

THE WORLD VISION SERENDIPITY ANNUAL BIBLE STUDY 1989

*Living As A Christian
In Today's World*

by John Mallison
and Ian Richardson
(with World Vision staff)

INTRODUCTION

These studies are designed for use in small groups of both youth and adults. They follow a relational approach which is characteristic of the very popular Serendipity Bible study method.

The Serendipity approach seeks to develop Bible study groups that care. They are made up of people who want to take God seriously in their lives. At the centre of the group life is the study of Scripture - but study that takes the biblical teaching and relates it firmly to the lives of the group members. Through this study, the shared life of the group, with its emphasis on care, support, encouragement and celebration, and the enabling of God's grace, Christians will grow and develop, and are prepared for Christian service.

To undertake these studies adequately, at least *1 hour to 1-1/2 hours* should be set aside for each session. You will get the maximum benefit out of these studies if you limit your group size to 6 or 8.

Each member will need a Bible. A variety of versions will enhance the study time and help in understanding difficult passages. All will need their own copy of this study book and something with which to write.

Most groups will want to include *a time of praise*. Be sure to use hymns or scripture songs which are known to the group. You may even want to write a few new scripture songs as there is an absence from many books of songs which deal with the Christian issues grappled with in these studies.

This will help you understand *what is intended in the segments* of each study:

Warm-up: (10 minutes) The purpose of this is to break the ice in the group. Each person is given the opportunity to reflect on some aspect of their past or present experience. This helps group members "get on board", and lays a foundation for the next segments.

Dig: (20-30 minutes) The group does some serious thinking in this segment about the scriptures. All are invited to give their own point of view. There may be varying degrees of shared ignorance here, so it is important the leader does some thinking beforehand, using study aids such as a study Bible, a concordance, Bible dictionary, etc. But the leader doesn't lecture, he/she acts as a resource person, feeding in the information at appropriate times *after* the group has done some thinking.

To think about: (15 minutes) Read individually, underlining the main points then discuss as a group.

My own story: (15 minutes) Here, all are encouraged to relate the learning to their own lives. The leader will set the example in openness. Use "I" messages. Encourage members to speak out of their own experiences, saying what it stirs in them personally. Don't generalize.

Action: (10-15 minutes) The group now struggles with what they are going to do about this learning. What action will be necessary if we are to be serious about God's word? How can share our new insights with others?

Prayer: (10 minutes) In a group not used to praying together, the prayer time may be in silence with the leader introducing a point at a time.

The timing of each segment will depend upon the number in the group. The suggested times are for a group of about eight people.

The leader's role in this type of study is important. The role of facilitator and fellow learner is what is required. As said previously, the leader will need to think about the scripture passage beforehand, with the help of some study aids. This knowledge is not presented in lecture form but is fed in at appropriate times after the members have struggled with the passage.

The leader should model openness and honesty for the group during the sharing as the group seeks to anchor the study to their own life situations.

Some groups may decide to continue meeting to support each other in their struggle to develop a style of Christian discipleship which is consistent with Christ's own example and teachings. In future meetings, groups may study appropriate books on these and similar issues, taking each book a chapter or less at a time. Some suitable books are suggested below. Appropriate scripture passages can be chosen for each session. The inductive methods outlined in my latest book, "Growing Christians in Small Groups", could be applied to these scriptures. There is also a wide range of Australian Serendipity studies available. See at the back of this book for details. Scripture Union also provides lift-out group, Serendipity-style, studies in their Daily Bread notes.

Let's pray for the hundreds of other groups using these studies, that God's Spirit will do a new thing in each of our lives so that God will be praised and others find hope and faith and an easier journey through this world, as we become more concerned and caring followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Mallison

FURTHER RESOURCES TO STUDY

<i>Allan Boesak</i>	- Walking on Thorns: The call to Christian obedience.
<i>Elias Chacour</i>	- Blood Brothers.
<i>Charles Elliott</i>	- Praying the Kingdom. - Comfortable Compassion.
<i>Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins</i>	- World Hunger: Twelve Myths.
<i>Dominique Lapierre</i>	- City of Joy.
<i>Peter Philp</i>	- Journey with the Poor.
<i>John Stott</i>	- Critical issues facing Christians today.
<i>Ronald Sider</i>	- Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger.
<i>Jim Wallis</i>	- Agenda for Biblical people. - The Call to Conversion.

