

MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL!

- **euchrestos** - easy to make use of, useful (2 Timothy 2:21, 4:11; Philemon 11)
 - **achrestos** - useless, unprofitable (found only in Philemon 11)
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Philemon 11

The book of Philemon is about a runaway slave named "Onesimus." His name means "profitable" or "helpful" - in other words, useful or beneficial. Originally he was nothing of the sort, but God changed all that. In verse 11, Paul uses a play on words, using a *second* word for "useful" (euchrestos) to describe the change that had happened. Onesimus (the "useful" one) was once "useless" (achrestos) but now has become "useful" (euchrestos). Becoming a disciple of Jesus causes great changes in one's life!

2 Timothy 2:21

Paul uses an illustration to describe those who accomplish good things for God, as compared to those who don't. The one is described as a "vessel of honor" - useful to the Master (God) and ready to serve him, doing what is good. The other is described as a "vessel of dishonor." Do you want to make sure you are a "vessel of honor"? Check the context to see what you need to do.

2 Timothy 4:11

Paul found Mark to be "useful" (helpful) in his ministry. If this is the same Mark who deserted Paul during his first missionary journey (Acts 15:37-38), it testifies to the power of Christ, which changes the lives of those who love him. Mark wasn't of much use to Paul back then! [Note: It also testifies to the value of another person's encouragement: Barnabas (the "son of Encouragement" - Acts 4:36) continued to work with Mark at a time when Mark was of no value to Paul's ministry - Acts 15:39.]

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

Look at the verses before and after 2 Timothy 2:21. How will a "vessel of honor" (or one intended for "noble purposes" - NIV translation) be different from a "vessel of dishonor" (or one intended for "ignoble purposes" - NIV translation)? To what degree are these characteristics (good or bad) a part of your life? What can you do to increase the good characteristics and decrease the bad ones?

To most people, slavery is a totally negative concept, and often carries with it the idea of a cruel taskmaster brutally beating helpless victims. And though the cruel treatment of humans (whether or not slaves) has always existed, since the time sin entered the world, the Bible's concept of slavery does not always carry those evil connotations. There are times that the Bible speaks about slavery (or being a servant) in a good sense! (See Deuteronomy 15:16-17; Romans 1:1; 6:22; 1 Corinthians 7:20-22; 9:19,27; James 1:1 as a few examples.) Furthermore, the principles that govern a master-slave relationship (see Ephesians 6:5-9, for example) would apply to *many* situations in which one person has authority over another. The employer-employee relationship would be one example. Think about how Onesimus' conversion affected his attitude toward the way he fulfilled his obligations as a servant. How did he demonstrate the presence of love (1 Corinthians 13) in his life? How can you apply these principles in your life, in any relationship in which you are under another person's authority? [You may want to study some of the New Testament verses which make reference to serving God or serving other people.]

Have you ever failed to be "useful" when you should have been? Did you ever fail to have a kindness in your heart that expressed itself in good and useful ways? We all have! Assuming that the Mark mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11 is the same one that is mentioned in Acts 15:37-38, how can this passage be a source of encouragement to you? Even if you are unsure about the connection between these two passages, this passage in Acts can illustrate how you can be a source of encouragement and help to others. Consider this passage, and also Galatians 5:13. How can you follow this example?

ASSIGNMENT:

Set some goals for ways you can make yourself "useful" to others. In the next few days, focus on trying to fulfil some of these goals. Also be watching for unexpected situations (which will most likely occur) in which you can display the "useful kindness" that 1 Corinthians 13:4 mentions. If God's love has filled your heart (and it has, if you belong to him), look for ways to express it to others!

BEING "USELESS"

The Wrong Way & the Right Way!

- **achreios** - useless, good for nothing (Matthew 25:30; Luke 17:10)
 - **achreoo** - to make useless, render unserviceable (in reference to one's character: Romans 3:12)
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Romans 3:12

Sin has had a horrible effect on humanity. It has destroyed us in every way. This passage (verses 10-17) is God's indictment against the human race... and also the reason that it was necessary for Jesus to die in our place. Not only are our actions sinful, but our very character and nature are totally corrupted by sin. Because of this, we are described as "useless" or "worthless" in God's sight. Thank God that, starting in verse 21, we are introduced to a righteousness that is available to us in Christ!

[Note: In the following two verses, Jesus uses the master-slave relationship to teach two totally different (complementary, not incompatible) principles. Because of this, the actions of the servants and masters are totally different in the two passages. Don't try to combine the illustrations, or you will end-up with confusion!]

