



A Work in Progress

A Scriptural Course toward Self-Improvement

CARLA KRAZL



*In honor of Annette,
who showed me
what “Bible study” means.
First caller!*

—cak—



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how to use this book



A *Work in Progress: A Scriptural Course toward Self-Improvement* is appropriate for any small group, high school age and up. Each of the seven topics covered here is designed to be discussed during a forty-five- to sixty-minute session.

Each Bible study group is unique; therefore this book is intentionally adaptable. Your group may have one dedicated leader, for example, who guides everyone through each session, keeps discussions on track, and leads the group in prayer. An alternative approach is to have group members take turns leading a session (or two). Or perhaps one person guides the group's discussions while another leads everyone in prayer.

You are encouraged to read each session on your own before your study group meets. Take time for personal reflection—your thoughts matter! Working individually, you have an opportunity to think at your own pace, dwelling on the parts that are meaningful to you. This is the time to answer the questions from *your* point of view. At the group study, answers become collaborative. Participants will recognize varying perspectives and hear how others understand the topic. In contemplating the thoughts of others, participants will discover more richness in God's Word.

For each session, you are directed to go to your Bible to read God's Word and then talk about that session's emphasis. Questions are designed to keep group members engaged in personal reflection and in group discussion so the topic is addressed completely. There are a few blanks to fill in along the way. Space is allowed in the margins for noting wisdom gained during group discussions.

There is guidance for life application at the end of each session. Use these opportunities to set small goals for personal betterment—after all, we are all works in progress!

prologue

Teacher.

That is God so frequently!

He taught Pharaoh some lessons, taught the Israelites His commandments, taught Joshua to trust Him, and taught Zechariah that He is in charge.

He taught Nicodemus the necessity of being born again (John 3). He taught the Samaritan woman about living water (John 4) and taught His disciples about the bread of life (John 6). He taught the Pharisees the greatest commandments (Matthew 22) and taught the disciples how to pray (Matthew 6).

Jesus' friends called Him "Teacher." His opponents called Him "Teacher." Those who merely knew *of* Him called Him "Teacher." Certainly, today we think of God as our teacher. But let us be careful not to pigeonhole God; He does more than teach! We can look more closely at other Bible stories and discover more potential titles for God:

1. **Commander.** Noah, in Genesis 6, heard quite a list of directions from God: Build an ark! 450 feet long! Door in the side! And we read in verse 22 that "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him."
2. **Leader.** The children of Israel, while in the desert after their escape from Egypt, were in serious need of direction. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light" (Exodus 13:21).
3. **Provider.** The desert-dwelling Israelites were in serious need of sustenance too. God to the rescue! They received "bread from heaven" every day (Exodus 16:1-30).
4. **Guidance Counselor.** Psalm 73:24 points out that God guides us with His counsel. John 16:13 says "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth."
5. **Back-up.** "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). The Spirit covers for us, just like a friend who knows us well.
6. **Companion.** Psalm 51:11 says, "Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me."

"Teach me to do
Your will, for You are
my God!"
—a prayer of King
David, Psalm 143:10