For information about simulation games and suitable audio visual and video materials on these issues of poverty and injustice, contact Diane, Helen or Bill at World Vision's information Centre, telephone (03) 699 8522, or 008 033 112 for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Australia.

STUDY 1: Caring for the Whole Person

Scripture resource: Mark 2:1-12.

WARM-UP

What pressures are you or people close to you under today that cause feelings of struggle or, for some, just the need to survive?

What organisations or groups of people have you observed helping in these situations? Who have been helpful to you in your own struggle?

DIG: Read Mark 2:1-12

(Respond individually to the following by circling one key letter or writing in your own response. When sharing with the group, give your answer and say why.)

- Before Jesus came to town, had you been the paralysed man, how would you have felt?
 - helpless
 - dependent on others
 - ready for anything
 - resigned to being like that for the rest of your life
 - determined to find a solution
 - _____
- What would it have taken you, as the paralysed man's friend, to lower your friend through the roof?
 - courage
 - physical strength
 - desperation
 - conviction of Jesus' concern for physical well-being
 - a sense of humour
 - _____
- When Jesus said to the paralysed man "... your sins are forgiven ...", what do you think the Pharisees thought?
 - Who does this guy think he is?
 - That Jesus is saying he is concerned for spiritual/physical needs.
 - This is making us look ineffective. Let's get rid of him.
 - He's a charlatan. He's on an ego trip.
 - _____
- What new insight about the Kingdom is Jesus raising in this story?

THINK ABOUT

"The kind of evangelicalism which concentrates exclusively on saving individual souls is not true evangelicalism. It is not evangelical because it is not biblical. It forgets that God did not create souls to be body-souls called human beings, who are also social beings, and that he cares about our bodies and their society as well as about their relationship with himself and their eternal destiny."

So true Christian love will care for people as people, and will seek to serve them, neglecting neither the soul for the body nor the body for the soul." ... John Stott.

MY OWN STORY

1. Do you identify more with the paralysed man, his friends or the religious leaders? Why?
2. In what way has Jesus' word of forgiveness given you a sense of freedom?

ACTION:

Design or create a banner or poster that will help others appreciate that God "cares about their bodies as well as about their relationship with himself and their eternal destiny." Either may be used to promote the 40 Hour Famine in your church.

The challenge for the Christian church is to bring together holistic ministry where the Gospel is proclaimed and people's sins are forgiven, but to allow this preaching to also bring self-determination to local people by working together to solve their problems of living. Social structures, superstitions, injustices and environmental factors are amongst the problems to be confronted. We should remember that these problems exist not only overseas but also in Australia. When one lives the life of Christ, it does not take long to realise we do not live in isolation. On the contrary, we find ourselves responsible to the many needs around us. This is the legitimate place for Christ's church.

In essence, holistic ministry is bringing wholeness by preaching the Gospel and releasing people to become all that God intends them to be. It is harnessing the potential of people and communities so that together they can solve the whole spectrum of their real needs.

PRAYER

Pray that World Vision workers in field projects will have the skills and compassion to care for the whole person in the communities they serve.

Pray that through participation in these Bible studies we may deepen our understanding of the call for Christians to holistic ministry.

STUDY 2: Making a Christian Response to Poverty

Scripture resource: Luke 16:19-31.

WARM-UP

Can you recall a situation in which you didn't have enough money (or a credit card) with you to pay for some immediate expense? How did you feel on this discovery? How did you handle it? If you had to borrow from someone, how did you feel about that? OR

Can you recall a time, other than in the 40 Hour Famine, when you had to go without food (or a time when you didn't have anywhere comfortable to sleep)? How did you feel?

DIG: Read Luke 16:19-31.