Matthew 25:30

In many places, the Bible warns us that genuine salvation will result in genuine "fruit." After all, where the Spirit is present, so will his fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) be present! The Bible also warns us that there will be many who are "fruitless," who will have deceived themselves into thinking they were his disciples or servants, though they are not. In this parable, we see these two types of "servants." The one type is represented by the servants who were entrusted with money and who used that money to gain more for the master: they are described as "faithful." The other type is represented by the servant who did nothing profitable with the money, and then returned it with nothing gained: he is described as "worthless" or "useless." To be sure, he had plenty of excuses, but in reality, he was simply lazy and wicked (verse 26). In the end, each group receives its appropriate reward.

Luke 17:10

We need to remember that the good we do was made possible, *only* because God gave us the ability to do it. It is easy to forget this and to develop a proud attitude similar to the Pharisee mentioned in Luke 18:9-14, who thought he was better than others. We need the attitude of truthful humility that is displayed in Luke 17:10. After we have done our duty, we need to remember that we have done nothing above and beyond what we were supposed to do in the first place. From this perspective, we have been "unworthy" or "useless" - that is, in the sense that we have *not* gone above and beyond "the call of duty."

Remember that everything we have done for God - no matter how great and mighty it may be - is nothing, in comparison to what God has done for us! The contrasting attitudes between the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) is another illustration of the truthful (rather than pretentious) humility of those who belong to God.

TO THINK ABOUT:

The prophet Jeremiah reminds us: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) What is your attitude toward this verse and toward the Romans passage? Do they offend you? Or do you consider their evaluation to be correct and accurate? Why?

How can one who is by nature "worthless" (or "useless") be made "useful" in God's sight? Take some time to think about the amazing thing that happened on the cross. What an expression of kindness! Even angels long to look into these matters (1 Peter 1:12)!

God has given you numerous abilities. Even the ability to do "normal, everyday activities" is a gift from God. How have you used the things he has given you? Have you "invested" them by using them in ways that honor him? Or have you wasted the gifts he has given you? Are you "faithful" or "worthless" ("useless") in his sight?

If you have become aware that you are not what you should be, what are you going to do about it? [Hint: Don't merely make some resolution to start doing better. You will fail. Start doing something, but focus also on the attitude of your heart. Perhaps a focus on Psalm 51 would be a good place to begin. And once you do begin living more faithfully, consider the attitude explored in the questions that follow.]

When God has given you the ability to do something... and you do it, who do you give the credit to? We all have the temptation to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. (That is why Paul warns us to *not* do so - Romans 12:3, and that when we do so, we are *not* being wise - 2 Corinthians 10:12.) Consider some of the ways that giving credit to yourself is incompatible with love. If you have a problem with pride and self-love, it would be good for you to explore the Word of God, to see what it says about such an

attitude. You will also benefit from a study of the topic of humility. Since you probably won't be able to begin these studies this very moment, here are a couple verses for you to consider:

1 Corinthians 4:7

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Micah 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

RESTRICTING YOUR USE OF THINGS

When They Hinder Your Expression of Love and Kindness to Others

- **katachraomai** - to use fully (1 Corinthians 7:31, 9:18)
 - **chraomai** - to take for one's use; to use (1 Corinthians 7:31; 9:12,15; other verses exist, but are not applicable to this study)
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[These words do not focus on making oneself "useful," but on "using" things. I have included these two passages because they deal with attitudes. If we don't become consumed with "using" the things mentioned in the following verses, we will find ourselves more free to focus on being "useful"! If our focus is not on ourselves, our circumstances, etc., we will be more able to focus on our love to others: expressing kindness in good and useful ways. One of the passages describes an obligation; the other is a recommendation (at least for certain circumstances), rather than a mandatory action.]

1 Corinthians 7:31

The primary focus in this chapter is on the issue of whether or not a person should marry. And Paul answers this question by telling us that marriage is an acceptable alternative. However, the one who is able to remain unmarried (avoiding sexual sin, of course) will be able to have a more intense focus on the kingdom of God - and this is the more desirable choice.

In addition to this answer, Paul also gives us some basic, general principles that apply to all the circumstances of life: We should make it our goal to live in peace and with contentment in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. It is acceptable for us to make changes to better circumstances, when the opportunity is present, but our primary focus should be on obeying God (v. 15, 17-24).