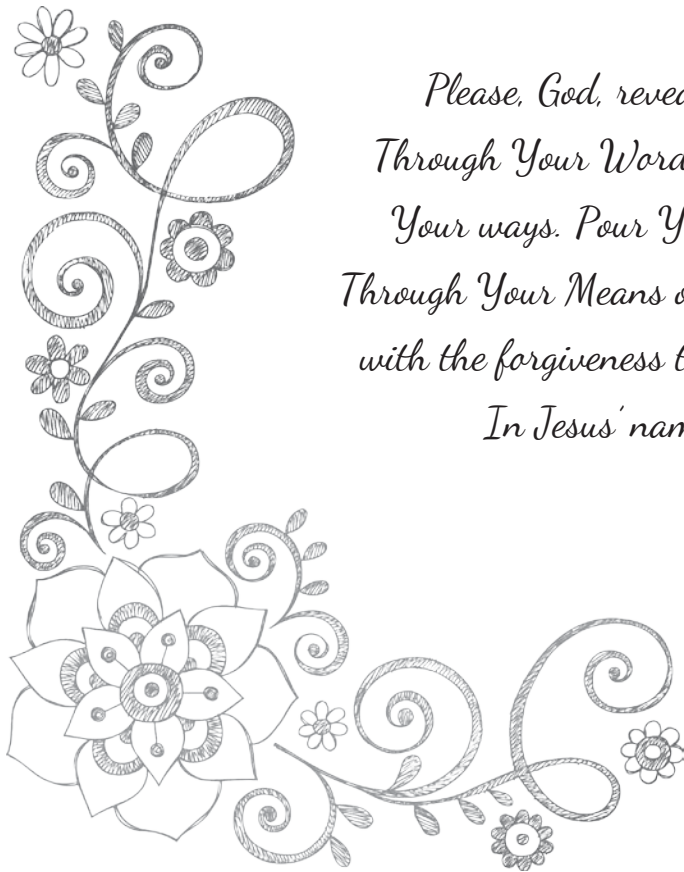
Teacher, Commander, Leader, Provider, Guidance Counselor, Back-up, Companion: these are all characteristics of our loving God. And He teaches, directs, provides, guides, counsels, defends, and accompanies.

Hmm. It sounds like an all-encompassing descriptive title for God could be Coach! He helps, guides, and shapes us each and every day, all day long. He coaches us through highs and lows, joys and sorrows, and everything in between.

But unlike game day, there is no relaxing after the contest is over, and there is no finish line to coast across. In life, we as Christians cannot fight hard for a while and then relax in the shade. We cannot grow to be perfect, then coast through our remaining days. Life is a relentless series of constant personal adjustments. Each of us, as sinners struggling to model Christ, is always a work in progress.

“You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.”

—Jesus, when speaking to His disciples, John 13:13



*Please, God, reveal Yourself to me today.
Through Your Word, inspire me to follow in
Your ways. Pour Your will into my heart.
Through Your Means of Grace, fill my conscience
with the forgiveness that is mine through you.
In Jesus' name we pray it all.*

Amen!



SESSION A

A WORK IN PROGRESS: RESPONSIBILITY

“With great power comes great responsibility.”

Introducing . . .

Toddlers have none, children get some, teens want more, and adults accumulate exponentially increasing amounts. Responsibility increases with age. But what about the almighty God? He is as old as time and has no superior. What is His responsibility? Does He owe anything to anyone? Is He accountable to anyone?

This session will explore answers to these questions. As you explore the topic of responsibility, you will see our God’s commitment to His creation. (Is that salvation we see arriving on the horizon?)

The session then details six categories of responsibility that God has unpacked for us in His Word. Responsibility can be shouldered or shirked, accepted or ignored. Here we will hear the directives God gives for His people. These expectations, combined with knowledge that God acts responsibly for us, will lead us to act responsibly for ourselves and for others.

Get Going!

Do you know the source of the quote used for the title of this session: “With great power comes great responsibility”? Think a minute.

When your group meets, find out how many initially thought, “Spider-Man!” The quote is, in fact, directly from the 2002 movie “Spider-Man.” Earlier comics often credit Parker’s Uncle Ben, who either spoke or implied the sentiment. But Spidey is a quote thief. Nineteenth-century French philosopher Voltaire should also get a nod because he expressed these words when he put pen to paper in his 1832 *Œuvres de Voltaire, volume 48*. Our French buddy, Voltaire, just may have been inspired by Luke 12:48, where the following is found: “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.”

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

In addition to the responsibility of feeding their children, God has charged parents with teaching their kids how to be faithful and responsible adults! That is some heavy stuff and perhaps the weightiest task felt by parents.



Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:33

Proverbs 22 may tell of parents' weightiest task, but Ephesians 5 summarizes one of the most *challenging* tasks for some married people. To show this love and respect at all times can be difficult. Yet, clearly, it IS God's expectation of us.