1. How did the rich man and Lazarus compare ...

	RICH MAN	LAZARUS
On earth (v. 19-21)	<hr/>	
... and after death (v. 22-24)	<hr/>	

2. Why do you think Jesus used a poor man to illustrate conditions for entry into God's kingdom? (v. 30-31)
3. What does v. 31 show us about human nature?
4. In summary, what does this passage teach us about the purpose of life?

THINK ABOUT:

Poverty is not just a lack of financial resources, for people can be poor in many ways. Poor of hope to face the future, poor of family support or contacts to help in times of need, poor of knowledge about how to solve their problem. There is an element of powerlessness in poverty where the poor are trapped in circumstances but lack the solutions due to many factors. In the two-thirds world, these poor are often the victims who make no claim on anyone. Poverty is a reminder of the heartlessness in the world and at the same time is a call to the rich and powerful to see their humanity equally before God.

MY OWN STORY

1. Where do you stand on the following scale in the way you think you would have responded to Lazarus compared to the rich man and the way Jesus would have responded?

RICH MAN						JESUS				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

2. How do you generally respond to people who treat you unfairly? If that went on and on, and you were powerless to change the situation, how do you think you would respond?

3. Someone has said that the parable of the Good Samaritan presents three philosophies of life ...

- * What's yours is mine ... I'll take it (thieves)
- * What's mine is mine ... I'll keep it (scribe/priest)
- * What's mine is yours ... we'll share it (good Samaritan)

To what degree are any or all of these true of you?

ACTION:

Think about some person or group in your own community who is/are poor.

Discuss practical ways that you could, individually or as a group, show Christian concern to that person/group while still maintaining their integrity. When will you do this?

OR

Contact a Christian service organisation in your community (Life Line, Salvation Army, Community Aid, etc.) to ask them if you can be of service.

PRAYER

Pray that God will open our eyes to those in need in our world, in our local community, within our nation and in others.

Pray that we might discern what we might do to care for all in poverty and that we will be strengthened for the ministry of caring to which we are called. That we will be strengthened and encouraged to show, as God's servants, God's special concern for the poor.

Pray for the community education program of World Vision Australia as it seeks to deepen the understanding of Australians about the nature and causes of poverty in today's world.

BECOME A VITAL LINK!

You can serve a vital role in linking concerned Australians with hungry and needy people in the two-thirds world.

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STUDY 3: Making a Christian Response to Injustice

Scripture resource: Amos 5:7-15, 21-24.

WARM-UP:

Can you recall times when (even as a child) at home or in the community you have spoken up in another's defence? What happened? Did you plea do any good? Was it easy or hard to do?

DIG: Read Amos 5:7-15, 21-24.

1. Make a list of the wrongdoings mentioned in verses 11 and 12.

2. Of the following effects of the wrongdoing, what do you think would have been the hardest to handle?

- a) I'm broke! I can't even afford the necessities of life. (Financial)
- b) I'm an outcast! No-one cares about me. (Social)
- c) I'm powerless! I can't do anything to change my situation. (Legal/Political)
- d) It's hopeless! Where is God in all this? (Spiritual)
- e) I'm finished! I can't cope any more. I give up. (Emotional)

3. How would the people who have oppressed others respond when God's judgement upon them deprived them of their mansions and income? (v. 11)
Disgusted, enraged, hopeless, bitter, helpless, quietly penitent,
other _____

4. List the religious practices mentioned in v. 21-24.

What words describe God's rejection of these practices?

Why do you think God reacted in this way?

5. Why do you think symbolism of a generous supply of water is used in verse 24?

- a) It would have meant a lot in a dry and arid land.
- b) As individuals or as a nation they knew what it was like to be denied justice and righteousness.
- c) Floodwaters are hard to stop.
- d) Water symbolises destruction but also life, growth and cleansing.

TO THINK ABOUT

God's people are called to show no partiality and to seek justice for those in need. This justice is not only the right of the poor but no partiality means that justice must exist in all levels of society. This then is living "righteously".