Our primary focal point should not be on having a family, on circumstances (whether pleasant or unpleasant), on the abundance of possessions, or on the enjoyment of the things of this world. We need to remember that all the things of this present world are temporary, and we need to focus on what is eternal. (v. 29-31) In the context of this specific study, Paul warns us (v. 31) that those who "use" (chraomai) the things of the world should not focus on "fully using" ("being engrossed in" - NIV translation) them (katachraomai). This is essentially the

same thing Jesus taught us, when he said that we cannot serve two masters! (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13)

[Note: Some restrict the application of this passage just to the Christians at Corinth. They say that it has no relevance for people today. Yet nothing in the context requires us to reach that conclusion. Furthermore, the principles stated here are fully compatible with what Scripture teaches elsewhere.]

1 Corinthians 9:12,15,18

Those who faithfully teach the Word of God are working for us. They are doing us a great service, and we will benefit and prosper eternally because of their labor. This being the case, is it too much for us to provide for their physical needs, while they live on this earth? In Scripture, God says that even *animals* who work for us should be "paid"! (Deuteronomy 25:4, quoted in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18) How much more should those who show us the way to eternal life! They have a right to it; we do *not* have a right to refuse it.

However... there may also be circumstances in which they choose to *not use their rights*. They may conclude that they can accomplish more for the cause of Christ if they preach the gospel "without charge." In this chapter, Paul shows that he has the right to receive support from the Corinthians. He has his rights, just as the Corinthians had theirs (see chapter 8). But does that mean he must go parading about, demanding his rights? He knows he has rights... but he also has love!

It seems, in chapter 8, that the Corinthians were willing to trample and destroy others, in order to exercise their own rights. Paul had to remind them that they have *no right* to destroy others - they must build them up, instead. And in chapter 9, he showed that he "practiced what he preached," when he refused to receive financial support from them. Though he had every right to do so, he chose rather to give them the gospel "free of charge," in order that the effects of the gospel would not be hindered in their lives. More than that, he chose to give up *every* right he had, for their sake - choosing to focus on love, rather than on self. Isn't this the very essence of biblical Christianity? Once God changes your heart, that change reflects itself in a change in your attitude toward self and toward others.

It should be noted that there were other apostles and leaders who *did* receive financial support (see the early part of chapter 9). Paul did not condemn them for doing so. Yet in his own circumstances, it would have been detrimental to the Corinthians for him to do so. And this would not have been an expression of love! Note also that even when leaders do not exercise their rights of material support from us, we still have an obligation to "pay" them in other ways. For instance, we owe them the "payment" of honor, in proportion to how well they perform their duties (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

[Note: To better understand this issue, study the context of these chapters. Refraining from the expression of "rights" in this context (so that we do not destroy others) is *not* the same as

yielding to the demands of "legalistic Pharisees" whose purpose is simply to enslave us with a bunch of restrictions. For the first group, Paul always gave-up his rights; for the other group, he *never* did. (Acts 15, Galatians and Colossians provide examples of this second group.) For the first group, our actions can cause them to sin; for the second group, they are sinful and warped regardless of our actions.]

TO THINK ABOUT:

Look around you. Which things are temporary? Which are eternal? Where is your focus? Are you absorbed with things that do *not* have lasting value? Many people *claim* to value Christ and his kingdom... but what values do you *live*? (Empty claims do not prove a change in heart... or demonstrate the reality of one's salvation.)

You may need to spend some time examining the values taught by Scripture. Making them a part of your life is a life-long process. But if the Spirit of God is in you, change will occur. If the love of Christ is in you, it will manifest itself in some way. (Of course, if there is no evidence of life, at least you know where you need to begin: you need to turn to God for salvation.)

How does love manifest itself in one's use of rights? We live in a world in which everyone demands their rights... and they are willing to knock down anyone who is in their way, to get them. Are you different? To what extent do you let the effect you have on others influence your actions - so that others are built-up rather than torn-down? Are there areas in your life, in which the exercise of rights would be incompatible with love and kindness? How do you respond in those areas?

Think about the things mentioned in 1 Corinthians 8-9... about Paul's willingness to become a "slave" to everyone (9:19-23)... and about his ultimate goal in everything he does (9:24-27). Think about ways that these principles apply to your life.

ASSIGNMENT:

You will have opportunity to make choices which reflect your values. As you do so, think about the values being reflected. If they are not a reflection of Christ's love, how can you change your choices?

