every day to lift some human burden.

THE DISCIPLINE OF STUDY

To develop my mental powers by careful reading and study.

THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLINE

Dr. Elton Trueblood inspired the Yokefellow organization as a dedicated group of people who wished to work for spiritual renewal for individuals and churches. The core of the Yokefellow movement was the adoption of the seven disciplines that persons pledge to activate in their lives. No discipline is considered more important than any other and in many ways they are interrelated. However, as you begin to practice the disciplined life, attempting to implement all at once may be too difficult. Beginning by working on one or two disciplines, may be more practical. As you master one or two, another discipline may be implemented.

The acceptance of the idea of discipline has come more rapidly and more widely than anyone supposed that it could. This has occurred through a combination of factors, one of which is the public recognition of the weakness of progressive education. Through there are still many of our people who resist discipline of any kind, and particularly self-discipline, the idea that excellence can be achieved without some system of control is no longer convincing to anybody. We cannot help but see that the men who have achieved wonders in modern science and technology are men of very great inner discipline. Not one has succeeded by following the path of least resistance. There is a great deal of power in the world, including human power, but much of it is wasted because it is neither controlled nor directed. ...We see the truth of this, vividly, in such well-known human achievements as athletics and music. The athlete who is training for a contest does not dare to relax his discipline for a single day.... What we have now rediscovered, with a good deal of understandable enthusiasm, is that the same principles which apply to science and athletics and music, apply equally to our religious experience".

From: The Yoke of Christ by Elton Trueblood, p.128-130

Dr. Trueblood's devoted follower and editor of several of his books, James Newby, said of him:

The disciplined atmosphere of his growing years provided a strong foundation for this career as a college professor and Christian, author, since the living of a disciplined life was the basis for his pursuit of excellence in both teaching and writing. (p.xi)

There were a number of outstanding aspects of the Trueblood personality that should be examined in this brief introduction. The first recognizable quality of genuine magnitude is discipline, a quality, as mentioned before, that was developed at a very young age. Elton Trueblood was the most disciplined man I have ever known. He discovered the rewards of self-discipline, since he knew full well that inherent in the human race is the tendency toward laziness, which left unchecked, becomes sinful waste. He regarded time as a sacred gift, and used every minute of every day as a sacred gift, and used every minute of every day as a witness to the glory of God He was a structured individual who maintained a schedule that would have exhausted persons half his age. (p.xi)

DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

"Prayer is the divine in us appealing to the Divine above us." C. H. Dodd

BIBLE TEXTS:

Matthew 6:5-13

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

*Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but Deliver us from evil.(ESV)*

FOR DISCUSSION:

Do we recite prayers or really pray? What is the difference?

Are prayers said in a place of worship more important?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Luke 6:12-13

Jesus went out into the hills to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, that he named apostles.

FOR DISCUSSION:

When you have an important decision to make, do you spend time in prayer?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Luke 18:1

And he told them a parable that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Read Luke 18:2-8.

FOR DISCUSSION:

When prayer is not answered as soon as we wish, what is our best course of action?

What personal experience have you had in prayer when the answer is delayed or different than you expected?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Read Luke 18:9-14

I Timothy 2:8

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

Mark 11:24-25

Believe that you have received everything for which you pray and ask and it will be done for you. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

Can a proud person pray effectively?

Why is hate and bitterness a barrier to prayer?

Can we miss an answer to prayer because it is not what we expected?



📖 BIBLE TEXTS:

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

Do you feel that you know what to pray about?

Have you prayed for something and later realized that it would not have been the best for you or others you may have been interceding for?



📖 BIBLE TEXTS:

Matthew 21:22

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith

Philippians 4:6

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

Does this mean you should pray and then sit and wait or pray and rise and work?

Is trying to work to solve a situation show lack of faith?

Has prayer ever given you strength to accept a very difficult situation? How?

Have you ever felt there was something you could not bring to God in prayer?

Is it sometimes difficult to “pray with thanksgiving?”



DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton, **The Lord's Prayers**, p. 13-14.

Of all parts of the Gospel record, there is not part of greater practical significance for us than that which relates to prayer. Christ confronts us in His parables, in His laughter, and in His suffering, but the deepest confronting comes when we meet our Lord at prayer. Here is an antidote to all that is superficial in religion; here is an alternative to cheap grace. Here is the religion of experience which is also evangelical in the sense it is Christ-centered.