Justice is not about giving the two-thirds world the same standard of living we in the west have, it is about giving them the dignity and resources to solve their own problems their way. It is about partnership, equal opportunity, redistribution of resources and world priorities. This is the Gospel of Jesus, that his church be salt and light within a decaying world, a church which preaches and ministers the salvation gospel.

MY OWN STORY:

1. Amos preaches both good news and bad news. Does his message convict you about things in your own lifestyle, behaviour towards others or your religious practices? (Try to keep your response personal - "I", "me", "my" - rather than applying it generally to "the church", "Christians", "us" or "them".)
2. In what ways do you personally find encouragement and hope in Amos' message.

ACTION:

1. From recently daily newspapers, identify evidences of injustice and any steps being taken to address them.
You may want to make a montage or poster of these to promote the 40 Hour Famine or to encourage others' prayers for the poor and oppressed.
2. Is there something from this study which you should be bringing to the notice of a person at an appropriate level of government? Do you need more information or help before you do this?

PRAYER:

Pray for staff in World Vision's programs around the world that their work might be a sign of God's justice in all situations where injustice occurs. Especially, pray for the people of South Africa as change towards a non-racial society will emerge. Pray for a just settlement to civil war. Particularly, pray for the leaders and people of the countries of the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, especially Lebanon, Israel and Palestine.

Pray that we may all become agents of God's justice in our world and, in particular, within our own society.

Pray that Aborigines in Australia will know justice in their lives. Pray for World Vision's ministry with Aborigines. Give thanks for the renewal of religious faith through aboriginal Christian leaders inspired by God's Spirit for their ministry.

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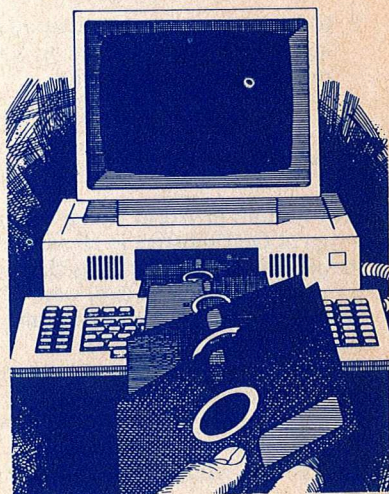
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STUDY 4 Caring About Our World

Scripture resource: Isaiah 40:10-31 and Romans 8:26-39.

WARM-UP

What world problems today seem to be beyond solution? How did you first become aware of these? How do you honestly react to these problems - with helplessness, cynicism, sorrow, hope, disgust, anger, confusion? Why?

DIG: Read Isaiah 40:10-31 and Romans 8:26-39.

- 1, Isaiah prefaces this passage with "Here is your God" (v. 9). Working in pairs, seek to identify which (and in what ways) speak of

- God's sovereignty _____
- God's concern _____

Read through the Romans passage and add to the above.

Share your findings with your group.

OR

2. Individually read through the above passages looking for only one or two verses which

- mean the most to you personally in this passage ... OR
- shed new light on our understanding of God or the Christian life ... OR
- is God's message to you at this moment.

Verse(s) reference _____

Reason for your choice _____

- Share your findings with the group.

TO THINK ABOUT:

What sort of world will we live in by 2000 AD?

World population - by 2000 AD there will be 6.1 billion (thousand million), 30.7% under 15, median age 26.1. 4.8 billion will live in developing countries.

Supercities - By 2000 AD urban dwellers will make up 51.2% and increasing by 1.6 million each week with urban slums expanding daily. (One slum in Mexico City today has 2 million inhabitants.)

It is predicted that by the year 2000 eight of the ten largest cities in the world will be in developing countries.

1. Mexico City, Mexico	31 million (increases 1.1 m a year)
2. Sao Paulo, Brazil	26 million
3. Tokyo-Yokohama, Japan	24 million
4. Shanghai, China	23 million
5. New York, USA	23 million
6. Beijing, China	20 million
7. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	19 million
8. Jakarta, Indonesia	19 million
9. Calcutta, India	17 million
10. Bombay, India	17 million

Agriculture - 30% of the world's fertile land destroyed by human encroachment over the past 20 years. Families leaving the farm for the cities at the rate of 50,000 a day.