If "putting God and others first" seems like an empty burden to you, you may need to first focus on your relationship with God. You may need to think about what repentance and salvation is all about. [Even Christians need to remind themselves about these things, at times. This is what the apostle Peter thought, when he reminded his readers about things they already knew - see 2 Peter 1:12-15.]

THINGS WHICH ARE "USEFUL" OR "USELESS"

As Far as Their Spiritual Value is Concerned

- **chraomai** - to take for one's use, to make use of a thing (1 Timothy 1:8 and elsewhere)
 - **chresimos** (fit for use, useful) + **oudeis/oudemia/ouden** (no one, none) - no use or value: useless (2 Timothy 2:14)
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1 Tim. 1:8 - The law is good, if used properly or in the right way.

The New Testament tells us much about the law and its proper function. It also shows us the relationship between law and grace. We learn that there are different aspects of "law" - such as moral law, ceremonial law, civil law, the law of Moses, etc., and there are varying ways in which each has (or doesn't have) application to us.

Here, in 1 Timothy 1:8, we focus on the law's application to those who break (violate) the moral law. We focus on its use for exposing and condemning sin. This is comparable to the focus of Galatians 3:24, which tells us that the law was intended to show us our need for a Savior - Jesus Christ. Within the context of 1 Timothy, Paul is warning about people who acted like "teachers of the law" (v. 7), but who had no comprehension of its proper use. As a result, they taught "meaningless words" (v. 6) - they were "teachers of falsehood" (v. 3). The context describes some of the consequences of these false-teachers' actions.

2 Tim. 2:14 - Arguing over words has no value - it is useless and destroys those who listen.

Much of the focus in Paul's two letters to Timothy deals with the issue of "sound" words (the teachings of the Scriptures) contrasted with "empty" words (man-made or distorted teachings). In the context of 2 Timothy 2:14, Paul warns about "godless chatter" - false teaching - which produces only godlessness.

The message of the Word of God is a solid foundation for those who live by it. This is what we should focus on, not on speculations, disputes, arguments and meaningless talk!

TO THINK ABOUT:

The concept of "law" brings different ideas to different people. A full examination of this topic is far beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that there *are* some good uses for it... as well as some bad *misuses* of it. In terms of the focus of 1 Timothy 1, in what way does the law show you how you ought to live? How does it teach you about your need for Christ?

You may wish to explore other New Testament passages that focus on the law. What aspects of the law are we to "uphold" (as Paul says in Romans 3:31)? What aspects of the Law were not intended for everybody? You may wish to explore the issue of what is and what isn't applicable to us today. (Acts 15 is a good place to begin looking.) You may wish to examine the relationship between law, grace, faith and salvation.

Jesus says that all the requirements of the Law are summarized in the two great commands: To love God completely and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:34-40). How are these two commands a summary of the 10 Commandments?

Empty talk can take on many forms. It can even sound good and "spiritual." Look at these two letters (1 and 2 Timothy). How does Paul contrast "sound teaching" with "empty talk": what makes the one "useful" and the other "useless"? Focus not only on the descriptive characteristics of each, but also on their "fruit" - the consequences of each. [You may also want to include the book of Titus, which also mentions much about empty talk and "myths."]

When you talk about "spiritual things" (or listen to others talk about them), to what degree does the discussion fit into the category of "useful"? of "useless"? (For example, does it eventually turn into a heated argument, in which nobody listens to anyone? Or does it ramble off to things the Bible isn't concerned about? Does it leave people feeling "more spiritual" without having any positive effect on their spiritual lives?)

If you were involved in such a discussion, how would you be able to recognize if it was truly useless? (Example: Does it have any impact on your relationship with God and with your "neighbor" - including your enemies?) How would you distinguish between a "useful" and a "useless" discussion? (Most people just assume that if it involves themselves, it is "OK." They don't carefully reflect on its spiritual value.)

Empty talk is not limited to "spiritual" matters. Many passages - especially in the Proverbs - make reference to "meaningless speech" or "the speech of a fool." According to Proverbs 10:19, there is a strong connection between "wordiness" and the tendency to sin. James 3:8 reminds us that the tongue is "filled with poison." You may want to explore some of these other aspects of talking. If you do, you will better understand the reason it is so easy for even "good" discussions to become sinful!

How might the expression of love and kindness be indirectly implied by the two passages in this study? (This is an "opinion" question. If nothing comes to your mind, there is no need for you to invent something, just to satisfy the question!)

