

## GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

### Help the group members:

1. understand that God always has the highest priority
2. to practise to make plans together with God every day

## I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

### 1. Prayer

*Pray* that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

### 2. Meditation

Worship is to subject yourself to the living God who does not tolerate another god next to him.

**Theme: No longer waver between two opinions**

*Read* the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

#### 1 Kings 18:16-21

<sup>16</sup> So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. <sup>17</sup> When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

<sup>18</sup> "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. <sup>19</sup> Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

<sup>20</sup> So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. <sup>21</sup> Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

But the people said nothing.

- What does it mean 'to waver between two opinions'?
- If the LORD, the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, is God, what consequences does that have for your daily life.

### 3. Worship

*Let* everyone in the small group take a turn to worship (in one or two sentences) God as the One who wants to plan your every Day together with you.

## II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

### The theme for this meeting is: Priorities

*Read or explain in your own words.*

#### 1. What is a priority?

'A priority' is an issue, task or activity that is more important than another and thus has precedence above the other and must be carried out first

#### 2. What are the 5 most important areas of life according to the Bible?

The Bible clearly teaches the importance of the following 5 areas of life:

- your work (school, study, education, job, profession)
- your family (marriage partner, children)
- your ministry (in the congregation and society)
- your personal development (personality, character, health, sport, relaxation)
- your personal relationship with God (relationship and growth)

#### 3. What or who has the highest priority? Is it always first?

The Bible teaches that God himself is always the highest priority. He must determine when something else has priority.

#### 4. Is there a fixed order in the other priorities?

No! The Bible teaches that God should determine what needs to receive priority at different times of each day.

In some circumstances God determines that your studies (education) need to receive priority than your ministry in the congregation. In other circumstances he determines that your ministry needs to receive a higher priority than your studies.

Likewise, in some circumstances God determines that your personal development needs to receive a higher priority than your work. In other circumstances he determines that your work needs to receive a higher priority than your personal development.

There is always only one priority at the top: God himself. He determines when you need to give attention to any of the other important areas in your life.

### III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

#### Theme: Priorities

- Day 1 Mark 8:34-38  
Prerequisites for every Christian
- Day 2 1 Timothy 3:4-7  
Prerequisites for every Christian leader (elder)
- Day 3 Deuteronomy 6:4-9  
Responsibilities for the family
- Day 4 Colossians 3:18 – 4:1  
Rules for the family and work
- Day 5<sup>BS</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1-16  
Instructions to young Christians
- Day 6 Titus 2:1-8  
Instructions to various groups of Christians
- Day 7 2 Timothy 2:1-7 and 22  
Instructions to Christian who want to serve Jesus Christ
- Day 8 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8  
Rule for the relationship between a man and a woman
- Day 9 1 Kings 18:21-38  
Who is God really?
- Day 10 Ecclesiastes 3:1-17.  
There is a time for everything

### IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.  
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

#### 1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

##### Theme: The priorities of a Christian

- Why is there not a fixed list of priorities?
- What needs to receive a high priority in your study or work? Why?
- What needs to receive a high priority in your marriage and family? Why?
- What needs to receive a high priority in your ministry in the church? Why?
- What needs to receive a high priority in your personal relationship with God/Christ? Why?

#### 2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- “What are you going to prioritize the coming week?”

### 3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

### V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

#### 1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

#### 2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

#### THE HIGHEST PRIORITY Mark 12:30

Love the Lord your God with all your heart  
and with all your soul  
and with all your mind  
and with all your strength.

Mark 12:30 (NIV)

### VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

#### Theme: Instructions for young Christians

##### 1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step method and study:

##### 1 Timothy 4:1-16

<sup>1</sup>The Spirit clearly says (i.e. now in the present time) that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup>Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup>They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. <sup>4</sup>For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

<sup>6</sup>If you point these things out (i.e. put these things as a firm foundation under their feet) to the brothers (and sisters), you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on (Greek: trained in) the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. <sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup>For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. <sup>9</sup>This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. <sup>10</sup>That is why we labour and strive, because

we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, and especially of those who believe.

