

Study Guide

Monday, June 21. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-19. Author Ed Dobson writes: A man, who'd obviously been drinking, called to me, "Hey, could spare some change so I can get something to eat?" I've heard that line a lot, and I know a number of responses. First, you can simply ignore such people. Second, you can offer to take him to a restaurant to buy him something to eat.. Third, you can point him to an organization that provides meals for the homeless. What did I do? I walked past the man without doing anything. But after I'd walked on a little farther, he called after me, "Can you help a Vietnam vet?" So I stopped, walked back to him, and gave him a dollar. At that moment I remembered the words of Jesus: "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." It's as simple as that—give to the one who asks. He asked. I had an obligation to give. As I walked down the street, a wonderful peace came over me because I felt I'd actually obeyed one of Jesus' teachings. I knew he'd probably use it to buy more alcohol and that I probably hadn't made the wisest choice. And I also knew that a dollar wasn't really going to help him. But I had no other choice. He asked and I was obligated. Still, what caused me to give him the money was not really my responsibility to follow Jesus, but the fact that he was a veteran. So after my initial euphoria, I realized I had done the Jesus thing for the wrong reasons. Are you doing 'things' that bring a temporary peace? Are you 'working' for Jesus for the wrong reasons?

Tuesday, June 22 – Read James 3:18. In the fifth century, a monk named Telemachus wanted to live his life in pursuit of God, so he lived alone in the desert praying, fasting, and meditating. One day as he prayed, he realized his life was based on a selfish love of God, not selfless. If he were to serve God, he must serve men. He decided to return to the city where there was sin and need. Telemachus headed for Rome. Rome was officially Christian and great military victories brought people to church. One pagan practice still lingered in Christian Rome—the gladiator games. Prisoners of war were cast into the arena to fight and kill each other. Telemachus arrived on the day of the games. Following the noise, he made his way to the arena where 80,000 people had gathered to celebrate. The fights began and Telemachus stood aghast. Men for whom Christ had died were about to kill each other to amuse a supposedly Christian populace. He jumped into the arena and stood between the two gladiators, imploring them to stop. The crowd was furious at the delay of their "entertainment," and after several shouts and threats, it stoned the monk to death. The rest of the contests were cancelled that day. Three days later, Honorius (the Roman Emperor) declared Telemachus a martyr and ended the gladiatorial contests. Historian Edward Gibbon said: "His death was more useful to mankind than his life." What are you doing to bring peace to your world?

Wednesday, June 23 – Read John 16:33. On July 24, 2008, Steven Curtis Chapman opened his concert with "Blessed Be Your Name" just two months after the death of his 5-year-old daughter, Maria Sue, in a tragic accident at the family's home. "Blessed Be Your Name" was also the first song Chapman sang May 21, the day of Maria's death, when he wasn't sure he'd ever be able to sing again. Inspired by the story of Job, at one point the lyrics repeat, "He gives and takes away." "As I sang this song ... it wasn't a song, it was a cry, a scream, a prayer," Chapman explained to the audience of nearly 5,000. "I found an amazing comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding." Chapman also shared that after Maria's death, he'd reconsidered the words to all his songs and whether he could still sing—and believe—them. Instead, losing his little girl brought the meaning of some of those songs into sharper focus. One example was "Yours," which addresses how everything in the world belongs to God. "In this song, in particular, I had to come to a new realization," he said. "There's not an inch of creation that God doesn't look at and say 'all of that's mine.'" As a result of that realization in conjunction with Maria's death, Chapman added a new verse to "Yours":

I've walked the valley of death's shadow, so deep and dark that I could barely breathe. I've had to let go of more than I could bear and I've questioned everything that I believe. Still even here in this great darkness a comfort and a hope comes breaking through as I can say in life or death God we belong to you. Can you find peace in Christ?

Thursday, June 24– Read Philippians 4:7-9. While Marge was aboard a plane bound for Cleveland, waiting for takeoff. She noticed a strange phenomenon. On one side of the airplane a sunset suffused the entire sky with glorious color. But out of the window next to her seat, all Marge could see was a sky dark and threatening, with no sign of the sunset. As the plane's engines began to roar, a gentle Voice spoke within her. "You have noticed the windows," he murmured beneath the roar and thrust of takeoff. "Your life, too, will contain some happy, beautiful times, but also some dark shadows. Here's a lesson I want to teach you to save you much heartache and allow you to 'abide in Me' with continual peace and joy." "You see, it doesn't matter which window you look through; this plane is still going to Cleveland. So it is in your life. You have a choice. You can dwell on the gloomy picture. Or you can focus on the bright things and leave the dark, ominous situations to Me. I alone can handle them anyway. The final destination is not influenced by what you see and hear along the way." "Learn this, act on it and you will be released, able to experience the 'peace that passes understanding.'" Are you able to experience Philippians 4:7 in your life?

Friday, June 25– Read Matthew 5:9. In 1934, Hitler's plague of anti-Semitism was spreading throughout Europe like wildfire. Some would escape it. Millions would die from it. But an 11-year-old boy named Heinz would learn from it. Gangs of Hitler Youth roamed Heinz's neighborhood of looking for trouble. Young Heinz learned to keep his eyes open for them. Whenever he saw a gang of troublemakers, he would cross to the other side of the street. Sometimes he would escape a fight, but sometimes he couldn't. One day, Heinz found himself face to face with a Hitler Youth. A beating appeared inevitable, but on this day he walked away unhurt, not because he put up a good fight, but because of what he said. Somehow, he convinced this troublemaker that a fight was foolish and unnecessary. From that point on, 11-year-old Heinz learned the power of words to avoid conflict, and for a young Jewish boy living in such a volatile, anti-Semitic climate, that was a skill he used often. In fact, it was a skill he perfected. Fortunately, Heinz and his family escaped Bavaria and made their way to America. As the years have passed, his name has become synonymous with peace negotiations; he is remembered as one of the greatest peacemakers of the last century. You don't know him as Heinz. You know him by his Anglicized name, Henry...Henry Kissinger. How are you being a peacemaker?