BEING WEALTHY

Having Plenty of Things to "USE"

- **chrema** - (plural) riches, money [whatever one can "use"] (Mark 10:23; Luke 18:24; and elsewhere)
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Mark 10:23 - It will be hard for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God.

Luke 18:24 - It is hard for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God.

How much is "enough"? Most people say, "Just a little bit more." Few say, like Paul did, that they are content in whatever circumstances they find themselves (Philippians 4:11 and elsewhere).

Don't ask yourself whether or not you consider yourself "wealthy." Don't compare yourself with some rich person you know. Instead, focus on just yourself. Look around you. Do you have lots of things that you *cannot* enter the kingdom of God. But you need to give thought to how serious this matter really is - how easily the things you "use" can crowd the kingdom out of your life. You may worship God in a "church" one day of the week... but who (or what) do you worship the rest of the week? If you claim it is God, is it obvious to other people? If not, then you may be deceiving yourself. Even if you could gain the whole world, would it be worth it? In these passages, it seems that the rich young ruler loved his "things" too much to change his ways. This is an example to *not* follow!

TO THINK ABOUT:

In the context of these passages, the rich young ruler was told that he needed to give away his riches - the things he was accustomed to "using," if he wanted to inherit eternal life. This is not always the case, but when such things receive more attention and time than God does, there may be no other recourse. Jesus wasn't "glorifying" poverty when he said this; rather, he was telling the young man to get rid of *everything* that had become like an idol to him - things that had taken over the place of God in his life. The man left filled with grief and sadness, for he knew that Jesus had spoken to the very heart of the matter. He was breaking the very first of the 10 Commandments.

How does one objectively evaluate himself? As James says, he can look into the "mirror of truth" (compare to James 1:21-26). But doing so has a danger. The Word of God can save your soul (verse 21), but - when you ignore it - it can also condemn you. The same Word that brings life to one person (he who hears and obeys) brings death to another (he who ignores it). *The Bible is not a toy. Reading it can be very dangerous, because it requires you to change!*

You will benefit greatly from reading and studying the Word (if you do as it says, of course) and focusing on what it says about riches, contentment, generosity, helping others, greed and idolatry, etc. Of course, you will want to look at the passages that describe wealth as being a blessing from God. But you need to also consider the effects of sin on the heart: it turns what is a blessing into a curse, if it is not "crucified" in Christ (Galatians 2:20). God did not give you the blessing of wealth - or any other blessing, for that matter - so that you could live for yourself. He gave it to you so that you could live for God and could be a blessing to others. Don't forget it! (If you do, you will receive an unpleasant reminder about it, at the Day of Justice.)

For those of you who do not have wealth (or "many things" to use), remember that you also have the ability to sin. You cannot point an accusing finger at the rich without also condemning yourself. How often are you jealous that they have more than you do? Are you content? Do you live for God any more than they do? Remember that Paul wasn't content only when he had "plenty," but also when he was impoverished (Philippians 4:11-12). God may be able to use the rich, if they have a repentant heart, to accomplish certain things for the kingdom of God. But he may be able to use you better, if you also have a repentant heart. Remember that God's strength is *best* seen in weakness (consider 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Finally, if you believe you are being "oppressed and persecuted" by the rich, remember that the Day of Justice is inescapable for all of us. Pray for them, that they may become ready for it (Matthew 5:44-45).

[A question for both rich and poor - those with plenty and those in need.] If you are a genuine disciple of Jesus, God has given you the ability to show love and kindness to others. Are you doing so? How can you improve? If you need to improve in this matter, start reading the New Testament and looking for examples and commands which apply to you. (Some Old Testament passages, such as the Proverbs, may also prove helpful.) Some things will apply more to the rich, some more to the poor, but something exists that will apply to *each* of us.

The Bible is DANGEROUS!

The Bible is not merely something to believe;
It is something to be submitted to.

We are hopelessly lost without it;
But we face a dangerous peril with it:

For if it doesn't break us and change us,
It will harden us.

Even people who claim to agree with the Bible can become hardened against it - and not even know it - if they fail to make a conscious effort to put it into practice.