<sup>11</sup> Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity (i.e. in the moral area). <sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect your gift (Greek: charisma), which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup> Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

## 2. Emphasis

- God teaches young Christians as Timothy the important things in life to which they should give their lives. They need to make time for these things, even when they think that they have no time.
- It is not God's purpose that Christians run after new things all the time: new possessions, new activities, new meetings, new conferences, new courses, new friends, etc. There are only a few important things in life, such as: your words, your actions, your faith, your love and your purity.
- God (Jesus Christ) himself is your highest priority! He determines what you should give priority and when you should give it a priority. Without the God of the Bible everything (even religious matters) are empty and meaningless. But with the God of the Bible everything has significance

## 3. Explanation for the group leader

### 4:1 In latter times

We are living in 'the last days'. The whole period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ is called 'the last days' in the New Testament. The last days begin with the first coming of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1; 9:26b; 1 Peter 1:20) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17). It lasts throughout the whole New Testament period (2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3-4). And it ends with the resurrection of the dead (John 6:39,44; 11:24) and the last judgement at the second coming of Jesus Christ (John 12:48). Christians therefore live 'in the last days'!

But here Paul speaks of the later times within the New Testament period, in which people who only belong outwardly to the Church will fall away from the faith in Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). They will fall away,

because they are listening to false prophets and false teachers (erring spirits) and to what they are teaching (the false teachings of demons in hell). Note that the Bible teaches that all false teachings originate with Satan and his demons in hell!

Christians must not remain naïve and think that these things will not overcome them. Paul had warned the Christians in Ephesus about six years earlier that this will happen (Acts 20:29-31).

### 4:2 Hypocritical liars

These false teachers are not merely inspired by demons, but have also deliberately chosen not to listen to God's warnings in their conscience. They cannot shift the blame to Satan, but must carry responsibility for their own thoughts, words, convictions and behaviour (cf. Galatians 6:5).

As Satan, these false teachers put question marks behind God's Word. They make God's Word suspect (Genesis 3:1b). They proclaim 'another gospel' than the gospel in the Bible (Galatians 1:6-9). They proclaim another religion as if this new religion is the final religion. The spirit that inspires them does not come from God (cf. Jeremiah 23:21-22), but from the world. It is the language and arguments of the people in the world. The false prophets are driven by the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4:1-5).

Their conscience gets blunted and even seared as by a hot iron, because they continually listen to lies. Finally their conscience stops to warn them.

### 4:3 Hypocritical teachings

#### ➤ *Asceticism.*

The false teachers teach for example that if you want to be 'spiritual' you must not marry (because in their thinking sex is sinful). They also teach that eating certain kinds of food is sinful. And they teach that people should often fast. They and their adherents teach that everything that has to do with the physical world and the senses pollutes the soul! During the second century A.D. these false teachings received a fixed form in 'asceticism'. Asceticism rejected all the comforts of life in order to reach spiritual perfection (Colossians 2:16-23).

#### ➤ *Gnosticism.*

Gnosticism is a cult that originated in the second century A.D. It puts 'knowledge' (Greek: gnosis) above faith and despised the created world. 'The god of the Old Testament' was regarded as a half-god that created the world, matter, the physical body and these were all regarded as 'evil'. Gnosticism propagated this asceticism, this avoidance of 'evil', as Paul described in his Letter of 1 Timothy.

➤ *Hedonism.*

Soon this false teaching gained another dissolute form which taught: 'Enjoy evil, because the more you sin, the more you would receive God's grace'. The apostles already fought against these abuses during the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.: Paul (Romans 6:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-9), John (1 John 3:6-10, Revelation 2:15,20,24), Peter (2 Peter 2:12-19) and Jude (Jude 1:4,7-8,11,18-19).

➤ *Modern Gnosticism.*

In our modern society we recognise Gnosticism in false statements. People who only accept the New Testament say: "The Old Testament god was a god of revenge". People who reject the teaching about the Triune God say: "Everything in conflict with human reason (knowledge) must be rejected". And people of other religions say: "Jesus Christ is not the only perfect saviour".