The more we reflect, the more we realize that prayer is the heart of genuine religion. If this were well understood there would be no need to speak of "religionless Christianity." Basic to private religion is private prayer, and basic to public religion is public prayer. All who think with any clarity understand that prayer is far more than any mere verbal form. Prayer is an experience of pure trust and loving obedience which elevates even a modest life when truly related to the Living God. Prayer, in this sense, is nothing of which we need to be ashamed, intellectually or in any other way.

p. 21-22

We find in Matthew's Gospel the most succinct statement of Christ's teaching about prayer, in a passage which deals with two problems, the problem of solitude and the problem of words. The first of these problems concerns the tendency of make prayer a means of impressing other people, rather than a genuine conversation with God, in which our entire interest is in Him. Christ's brief statement is as follows:

"And when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward But when you pray go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

One result of the tendency to take Biblical passages in isolation is the conclusion, often voiced, that it is wrong to pray with others. If the above passage were all that Christ ever said or demonstrated about prayer, such an extreme conclusion might be justified, but the passage cannot bear the whole weight of the problem, for there are others. For one thing, it is clear that Christ Himself did not always go into His own room to pray. He seems to have prayed everywhere, sometimes alone and sometimes in a fellowship. That He did not always pray alone is evidenced by the fact that some of His prayers have been preserved and some could not have been preserved had they not been heard.

Trueblood, Elton, **Your other Vocation**, p.68-69.

The ordinary worker who seeks to make .. work a ministry can make great strides in this direction by the introduction of prayer and meditation into [daily] work. Much as we may need to pray when we are in church, we often need to pray far more when we are engaged in difficult mental or manual tasks. Why should not a Christian businessman pray on every occasion when he faces a difficult decision, especially when there may be some personal clash? Why should not every teacher pray for strength walking through the hail of the school to face a class? Such a person need not parade his piety at all, for prayer can be genuine without any change in external posture. It may be fair to say that a job about which a Christian cannot pray is not the right job and is therefore outside .. true vocation.

FOR DISCUSSION:

The Islamic faith requires prayer five times a day. How often should a Christian pray?

How and when can you pray everyday?

How can you integrate prayer into your daily routine?



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DISCIPLINE OF SCRIPTURE

BIBLE TEXTS:

John 20:9

For as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

FOR DISCUSSION:

What part of the Bible do you know best? Why?

What books of the Bible do you seldom read? Why?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Acts 8:35

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus.

FOR DISCUSSION:

To identify this scripture read Acts 8:30-35

At the time that Acts was written what did the word Scripture mean?



BIBLE TEXTS:

I Cor 4:6

I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers and sisters, that you may learn by us to live according to the scripture, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against the another.

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can reading the Scripture help us in our relationships?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Gal 3:22,25

— but the scripture declares that the whole world is prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. (v.25) Now that faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

FOR DISCUSSION:

What was promised before Christ came??

Does “no longer under the supervision of the law” mean that there are no ethical rules?

Does this mean the 10 Commandments should no longer be followed?



BIBLE TEXTS:

I Tim 4:13

Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching.

II Tim. 3:16-17

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the people of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Read I Tim 4 to understand the complete message.

Who was writing this book and why?

How can today's Christians apply the teachings in this Chapter 4?

Does this phrase "public reading of scripture" imply that we should not read it in private??



BIBLE TEXTS:

2 Pet 1:20,21

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Since the prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit, can the Holy Spirit help us to understand their writing today?

How does the Holy Spirit help us understand what we read in the Bible?

When we read a passage of scripture at different times, can the Holy Spirit help us see different meanings⁷



BIBLE TEXTS:

John 8:31,32

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in Him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

FOR DISCUSSION:

Is Jesus word limited to the Bible?

Can we know the truth by one reading of the Bible?



DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton, **The Encourager**, p 76

If the Christian faith is to survive, the place to begin is the necessity of the Bible. Apart from the written records, Christian practice would have become so diverse that its different expressions would have had almost nothing in common. But once the New Testament had come into existence, there was a standard of reference in terms of which all variants could be judged. It is, therefore, something for which our gratitude is boundless. If it were not for the Book, we should not even be.