My people come to you, as they always do. They sit before you and hear your words, but they do not obey them. With their mouths they express love, but in their hearts they chase after selfish gain. To them, you are nothing more than a singer of love songs who has a beautiful voice, or a musician who plays an instrument well. They hear your words but do not obey them. Ezekiel 33:31-32

HAVING "NEEDS"

Not Having Things Which You Need to "USE"

This section focuses on what people "need to use." In some cases, the passage deals with something that we *do* have (or can have) - things that we ought to "use." In other instances, the passage deals with things people *don't* have - the issue of being "needy."

Of course, other Greek words can be translated "need," and other passages mention needs without using the word "need." So much more could be said than is mentioned below. But these verses are a place to start. Later, you may wish to further examine the issue of "what we need."

(As normal, look at the context of these verses.)

- **chreia** - a necessity, need (Matthew 6:8; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31; 10:42; Romans 12:13; 1 Corinthians 12:21, 24; Ephesians 4:28-29; Philippians 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; Titus 3:14; Hebrews 5:12; 10:36; 1 John 3:17; Rev. 3:17; and elsewhere)
 - **chre** - it is necessary (James 3:10, used with "not": it is not needed <it must not be needed>)
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1. ABOUT YOUR NEEDS

- **GOD KNOWS ABOUT THEM:** Matthew 6:8 - Your Father (God) knows what you need, even before you ask him; you do not need to "babble" like pagans, to get his attention!
- **GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM:** Philippians 4:19 - He will supply your needs. Of course, one of your main needs may be contentment! (See verse 11) Our definition of "need" does not always match God's definition!
- **DOING SOMETHING TO PROVIDE FOR THEM:** Titus 3:14 - We must learn to devote ourselves to doing what is good. Then we will be able to provide for life's necessities, and will not be unproductive in our lives. [NOTE: This verse parallels Ephesians 4:28 (below), and perhaps could be placed under the heading "When Others Have Needs." The passage doesn't specifically mention a focus on *our own* needs, but on "needs" in general!]

- HOW TO *NOT* BE IN NEED (ALSO, HOW TO GAIN RESPECT): 1 Thessalonians 4:12 - Lead a quiet life, mind your own business, and work with your own hands! (see verse 11)

2. SOME SPECIFIC THINGS YOU NEED

- PAYING ATTENTION TO JESUS: Luke 10:42 - There are few things you *really* need, and *ultimately just one*: paying attention to what Jesus has said. Avoid the distractions of life!
- WE (BEING SINNERS) NEED JESUS: Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31 - Illustrated by the saying: "It is not the healthy, but the sick, who need a physician." Application: Jesus came to save sinners, not righteous people. (Of course, there are no righteous people, apart from Jesus. But there are quite a few "self-righteous" ones!)
- OTHER PEOPLE: 1 Corinthians 12:21 - In the "body of Christ," we *all* need *each other*.
- ENDURANCE: Hebrews 10:36 - You need endurance, so you will do the will of God, and (ultimately) receive what God promises to those who follow him. Endurance and following God cannot be separated. (Some people try to... but none will succeed.)

3. THINGS YOU DO *NOT* NEED

- HOPEFULLY NOT - THE NEED TO GROW-UP SPIRITUALLY: Hebrews 5:12 - Hopefully, you are *not* dull of hearing and immature in the faith (needing to be re-taught the "basics"), but have grown to maturity. This is comparable to needing milk when you should be eating solid food. Don't be "spiritually retarded"! (This passage is applicable to those who *claim* to have turned to Christ, a long time ago, and have not grown in the faith. It definitely does *not* apply to those who have just been saved, who have not had time to grow!)
- DEFINITELY NOT - YOU HAVE NO "NEED" TO SPEAK BOTH GOOD AND EVIL: James 3:10 - This should never be!

4. BEING BLIND ABOUT ONE'S NEEDS

- CLAIMING TO BE WITHOUT SPIRITUAL NEED, WHEN THE OPPOSITE IS ACTUALLY TRUE: Revelation 3:17 - Pay attention to Jesus' advice, mentioned in v.18+.

5. WHEN OTHERS HAVE NEEDS

- **SHARE WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS:** Romans 12:13 - Share with other Christians who are in need.
- **OTHER'S NEEDS... OUR ACTIONS:** Ephesians 4:28 - We must work (rather than steal), doing things which are beneficial, so that we can share with those who are in need. The idea is: If you can, you are to "give" rather than "take." (See also Titus 3:14, under the heading, "About Your Needs.")
- **OTHER'S NEEDS... OUR WORDS:** Ephesians 4:29 - What we say should benefit others. We should build them up, not tear them down. Their needs should influence our words.
- **THOSE UNWILLING TO SHARE DO NOT HAVE GOD'S LOVE IN THEM:** 1 John 3:17 (v. 18 - We must have a love that is based on actions and truth, not on empty words!)
- **A NEED OF "WEAKER MEMBERS" OF THE "BODY" (THOSE WHO ARE LESS "PROMINENT"):** 1 Corinthians 12:24 - They are just as important, in God's eyes, as the more prominent members. So we *need* to give them the additional honor they deserve - yet aren't getting. (See the context.)