#### **4:4-5 God created food for man**

Gnosticism despises God's creation (e.g. food, sex) and God's ordinances (e.g. man may eat all kinds of food and man may enjoy sex within marriage). But the Bible teaches that "all food is clean" (i.e. is not defiled and does not cause separation with God) (Mark 7:18-23). The Bible teaches that man may eat all kinds of food (e.g. meat, Genesis 9:3-4). "Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Food is consecrated (i.e. set apart and dedicated) by God's Word (i.e. by what God says about food) and by prayer (i.e. by the prayer of the believer in which he acknowledges his complete dependence on God and God's ordinances). This is one reason why Christians pray and thank God before their meal. Christians deliberately involve God during every meal, because it is a testimony to their faith in God's truth and their dependence on God.

For Christians, everything they do to glorify God: their eating, drinking and whatever they do (1 Corinthians 10:31). There is nothing in this creation that does not have 'a spiritual dimension'. For a Christian everything is significant, meaningful.

The abuse of food is over-eating, orgies, drinking bouts and drunkenness. And the abuse of sex is sex before marriage (sexual immorality) and sex outside Christian marriage (adultery) (Hebrews 13:4).

#### **4:6-16 The various tasks of a servant of Christ**

The word 'minister' in the New Testament is not a special title or office for only certain leaders, but the office and task of every Christian and means 'a servant'. It may also denote the office of 'a deacon' (1 Timothy 3:8,12). Here it denotes the office of Timothy as a servant-leader in the congregation of Ephesus. He had various tasks.

#### **4:6 The first task: to train believers with the truth of God's Word instead of the lies of false teachers**

The task of a good servant is to refute the lies of false teachers with the truth of God's Word (as in verse 1-5). Paul did this and Timothy should follow his example. He must train believers in the Christian Faith (i.e. in the Principles of the Christian Faith). A Christian servant must teach *the whole will of God* (as the Body of Christ does) and not a selective part of the Bible (as many denominations and especially sects and cults tend to do). He must guard and teach the form or pattern of sound doctrine contained in the whole Bible (2 Timothy 1:13-14)!

#### **4:7a The second task: to build believers up instead of breaking them down**

A servant of Jesus Christ must reject the devised myths (like found in apocryphal writings) and endless genealogies (which occupied some Jewish teachers) (1 Timothy 1:3b-4).

James taught that no man can tame the tongue (James 3:8). Jesus warned he would judge every useless word that was spoken during a person's life on the final judgement Day (Matthew 12:33-37). And Paul taught that a Christian may only speak when what he says is the truth, would build up people and give them grace, and when it is spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15,29).

#### **4:7b-10 The third task: to train himself to be spiritually godly instead of only training to be physically fit**

A servant of Jesus Christ should train to be physically fit (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), but much more to be spiritually fit and godly. 'Godliness' consists of awe (respect and a holy fear) of God, of faithfulness to God and his calling and of obedience to what God expects him to be and do.

The word 'train' means 'to practise gymnastics', as wrestling, athletics, fitness and other kinds of sport. All these kinds of physical training are useful, but only for life on this present earth (e.g. physical training helps you to live healthier and longer).

Spiritual training is useful for everlasting life! It promises a healthy mental, emotional, social and physical life here on earth as well as contributing to a complete and perfect spiritual life that remains for ever!

In athletics and other physical sports one must abide by the rules of the game, otherwise one forfeits the prize (2 Timothy 2:5). In spiritual life one must also abide by the spiritual rules set out in the Bible.

In athletics you must take off all heavy clothing and everything that hinders running as fast as you can. In the spiritual race you must throw off everything (activities or occupations) that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles (Hebrews 12:1).

In athletics you keep your eyes fixed on the finishing line, run straight towards the goal and do not allow anything to distract you. In the spiritual race you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the author (founder) and perfecter (finisher) of your faith and you set your mind on the joy lying ahead of you (Hebrews 12:2).

Paul says, "Therefore I do not run like a man (an athlete) running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man (a boxer) beating the air. No, I beat (i.e. discipline) my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

#### **4:9-10 God is the Saviour of all men, especially of believers**

Because spiritual training in God's will and spiritual battle against spiritual enemies has everlasting value, Christians say, "The living God is the Saviour of all men, especially of the believers". This is a trustworthy saying. 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (of whom I am the worst)". This is also a trustworthy saying. These trustworthy sayings deserve full acceptance. Because these sayings are trustworthy, Christians should labour (work hard) and strive (train and compete as in sports) to proclaim this message, to teach, warn, encourage and serve.

