



# Spiritual Due Diligence

Exploring questions of eternal significance

**Study 1** The Need for Due Diligence  
presented by Links Players International

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# Spiritual Due Diligence

## Introduction to this study

**W**HEN A MAN OR WOMAN CONSIDERS making a significant financial investment, they normally do not rush into the decision. Rather, they begin a process commonly known as due diligence—a gathering of facts and considerations that will allow them to judge rightly whether this investment is appropriate for them.

Of course, due diligence does not guarantee success. However, if an investment fails and we ask the investors whether or not they did their due diligence, the most embarrassing answer they can give is, “No, we did not.”

While thousands of wise investors each year avoid that embarrassment by conducting due diligence in their financial endeavors, millions of people never take the same careful steps in their spiritual lives. While they have heard stories of God and the afterlife, and while they may have even toyed with such questions loosely in their minds, they have never set about the task of spiritual due diligence—considering the information that would support these eternally significant claims.

### Intent of this series

The intent of this series, *Spiritual Due Diligence*, is to assist potential spiritual investors with regard to investigating the claims of the Bible, particularly as they point to a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One study in this series will focus on the claims of other faith systems, but that is not our primary intent here. Instead, by a thorough examination of the Bible, you will have opportunity to study Christianity in depth, and thereafter you will have the tools necessary by which to measure other faiths and religions.

### The audience for this series

At least three categories of readers should find great value in this series: those who are beginning their first serious investigation of the Bible, those who are desiring to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and those who may be speaking with others about their own established Christian faith.

### Focus of this particular study

In this study, we look to answer the most basic of questions: what keeps us from spiritual due diligence, and why should we bother with it? Like grand jurors considering whether there is enough evidence to bring a case to trial, you will be presented with some key criteria for belief. From these you can decide whether to go forward into the review of more in-depth matters in this series: the nature of man, the nature of God, the nature of Scripture, death and the afterlife, Christianity and other religions, the invisible realm (angels, demons, heaven, and hell), and the end times.

— Jeffrey Cranford and Jeff Hopper, for Links Players International



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson One: Reasons to resist, Part I

**W**E HAVE ALL EXPERIENCED FAILED ATTEMPTS in our lives to enlist friends in an area of interest that is especially fun or meaningful for us. If you are a golfer, for instance, or enjoy fishing, you have surely tried to engage a friend in one of these activities with you. But your friend keeps putting you off. They may have a busy schedule, or other interests to which they are already dedicated. These are good reasons. But your friend may also be making excuses out of fear or laziness. From your perspective, however, the reasons are accomplishing only one thing: they are preventing your friend from latching on to a good thing.

In the same way, people are often reluctant to spend time investigating matters of eternity. Whether their reasons are legitimate or sound more like excuses, they prevent these folks from taking a good hard look at an extremely important subject.

Let's begin by examining two common reasons people have for steering clear of spiritual discussions. We have no desire to judge these reasons (though we actually think they are pretty good reasons sometimes). Instead, we want to lay them out for the purpose of identification. Maybe you will find that you or a friend has one of these very real reasons in mind when they don't take the time to stop and consider questions of transcendence and eternity.

### The nature of the Church

Many people find great fault in the Church, either in its global existence or its local existence, or both. The blame attached to the Church typically looks like one of these three arguments:

- The global Church has caused wars and hardships through history. In addition, the Church is largely responsible for many racist, elitist, and sexist crimes throughout man's existence.
- The Church, both globally and locally, is a harbor for hypocrites. While pastors and teachers refer to the Bible's instruction against gossip, for instance, many so-called Christians have much to say behind people's backs, and nearly all of it is negative.
- The local church is marked by infighting, and denominations always seem to set themselves against one another.

Sadly, representatives of their truth can be found for each of these arguments.

### The nature of God

While the Church is a difficulty for some people, others find difficulty in God Himself. These difficulties cause them to either dismiss God completely (atheism), doubt God's existence (agnosticism), or reject God as someone with whom they do not want to have a relationship (unbelief). Again, the most frequent difficulties listed with regard to the nature of God number three:

- There is great pain in the world, and a truly loving, powerful God would not

tolerate this. Either God is too weak to meet our gravest needs, too mean to care, or He does not exist to come to our aid.

- God has much more significant matters to deal with than my small life. In this argument, God is not necessarily impotent to meet our needs or ignorant of them. It is just that He is distant, occupied with physical worlds in the universe or the most significant people in this world, be they the truly godly or the shockingly evil.
- God is a condemning judge. No one likes to be made to feel guilty—though we will sometimes allow our conscience to prick us when no one else is around to see its pointing finger. But a judgmental God is no friend if His idea of love is to show me how wrong I am and how far from Him I reside. And He is all that much worse if He intends to send me to hell for the things I have done that don't satisfy Him.

It is very possible that you hear echoes of your own thoughts about God in these difficulties, even if you are someone who has said you try to love and serve God. What we see in the world around us and what we read on the pages of the Bible do not always seem to line up—assuming, of course, that we have given the Bible a full, fair reading.

Before we progress to Lesson Two, with more reasons people may choose to resist engaging in spiritual due diligence, let's spend a few minutes examining words from the Bible itself.

#### BIBLE STUDY

*Read Isaiah 43:18-27.*

What does this passage show us about God's interaction with His people (alternately called Israel and Jacob)? Is He pleased with their actions?

How was He calling them to live instead?

*Read Psalm 22:1-8*

Notice that David, who elsewhere in Scripture was called "a man after God's heart," honestly struggles with the nature of God. How do you think David's authenticity figures into his interaction with God?

Does it seem to undermine his faith or strengthen it?