4. Community

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work. Titus 3:1

Initially, being "submissive to rulers and authorities" sounds restrictive. After all, our rulers have a list of things we cannot do. But then again, there is this document called the Constitution of the United States. In it, the rulers and authorities clearly delineate a list of things that we, as citizens, *can* do: worship our chosen deity, speak our mind, assemble at will, bear arms. Gerald W. Johnson, a noted journalist and historian (1890-1980), once remarked on how the gift of a right also saddles a man with responsibility. A right to free speech does, technically, give you a pass to speak harshly, speak critically, and speak, as some might say, "without a filter." But what Mr. Johnson points out is that speakers have a duty to act with the interest of the community in mind. Speak to build up, not to tear down. Use freedoms wisely. God says it this way:

For each will have to bear his own load. Galatians 6:5

Horizontal lines for writing notes.

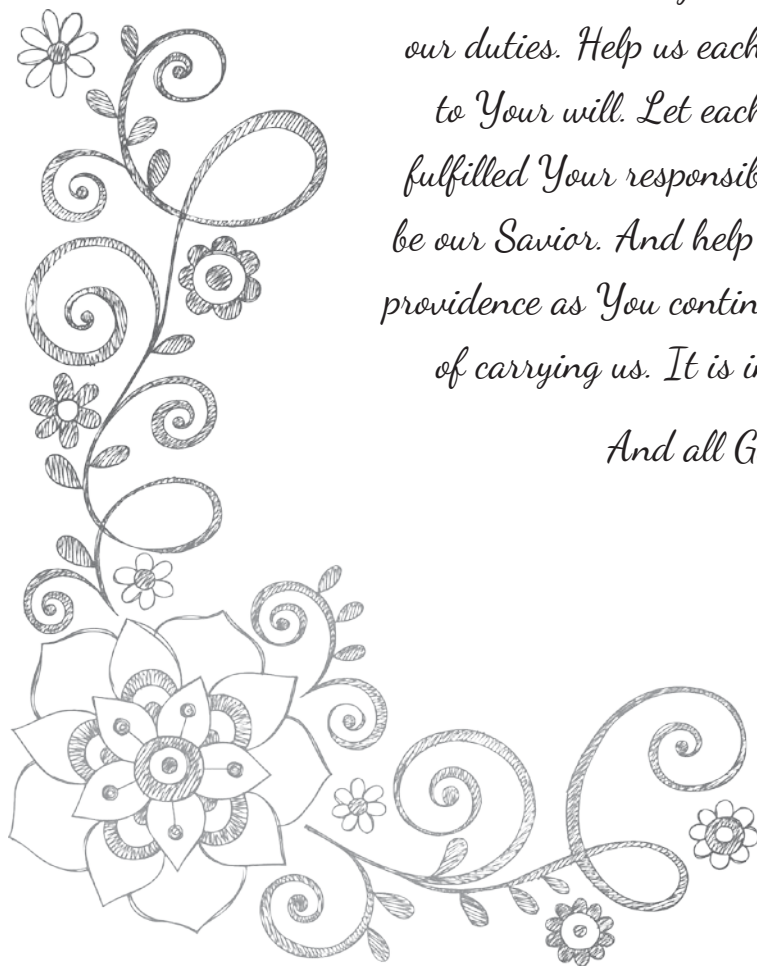
Before closing with prayer, be reminded of God's loving grace—that we do not have to be perfect, for He freely forgives us for not upholding our responsibilities. God took on responsibility by creating us: He has promised to care for us, His people, and He sent His Son, Jesus, to hand us all salvation!

Have the group leader or a volunteer close the session with prayer. Include prayer requests from group participants, or say the following prayer together:

Heavenly Father, it is so easy to get weighed down and feel burdened by the list of responsibilities we have. There are so many! Help us to be wise in evaluating our duties. Help us each to manage our list according to Your will. Let each of us know that You have fulfilled Your responsibility to us in sending Jesus to be our Savior. And help us to feel the warmth of Your providence as You continue to fulfill Your responsibility of carrying us. It is in Jesus' name that we pray.

And all God's people say,

Amen!



SESSION NOTES

SESSION A—RESPONSIBILITY

We are responsible for guarding our own faith and the faith of others as well.

Community: Rights and freedoms.

Faith: Our faith and the faith of others. We guard your own belief in Jesus and witness it to others.

Personal: I am the only person who decides what type of person I am.

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