#### **4:10. God saves all men**

The words, "God saves all men" are interpreted in four different ways:

- *God saves every human being that has ever lived (universal salvation)*
- *God saves all kinds of people (as in 1 Timothy 2:4)*
- *God wants to save all human beings, but his will is thwarted (crossed, frustrated) by the persistent unbelief of some people*
- *God actually saves all people but in two different ways: in a temporary and in an eternal sense*

(1) *God saves every human being that has ever lived (universal salvation)*

Objection. The doctrine of universal salvation is against the clear teachings of the Bible (John 3:16,18,36). It also makes the sentence, "Especially of believers" redundant.

(2) *God saves all kinds of people (as in 1 Timothy 2:4)*

Objection. This would also make the statement, "Especially of believers" unnecessary.

(3) *God wants to save all human beings, but his will is thwarted (crossed, frustrated) by the persistent unbelief of some people.*

Objection. The text does not say, "God *wants* to save all people", but, "God *actually* saves all people". Moreover, to nullify or set aside God's sovereign will is completely impossible, because God would no longer be 'God' (cf. Isaiah 14:24,27; *study*: Romans 9:12b-23).

2 Peter 3:9 says, "God is patient with you, not *wanting* anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance". This text does not mean that God wants everyone that ever lived on earth (in universal sense) to be saved. The context of this verse does not speak of all people on earth and in history, but speaks of *God's chosen people* who are destined to receive the same precious faith (1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:1). God is patient with his chosen people until they finally come to repentance and faith (cf. Romans 11:28-32)!

1 Timothy 2:3b-4 says, "God our Saviour, who *wants* all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." This text does not mean that God wants everyone that ever lived on earth (in universal sense) to be saved. The words 'everyone' in verse 4 must have the same meaning as the word 'everyone' in verse 1. Christians must pray, not only for the citizens, but also for the people in government (verse 2); not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles (people from other nations) (verse 6-7). With this same meaning God wants 'everyone' (verse 4), i.e. 'all people' without differentiation as to race, nationality, social status, language or culture to be saved for ever, not simply in the sense that they 'receive *intellectual knowledge* of the gospel (that would give them a chance to be saved through their 'free will')', but in the sense that they '*recognise* with joy the meaning of the gospel' (i.e. understand it) and '*acknowledge* (accept, confess and surrender to it)'. The text speaks of salvation (eternal life) in the sense of a personal, intimate knowledge of God through Jesus Christ that can only come through sovereign election (Matthew 11:27; John 17:2-3)!

#### *The words 'all people' in the Bible*

The word 'all' (Greek: pas, pantoi) or the words 'all people' (Greek: pas anthopos, pantas anthropous) must always be explained in their context, or else a false doctrine is taught.

Examples. In the Gospels the word 'all' does not have universal meaning! Not all that ever lived were looking for Jesus (Mark 1:37). Not all that ever lived were amazed that Jesus had healed a demon-possessed man (Mark 5:20). Not all that ever lived held that John really was a prophet (Mark 11:32). And not all that ever lived was going to Jesus (John 3:26)!

In the Letters of Paul the word 'all' also does not have universal meaning. Paul does not teach that all that ever lived is justified (Romans 5:18). He does not teach that all that ever lived is made alive in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22). And he does not teach that God's grace that brings salvation has appeared to all that ever lived (Titus 2:11).

#### The teachings of Arminius and Calvin

The struggle between Christians who believed in the *universal atonement* of all people that ever lived (Arminius) and Christians who believed in the *limited atonement* of people (Gomarus) in the Netherlands (1618-1619) was as follows:

The followers of Arminius taught: "Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all people and for every individual, so that by his death on the cross he actually obtained (earned) atonement (redemption, salvation) for all of them (in a *universal* sense). But only those people who believe (by their own free will and choice) will actually enjoy this atonement (forgiveness)." Thus they teach that the sins of all people that ever lived have been atoned, but all people still remain responsible for accepting this by faith. *Salvation is thus completely dependent on man*, whether he chooses to believe or not! (These people do not explain why not every individual in the world hears the gospel and therefore does not get a chance to exercise his so-called free will).