We understand the New Testament better when we realize that, in an important sense, its production was unintentional. The early Christians of Hebrew origin were familiar, of course, with what we call the Old Testament, which they often quoted, Christ himself quoted the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah. Many of the early Christian sermons employed texts found in the Hebrew Scriptures and saw their own messages as fulfillment. The Greek Christians, by contrast, had no experience of this kind and were not even familiar with the idea of sacred Scripture. Neither Jewish nor Greek Christians had, in the beginning, any idea of a new volume of Sacred writings.

I hope that all.. will learn more and more by direct experience how great a spiritual resource the Bible is. It is in no sense obsolete, for there has been no alternation either in the character of God or in the essentials of human need... Christ is the Word who "became flesh and dwelt among us." Our faith is not in language but in a Person. Yet we are grateful for the language because, without it, we could not know Him to whom it points.

FOR DISCUSSION:

What would you define as the "character of God?"

What are the "characteristics of Christ?"

Where in the Bible do you find supporting evidence for these opinions?



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DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

BIBLE TEXTS:

Deuteronomy 26:10

And behold now I bring the first fruit of the ground, which Thou, O Lord has given me. And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Note that the tithes or offerings to the Lord were presented before the act of worship. Why?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Psalms 29:1-2

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in Holy array.

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can we pay tribute to the Lord???



BIBLE TEXTS:

Psalms 95:1-6

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In His hands are the depths of the earth; and the heights of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for he made it; for His hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Are most of the worship services you attend 'joyful'? What do you associate with the term 'joyful'?

Are most worship services solemn and serious?

What parts **of the** text show reverence? When have you experienced a feeling of reverence?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Luke 4:8

And Jesus answered him, "It is written 'Thou shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve'".

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

What things can **we worship** and serve?? In daily life? In the church?



📖 BIBLE TEXTS:

John 4:22-24

*You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **But** the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipper will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

How important is worshiping in a certain place, like a particular building?

How important to you is the ritual of worship?

The gifts of love, loyalty, obedience and devotion are some gifts of the spirit. Do you feel you can present these in worship?

What does worshiping 'with reverence and awe' mean to you personally?



🖋️ DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton, **Basic Christianity**, p. 91-92

Worship is the most ambitious of all the enterprises in which human beings engage, because, while the mystery can **be** attacked at many points, in worship we seek direct contact with One who alone is ultimate. . . . It is important to make abundantly clear that, when we speak of worship we refer, always, to a direct experience of The Living God. We do not refer to a mere subjective feeling in ourselves, but to a Divine-Human encounter.

p.93 Religion is always shameful when it becomes an unexciting routine. This is almost inevitable when worship is identified with ritual. Whenever we think that saying words constitutes worship we are in manifest danger, for it is always possible to say words with no inner conviction.

Trueblood, Elton, **The Meditations of Elton Trueblood**, p. 5-6

Worship, at its best, is a group experience. The individual on the lonely hillside may know the real presence of God, but there he is only one, and there are many to assert that, when they are with a company, each individual is more than himself II' there is any reality in the group idea, if there is any experience in which men become knit together into an organic whole and cease to be independent units like marbles in a bag, we should expect to find this deeper unity in worship. The very faces of the other persons present can help us, they can fill us with a new sense of the similarity of our problems and common elements of our human nature. That is why an ordinary service of worship is so different from the experience of sitting alone at home listening to a sermon over the radio. As we listen to the radio we are not participators, but in every real service of worship each person contributes to the total mood, by the very expression on his face if in no other way. It is not uncommon for thoughts and hopes to be generated in an hour of group worship that are larger than, and different from the combined thoughts and hopes of the various individuals on entering the building. When this happens worship is really creative.

If we begin to see how worship may be a creative group enterprise we soon realize that every effort at worship is an exciting venture. Such worship may have an order of service, but certainly will not be a recital of what has already been learned. It is not like the playing of a phonograph record. If each person, including the minister, were to go to the service full of expectancy and wonder, realizing that a creative venture was about to be undertaken in which the total result was quite unpredictable, then we would be justified in talking about the worship which is "in spirit and in truth."

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

In your worship have you experienced a recital of "what has already been learned?"

What do you define as "truly creative" worship?

How can worship be "unpredictable?"

After attending a Christian church, Ghandi commented.

*"The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious; they were not an assembly of devout souls, but appeared rather to be worldly-minded people going to~ church for recreation and in conformity to custom."*⁴

Is this a somewhat accurate description of an experience you have had?