Other - Oil consumption annually 1.6 billion tons in 1950
 5.6 billion tons in 1974
 15.6 billion tons in 2000 (estimated)
with proportional increase in pollution and diminishing resources.

Christianity - By 2000 AD 2 out of every 5 Africans will be Christian, in Asia 2 in 50. 65 generations after Christ, the world is 35% Christian (only 40% white).

Today, the church of the historically "Christian" nations is probably in the minority worldwide and this shift will bring some changes. First, we will see a greater emergence of diverse nationalities intentionally related to needs of the poor, oppressed and suffering. Second, the increase in population, pollution and world ecological balance will see a church rallying to defend and protect the beauty and survival of God's creation. In short, the Kingdom of God is needing informed, active Christians who can enter into the international concerns of God toward justice, peace, evangelism and ministry.

(*"By the Year 2000 AD"*. Source article: D. Barrett, *"World Evangelisation"* - Nov/Dec 1988.)

YOUR OWN STORY

What encouragement/hope do you find in the scripture passages studies, especially when you face up to the changes and pressures of the world situation in 2000 AD?

ACTION:

So how do we live differently when we take seriously all we have studied over these four weeks?

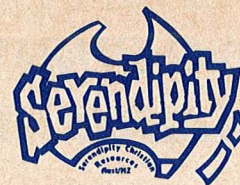
- In our use of money
- In our lifestyles
- In our encouragement and support of church and community leaders
- In keeping ourselves informed
- In being involved in decision-making in our communities
- In lobbying the government
- In prayer

How can we support each other in doing this by our prayers, meeting together, being accountable to each other and in other ways?

PRAYER:

Pray for everyone in the World Vision partnership, as together we seek to do God's will in our time.

Pray for those who lead World Vision in its ministry, especially Graeme Irvine, WVI president, and Harold Henderson, vice-president for International Relations.



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Resources available from World Vision Information Services

JOURNEY WITH THE POOR, Peter Philp, Collins/Dove, 1988. Former World Vision staff member Peter Philp confronts poverty in El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile, Brazil and Colombia. He meets the poor in jail, the refugee camps, the shanty towns and in the church. It is a journey in which the poor converted the aid worker. \$9.95

GREEN FINGER OF GOD, Maurice Sinclair, Paternoster, 1988. From his involvement in one development project in Argentina, Sinclair writes on his attempts to answer questions such as: What are development projects? How far do they concern a Christian? Must they be instruments of either hardline capitalism or of doctrinaire socialism? Can there be a distinctively Christian approach to development? \$8.00

A HEART FOR THE POOR, Jim Smith, Kingsway, 1988. A readable account of what could happen if we asked God to give us his heart for the poor. How might we react in everyday life if we felt God's compassion? The book provides some accounts of the experiences of ordinary Christians who have felt that compassion. \$6.00

SHALOM: THE BIBLE'S WORD FOR SALVATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE, Perry B Yoder, Faith and Life Press, Kansas, 1987. Shalom is not just basking in one's own peaceful easy feeling. Rather the search for shalom is a mission of conversion - converting ourselves and others to a new understanding and way of life. God's shalom, to which we are called, also entails a suffering love which struggles for human liberation and justice. \$15.00

CITY OF JOY, Dominique LaPierre, Arrow Books, London, 1986. A gripping story of tragedy and uplift in Calcutta's slums which provides much insight into what it is like to be poor. \$9.25

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP IN DEVELOPMENT: THE CHALLENGE FOR AUSTRALIA, edited by Ted Vandelloo, World Vision of Australia, Melbourne, 1989. This book is the proceedings of a conference organized by World Vision, which assesses Australia's record in helping the world's needy, and what it means for Australians to be world citizens. Experts from around the world examined such issues as: does aid work? How do we make aid more appropriate? What are the effects of the global debt crisis? And what are the ways of building more self-reliance in rural and urban development? The last section reflects on what all this means for the way we think and talk about our responsibilities and about people in developing countries. \$10.00

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