The followers of Calvin taught: "The gospel (including the necessity and responsibility of faith) must be proclaimed to all nations (cf. Matthew 24:14). While the sacrifice of atonement of Christ is *sufficient* for all that ever lived without exception, the atonement of sins in fact remains *limited* to those people God elected (Romans 9:8,11-12,16-18; 11:5-7)."

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ died *for his sheep* (John 10:11), *for his friends* (John 15:13) and thus not for everyone that ever lived. Jesus Christ gave eternal life to those people God the Father gave to him (John 17:2) and thus not to everyone that ever lived. Jesus Christ was chosen before the creation of the world *to redeem God's elect* by his precious blood (i.e. by his death) and thus he did not redeem everyone that ever lived (1 Peter 1:1-2,19-20).

Therefore by the shedding of Christ's blood (by his death on the cross) God once for all presented (offered) Christ as a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation (i.e. atonement) that is effective through faith, *not only of believers during the New Testament period, but also of believers during the Old Testament period*. The effect of justification is the redemption of the sinner (verse 24) and the propitiation of his sins (verse 25). The ransom redeems the sinner from the slavery and bondage to sin.

The sacrifice of atonement saves the sinner from God's wrath. Jesus Christ is therefore the means of atonement for all who believed in him as the coming Messiah during the Old Testament period and for all who believe in Jesus Christ during the New Testament period and not for all people that ever lived (Romans 3:24-26).

Also the faith exercised by Christians is a gracious gift from God to all the people he elected. Only those people who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48; cf. Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1). Before the beginning of time (from eternity) all the people God foreknew (elected) he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. In time (in history) he called them effectively through the proclamation of the gospel, regenerated them through the Holy Spirit, set them apart through their faith and justified them. In the future he will certainly glorify them! (Romans 8:29-30,33-34; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10)!

John 4:42 says, "We know that this man is really the Saviour of the world." 'The world' is here not every individual that ever lived (i.e. humanity) (John 1:9; 3:19). It is also not the realm of evil, the world that is openly hostile against Christ and Christians (John 15:18). 'The world' which Jesus Christ actually saves is *God's chosen people* from all the nations on earth (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). He saves them from all their sins (Matthew 1:21), from all lawlessness (i.e. deviations from the Bible) (Titus 2:13-14), from the (criminal and moral) corruption of this world (2 Peter 2:20), from the dominion of Satan (Colossians 1:13) and finally from physical decay and death (1 Corinthians 15:26; 2 Timothy 1:10). He saves them through regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-7).

1 John 2:2 says, "He (Christ) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." Also this verse does not refer to universal atonement, because the word 'our' refers to the believers to whom this Letter was addressed. 'The whole world' here has the same meaning as in John 4:42: all God's elect without distinction of race, nationality, social status, language or culture (cf. 1 John 4:10).

(4) *God actually saves all people but in two different ways: in a temporary and in an eternal sense*

In 1 Timothy 4:10, "The living God is the Saviour of all men", has two distinct meanings, already in the Old Testament and certainly in the New Testament. God actually saves all people that have ever lived in *temporary* situations, but actually saves only all elect people in *eternal* sense.

God is the Saviour of all people in temporary sense

The LORD sent the judge Othniel to save Israel from

their earthly enemies (Judges 3:9; cf. 2 Kings 13:5). In this temporary sense all Israel's judges were deliverers or saviours of God's Old Testament people (Nehemiah 9:27).

The LORD himself is called the Saviour (Greek: Sôtér) in the sense that he saves people from all kinds of disasters even when they forget God afterwards (Deuteronomy 32:15, LXX; Psalm 106:21). God was the Saviour of everyone in Israel from their oppression in Egypt. "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert" (1 Corinthians 10:5). In this sense God is the Saviour of all people, but especially of the believers: all Israelites left Egypt, but not all Israelites entered the Promised Land! This is also the sense in Isaiah 43:3,11; 45:14-15,21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8-10. The Old Testament also teaches that God is a Saviour in the sense that he supports and protects people and animals (Psalm 36:7; Psalm 104:27-28; Psalm 145:9,15-16).

This truth is continued in the New Testament. God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). The Most High God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35). He proves his kindness by giving rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; by providing people with plenty of food and filling their hearts with joy (Acts 14:17). He gives people life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:25). He saves people from drowning (Acts 27:24,31). Moreover, God sees to it that the gospel of his salvation and kingship is proclaimed in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations (people groups) (Matthew 24:14).