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DISCIPLINE OF MONEY

BIBLE TEXTS:

Ecclesiastes 5:10

The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth with gain. This also is vanity.

Isaiah 55:2

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can the desire for things money can buy crowd out our relationship with God?

Do we always “need” the things we “want?”

What gives you the most satisfaction in your life?

Do you desire more “things” with hopes that you will find happiness this way?

Do you think God wants everyone to live in poverty?

Can we accept God’s gifts with joy and thanksgiving and enjoy them?

Does the desire for money control you?

Can you control your money and find joy in it?

How does tithing help get the right perspective on handling money?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Deuteronomy 26:10-12

And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me. And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God; and you shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Notice that offerings are given to the Lord before worship. Why do you think this was done??

When are offerings presented in most churches today? Why is this done at this time?

How can you show rejoicing and thankfulness in worship? In daily life?



BIBLE TEXTS:

2 Chronicles 31:5

As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance from the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey and all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly of the tithe of everything.

Malachi 3:8-10

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?' In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you an overflowing blessing.

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

Holding tight to something requires closed hands. If we open our hands to give, we can also receive. How can this work?

If people give generously to God are they more likely to give help to other persons in need?

Can giving generously make us feel wealthy? How can we avoid feeling superior to others?

Do you feel that Christians may "rob God?"



📖 BIBLE TEXTS:

1 Timothy 6:10

For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for He has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you."

☞ FOR DISCUSSION:

Do you believe that the desire for money is based on a desire for security and/or a desire for power?

How does the desire for money effect faith in God and service to Him?

How can money be used for evil? How can it be used for good?



🖋 DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton, **Alternative to Futility**, p. 102

Austerity - The tradition for simple living is more than a tradition. It has a double justification in that the rejection of luxury serves, on the one hand, to release the mind from worldly interests, and on the other hand, to release income for the service of God and man [persons]. Many poor groups of concerned Christians are able to give to foreign or domestic relief in amounts which shame more wealthy congregations, largely because they live in such simplicity that they do not require all of their earnings for their private and family use. ... It is not required of us that we reinstate a plain garb or return to horse and buggies, but it is required of us that we learn to regulate our personal finances in such a way that planned and intelligent giving is possible. The present practice, in many churches, of placing the gathered offering on the communion table is not just a tricky device. It touches the reality of the situation. All true religion is concerned with money, because money makes a difference in human life.

Trueblood, Elton, **Your other Vocation**, p. 73

There is no doubt that money can be a boon to mankind when rightly used, but the time soon comes when a person who is moved primarily by the Christian idea of vocation cannot be satisfied with the sole incentive of

making money. There are heartening stories of contemporary Christian [laypersons] who, even in middle life, with great financial rewards just ahead, have changed jobs, not because the original job was trivial or evil in its consequences, but because the [person] became convinced that they had powers which the original job did not demand or develop. It is a shame to go down to the grave with some outstanding talent undeveloped, merely because there has never been a job to draw it out or the will to bring it forth with arduous self-discipline.

☞ **FOR DISCUSSION:**

Do you feel that you have control of your finances?

How is the use of money an ethical or religious issue?

Do you feel that your job allows you to use your talents and gifts that God has given you?

When has a gift of money made you feel truly joyful?



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Hinze, Donald W., **To Give and Give Again**, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1990.

DISCIPLINE OF TIME

BIBLE TEXTS:

Psalm 69:13

But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Lord, At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of thy steadfast love answer me.

FOR DISCUSSION:

What is the difference between God's time and our concept of time?

Do you have time priorities that are not coordinated with God's plan for your life?



BIBLE TEXTS:

John 7:6

Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here."

FOR DISCUSSION:

Can we always know when the time is right to take some particular action?

Can we be too impatient to wait for God's prompting?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-17

FOR DISCUSSION:

Can we spend too much time at one of these phases of life? For example can we get stuck grieving for years and miss the joy of life?

We each have the same amount of time, what do we do with it?

Can we take charge of allocating our time?

Can we plan time to communicate with God and also time to serve other persons?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Acts 17:21

Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Do you think this is also true today?

How do most people you know spent their time? Always looking for something new?

Is this a constructive or positive use of time?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Romans 13:10-11

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this you know what hour it is, full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

FOR DISCUSSION:

If you knew your time was limited or ending what would you do?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Ephesians 5:15-16

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Everyone must fill 24 hours per day with some activity. How do you fill your day? Write down a list hour by hour. Is your schedule a wise use of time?