TO THINK ABOUT:

Does God know what your real needs are? Do you? How do you distinguish between genuine "needs" and "wants"? God has promised to take care of your needs, but he has no obligation to meet your every whim and desire. He is not your servant. (That would be backwards!)

How does contentment fit into the picture? Look at the context around Philippians 4:19. Paul claims that God supplies our needs. In what types of circumstances is this true? In just pleasant circumstances, or also in unpleasant ones? Do unpleasant circumstances nullify God's promise to take care of us? Do they "prove" that God has "failed"?

This issue (God meeting our needs) is related to the issue of prayer. In many passages, we are told that God will answer our prayers - that he will do what we ask for. Yet there are circumstances in which we do not get the answer we asked for. Why? Some people would accuse God of breaking his promise! Yet Scripture gives us many reasons why things might not happen the way we want. A few passages include: 1 John 5:14-15 (we need to ask "according to his will"); James 4:3 (our motives must be godly); Luke 18:7-8 (it may be temporarily delayed - though "quick," or "right on time," from God's perspective); 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (God may be displaying his strength through your weakness. Implication: our attitudes in the whole matter may need to change!); Romans 8:26 (Sometimes we don't know how we really ought to pray!). Ultimately, the question is: When things don't go your way, do you still trust God, or not? (Such

circumstances test whether your faith is genuine or fake! 1 Peter 1:6-7) How does endurance fit into the picture?

What are our *real*, ultimate needs - the ones that will remain after everything else is gone? Do you focus on these needs, or on those which are temporary and will pass away? Do you need to reflect on your attitude and values? [If "yes," then *do it!*] How will your attitude in this matter impact your perspective on the issues mentioned in the questions above?

The "sluggard" (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16) has lots of needs. He could do something about it, but he is too lazy to do so. (Of course, he always has a "reason" - he can blame circumstances or other people.) Scripture requires us not only to attempt to take care of our own needs, but to also provide for the needs of others. By implication, there *are* genuine instances in which a person is unable to take care of his own needs, but it seems that laziness is also a problem. How is taking care of one's own needs an expression of love? How is reliance on others, when you have the ability to take care of yourself, like stealing? What does Scripture say about that?

There will always be truly needy people. What are our obligations toward them? (Note that , though the needs of "outsiders" is not excluded, our primary obligation is toward those who are part of the body of Christ, the members of our own "family" - Romans 12:13, Galatians 6:10, etc.) How is our attitude toward the needy a reflection of our attitude toward God? (Consider 1 John 4:20-21; James 2:14-17; Matthew 25:31-46, etc.)

How important are other members of the body of Christ, to you? How do you treat them? In what ways do you honor the "nobodies"? (How does Jesus treat "nobodies"?) This week, deal with your own attitudes (if necessary), then make an attempt to better appreciate others who are part of your family. Maybe you can focus on "building them up" with kindness! (Our focus is on the "family of believers," but if you need to work on your relationship with your *physical* family, do that, too!)

The section entitled, "Things you do not need," mentions two things that require self-examination. Both of these issues impact on our ability to express love and kindness to others. First, what is your tongue like? Do you need to repent? (Remember that those who have "unrestrained tongues" have a *worthless* "religion" - James 1:26.) Second, what is your attitude toward the Word of God? How much attention do you give to it - learning what it says, and paying attention to it (James 1:22-25)? Are you growing in the faith?

Finally, Revelation 3:17 warns us about the seriousness of an accurate self-evaluation. Often people tend to think of themselves as "OK," even when they have serious problems. This is especially true when spiritual issues are involved! (The book of 1 Corinthians describes a church that had all sorts of problems. Yet they were boastful and arrogant about themselves!) What can you learn from this passage, that will benefit you? You might not be "Laodicean" in your outlook, but you can probably still learn from their example... and (in doing so) prevent yourself from falling into the same trap! Be kind to *yourself* and learn from the wrongs of others!