In the classical and New Testament Greek the title 'Saviour' (Greek: Sôtér) is used for several gods like Zeus, Apollo, Hermes and Asclepius and for Caesars and high officials in so far they save people from certain disasters and cared for their subjects.

Paul began to use the title 'God is Saviour' only after he had been imprisoned in Rome (60-61 A.D.), probably because the Romans wrongly applied the title to their idols and leaders. Paul however laid the emphasis on the fact that God is the Saviour of all Christians in eternal sense!

#### *God is the Saviour of all Christians in eternal sense*

God is not only the Saviour of all people and animals in the sense of Saviour from disasters, protector from dangers, Feeder and Caretaker, but also the Saviour of believers in Jesus Christ in the sense of the One who makes atonement (expiation and propitiation) for their sins, redeems (buys) them from slavery to the power of sin, justifies them, sanctifies them and finally glorifies them (cf. Philippians 1:6). To them he not only gives

temporary good gifts, but especially the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) and every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3). This is the meaning of the word 'Saviour' in 1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 1:3; 2:10, 3:4-7; Jude 1:25.

#### **4:11 The fourth task: to continue to command and teach**

A servant of Jesus Christ must continually command and teach the above mentioned instructions of the apostle Paul.

#### **4:12 The fifth task: to set an example**

A servant of Jesus Christ must set an example of being a genuine Christian, no matter how young or old he is. When Timothy joined Paul in 52 A.D. he was about 20 years old. In 63 A.D. he must have been about 31 years old. Timothy was a fellow soldier of the apostle (missionary) Paul and his task was to build up the congregation of Ephesus.

Some older people tended to despise the fact that Timothy was young. Paul commanded Timothy not to allow the behaviour of some older Christians to cause him to become insecure. He had to win the respect due to a worker in the congregation not by becoming authoritarian, but by setting an example of being a Christian (cf. Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Paul does not say that he must set himself up as an example which the members of the congregation must follow, but to make it his personal goal to be such an example. Five areas are very important: his speech (what he says), his life (how he lives), his love (how he relates), his faith (how he trusts in God) and his purity (how he relates towards women).

#### **4:13-14 The sixth task: to read, preach and teach the Bible**

A servant of Jesus Christ devotes himself to public reading of the Bible (Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Revelation 1:3) as also happened in the Jewish synagogues (cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15; 2 Corinthians 3:14). He teaches them what these words mean and he warns, exhorts and encourages the believers (2 Timothy 4:2-3).

It really matters WHAT someone believes! An appropriate application of God's Word depends on the correct explanation of that Word.

The other tasks in the congregation like worship, prayer and pastoral care are not mentioned here.

The reading of the Bible may not simply serve as an introduction of the speech or sermon of the speaker, who subsequently may say what he likes! The most important task of a speaker is to explain God's Word accurately as

God intends it to be understood! Paul says, “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

The counsel of elders in the congregation of Ephesus had officially appointed Timothy as a worker in the congregation. The elders spoke prophetic words (i.e. they verbalised his tasks or job-description and possibly the nature of the spiritual gift needed) and laid their hands on him (i.e. they visibly and tangibly symbolised that God had given him a spiritual gift that would enable him to carry out his task) (cf. 2 Timothy 1:6; Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3-4).

#### **4:15-16 The seventh task: to make visible progress**

A servant of Jesus Christ takes care that he himself grows spiritually, especially in two areas: his life (how he behaves) and his doctrine (what he teaches). These two areas are inseparable. They visibly model and audibly reveal that he is growing and making progress (cf. Paul in Acts 20:18-20).

‘Salvation’ is not a one off event (a point), but rather a continuous process (a line): *The beginning of salvation* takes place at regeneration and conversion (Titus 3:4-7) and *the end of salvation* takes place at the resurrection of the body at the second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:26). Between these two events the Christian is being saved more and more from what is sinful or worldly. Timothy’s example of making continuous progress in salvation serves as an exhortation and encouragement for the other believers.

#### **VII. PRAYER (8 min.)**

*Pray* with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

*Pray* with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

#### **VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)**

*Hand out* the preparation for the next gathering.