Could you change? Should you change?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Colossians 4:5

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of time.

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can we use our time to work for Christ and serve mankind?

Can we use our time to show our Christian walk in daily life without giving the impression of superiority or criticism of others?



DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton, **A Philosopher's Way**, p. 23.

Perhaps the hardest discipline for modern man to accept is the discipline of time. We like to sit around in endless discussion, even when it is banal and fruitless, and consequently we tend to curtail our sleep so greatly that we are less than our best the next day. Once we looked upon this as merely a matter of personal choice or whim, but there is now reason to see it as a deeply moral matter. It is an affront to our Maker to live on the level of mediocrity when we could exhibit excellence. Many ruin the next day the night before, but they never give a Thought to the idea that this may be a serious religious failure. This is partly because they have not comprehended the idea that real religion is meant to cover the whole of life, not merely a segment of it.

Trueblood, Elton, **The Company of the Committed**, p. 41-42

One of the best secrets of the discipline of time is the fuller date book. This seems, at first, like a gratuitous paradox but appears, upon reflection, to be most reasonable. If a [person] will go through a date book and fill in empty places with really important commitments, including those to meditation, to solitude, to prayer, and writing, [one's] temptations to scatter.. energies will be more ably resisted. The temptation to waste an evening in shallow talk or in watching a succession of television westerns can be better handled if a decision has already been made to read a great book or engage in the arduous task of recording one's reflections. In the same way, much of the problem of time can be met by including, in the year's program, engagements with one's family and friends - for they deserve attention also. Thus, the prior engagement, whatever its character, is a practical way of avoiding the constant necessity of making little decisions at the moment and thereby it achieves liberation.

Of course, no decent person will be so hard with himself [herself], or others, that a planned use of time will be inflexible. It is obvious that in any life real emergencies may arise and we must, consequently, be ready to change our plans when there is a sufficient reason for doing so. There is a third way, better than either the inflexibility of a machine or the emptiness of the unexamined life. Certainly one cannot be in the Company of the Committed unless he[she] has a rule by which he[she] tries to live. It is a great mistake to suppose, as some do, that the acceptance of such a discipline, as an alternative to empty freedom, will make Christians into over-meticulous and self-righteous. This may have been the danger once, but it is certainly not the primary danger now.

☞ **FOR DISCUSSION:**

Do you think of time as a gift from God? Do you ever think of how you use it as a gift to Him?

Do you have a date book or schedule book?

Does or could this help you allocate your time to allow for prayer as well as service?



ADDITIONAL READINGS

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DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

BIBLE TEXTS:

Numbers 8:19

And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among Israel to do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting, and to make atonement for the people of Israel

The service here was the ceremonial activities connection with Jewish sacrificial religious practices.

FOR DISCUSSION:

How did Jesus serve God?

How did Christ's actions and teachings present the idea of service?



BIBLE TEXTS:

I Chronicles 28:21

And behold the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and with you in all the work will be every volunteer who has skill for any kind of service; also the officers and all the people will be wholly at your command.

David here is speaking to his son, Solomon, telling him that not only the Levites who had been chosen to serve in the House of God, but all people with a skill and willingness are to be employed in work for God.

FOR DISCUSSION:

In today's world what kind of work would you list as serving the Lord?

What skills can you offer in service to God?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Nehemiah 13:14

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

FOR DISCUSSION:

What service have you done which you could ask God to remember?



BIBLE TEXTS:

Romans 12:5-7

So we, though many, are all one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortations; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

FOR DISCUSSION:

List what you honestly believe you can and cannot do

What are your gifts, capabilities and talents?

How can you use these abilities in service to God and other persons?

If you do not have the talent to witness in public, how can you serve God?



BIBLE TEXTS:

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone.

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can we recognize characteristics that we possess as God's gifts to us?



BIBLE TEXTS:

1 Peter 4:9-11

Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

FOR DISCUSSION:

If we as Christians believe that nothing we possess of material goods or personal qualities are our own and all belongs to God, how does this effect our lives?

What has God given you?



BIBLE TEXTS:

3 John 1:5-6

Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brother and sisters, especially to strangers, who have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey, as befits God's service.

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can you support other Christian workers?

What kind of practical support?

What kind of spiritual support?



DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton, **Your Other Vocation**,

p. 37. If by the ministry, we mean the religious service of our fellow men, it soon becomes clear that his vocation is potentially universal. Not only does it include both sexes and various races; it can also include those who follow a great variety of occupations. John Bunyan was a tinker, Francis of Assisi a soldier and John Woolman a tailor, but it is obvious that all were ministers, because they were persons who ministered. They could and did speak to the spiritual condition of their neighbors in remarkably redemptive ways.

p. 58 One of the heartening developments of our time has been the growing awareness, on the part of those touched by the Christian gospel, of the meaning of vocation. The idea is that God can call us to many kinds of activity and that secular work well done is a holy enterprise.

Trueblood, Elton, **Alternative to Futility**, p. 101-102.

Humanity. The concerned Christian must be identified with the sufferings of his fellow men and active in lifting burdens wherever found. The rule is that every day must include some outgoing activity, that is not for ourselves alone. It is easy to make this sound sentimental, but need not be. . . This service must go beyond conventional philanthropy to various deeds of social action, in many of which each person can act alone. The extension of real friendship to a representative of another race, the lending of a hand to an overworked young mother — these are not grand or colorful acts, but they are the stuff of which Christian behavior is made. One of the chief concrete ways in which social concerns can be expressed daily is in care of the reputation of others. This involves refusal to participate in slander and malicious gossip, which are such a temptation to otherwise good people. One of the most disciplined of another generation put it memorably when he said, "O how good it is, and how it tendeth to peace, to be silent about other men, and not to believe at random all that is said, nor eagerly to report what we have heard" (The Imitation of Christ)

Trueblood, Elton, **The New Man for our Time**, p. 81.

It is possible to be religious, in the sense of having the assurance of personal salvation, and yet be blind or insensitive to vast areas of human suffering. While it is true that life is never adequate without reverence, it is true, at the same time, that no experience is valid unless it leads to acts of justice and mercy. Grace can be appropriated too cheaply! The author of the Fourth Gospel provided a balance to the Synoptics when, in his account of the Last Supper, he indicated that Christians are asked to combine the basin and towel with the bread and the wine. (John 13:3-17)

FOR DISCUSSION:

How can we serve others in our everyday life?

How can you put your Christian love in Action?



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DISCIPLINE OF STUDY

BIBLE TEXTS:

Ezra 7:10

Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Nehemiah 8:13

On the second day, the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the law.

FOR DISCUSSION:

Ezra, like a competitor in modern sports, was determined to prepare himself for Service to God. He studied all the material available so that he could be knowledgeable about God's laws. Since the Jewish faith was one of law, this was critical.

How did Ezra use the knowledge that he acquired by long hours of study?

What kind of study should we be doing in today's world?

List the religious books, other than the Bible, you have read in the last year?

How can you share with others what you have studied to help them?



BIBLE TEXTS:

2 Timothy 2:15

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (KJV)

FOR DISCUSSION:

What are the tools available to a Christian?

if you study many versions and commentaries related to the Bible, will you be heifer able to communicate with others?

Should you always accept someone else's religious ideas and opinions?

Can study and meditation give you greater insight into your beliefs and faith?



DR TRUEBLOOD'S WRITINGS:

Trueblood, Elton. **Your Other Vocation**, p. 115-117.

.....many people can be attracted by a program which deliberately lifts the intellectual level, whereas their interest could not be held by the trivial or the easy. Perhaps it is really true that it is to do hard things that the humblest son of Adam dimly longs. In any case we shall be well advised, in the development of the education necessary to the health of the laymen's movement, to raise our sights and to keep them high.

.....If the contemporary growth of lay religion is to fulfill its promise, as the need requires, the chief subject of study

must be theology. The study of theology, which is concerned with the knowledge of God, is perhaps the most mature discipline in which men and women can engage. It is an exciting intellectual venture to use our minds, with all of the honesty and integrity we can muster, to try to work out a coherent system of belief, which is true to experience and in which there are no mutually contradictory elements. Obviously this is not easy and is not a task for children. The Bible is an amazingly mature book. Children can get something from it, but only those who have lived deeply and long and well can begin to understand its real significance. Theological study is more appropriate, therefore, for experienced persons than for the very young.

☞ **FOR DISCUSSION:**

Have you ever felt really mental[ly] challenged by a study group dealing with faith or religion?

Did you have a belief as a young person which has changed as you matured in faith?



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**The
End**