#### ISAIAH 43

<sup>18</sup>Do not remember the past events, pay no attention to things of old. <sup>19</sup>Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert. <sup>20</sup>The animals of the field will honor Me, jackals and ostriches, because I provide water in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people. <sup>21</sup>The people I formed for Myself will declare My praise. <sup>22</sup>But Jacob, you have not called on Me, because, Israel, you have become weary of Me. <sup>23</sup>You have not brought Me your sheep for burnt offerings or honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings or wearied you with incense. <sup>24</sup>You have not bought Me aromatic cane with silver, or satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened Me with your sins; you have wearied Me with your iniquities. <sup>25</sup>It is I who sweep away your transgressions for My own sake and remember your sins no more. <sup>26</sup>Take Me to court; let us argue our case together. State your case, so that you may be vindicated. <sup>27</sup>Your first father sinned, and your mediators have rebelled against Me.

#### PSALM 22

<sup>1</sup>My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?  
Why are You so far from my deliverance  
and from my words of groaning?  
<sup>2</sup>My God, I cry by day, but You do not answer, by night, yet I have no rest.  
<sup>3</sup>But You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.  
<sup>4</sup>Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You rescued them.  
<sup>5</sup>They cried to You and were set free; they trusted in You and were not disgraced.  
<sup>6</sup>But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by people.  
<sup>7</sup>Everyone who sees me mocks me; they sneer and shake their heads:  
<sup>8</sup>"He relies on the LORD; let Him rescue him;  
let the LORD deliver him, since He takes pleasure in him."



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Two: Reasons to resist, Part 2

**I**F YOU ENGAGE IN AN ACTIVITY THAT HAS OLD ROOTS, such as golf or bowhunting, you know how valuable it can be to have this connection with history. It lends authenticity to your interests to know that so many people have participated in these activities over such a long period of time.

In our first lesson, we began by looking at the reasons people may have for resisting the work of spiritual due diligence. We found not only that these reasons are common among men and women today, but they were common in biblical times as well. And that crossover between the ancients and us can be an encouragement of sorts, for we know that we are not the only people to have considered these difficult questions.

In this second lesson, we will continue our look at some of the reasons people resist spiritual due diligence. This time, in addition to a third external reason, they include reasons that are personal in nature.

### The nature of science

In the first lesson, the reasons given for resisting spiritual due diligence came from a contrary position. Here is a more affirmative reason: Science and modern thought rule out the possibility of a spirit-being (God) who has existed since before time.

There is no argument against the fact that the vast majority of scientific leaders and teachers, while finding evidence for and joy in the vastness of the universe and the intricacies of the world, cannot credit a Creator for these things. For them, fossil and geological evidence points toward an evolutionary process, while matter and motion in space suggest a massive explosion (“the Big Bang”) started the universe.

Additionally, because these arguments are based on what can be observed on earth and in the universe, their evidential nature trumps faith in what is unseen, namely (in this instance) God.

### The nature of life

Some people never *take* the time to conduct spiritual due diligence because they can see no way to *make* the time. They find themselves governed by one or more of the following three circumstances:

- *The activities of life.* In an effort to manage their marriages and children, juggle the demands of their job so they can pay their bills, and grab whatever bit of entertainment and vacation time they can muster, some people find themselves too busy with “good things” to consider possible “better things.” This is not dissimilar to the many business people whose businesses stay small because they do not have time to investigate growth options.
- *The protocol of life.* Without question, life is full of expectations we do not necessarily choose for ourselves but which obligate us all the same. These in-

clude may family demands, holiday plans and programs, community participation, and more.

- *The course of life.* Sometimes the events of life are truly significant. On the good side are weddings and promotions and house relocations. On the tough side are illnesses and deaths and bankruptcies. Events like these can overwhelm a person for an extended season, making it difficult to think about anything beyond the most basic activities of the day.

### The nature of self

For all of the excellent reasons we have already observed, the plain truth is that many people do not engage in spiritual due diligence because they fear it will upset their apple cart. They have particular preferences in life that have made life comfortable for them. These include personal financial and moral choices. Because most people know that the Bible and the Church have a lot to say about these topics, they are afraid that the proven existence of God could require (or at least *request*) change in their lives. “Old habits die hard,” we have all heard said, so many people would rather not look into areas that threaten some of their favorite established activities.

While many people inside and outside the Church are outstanding at giving to and serving others, honesty would require us to admit that we generally do these things only so far as they do not rob us of our favorite “creature comforts.”

### BIBLE STUDY

Read *Luke 9:57-62*.

This passage shows three different men approaching Jesus. One calls himself, one is called by Jesus, and the third proposed to follow Him given a certain condition. How do the words of these men suggest a connection with what we have discussed regarding the activities, the protocol, and the course of life?

In what ways does it affect your thinking to know that people in ancient times wrestled with some of the same personal difficulties regarding faith that people wrestle with today?

### REFLECTION

Reviewing the reasons that people hesitate in spiritual due diligence, which (if any) seem to identify where you are coming from? Do you have another reason not given here?

### LUKE 9

<sup>57</sup>As they were traveling on the road someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go!”

<sup>58</sup>Jesus told him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.”

<sup>59</sup>Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”

“Lord,” he said, “first let me go bury my father.”

<sup>60</sup>But He told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.”

<sup>61</sup>Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.”

<sup>62</sup>But Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

### CONSIDERING THE COST

Jesus actually challenged people to engage in spiritual due diligence before choosing to follow Him in His life before God. He wanted committed disciples rather than celebrity groupies—a fact made plain by two pictures He presented to His listeners in *Luke 13:28-32*:

<sup>28</sup>“For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

<sup>31</sup>“Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000? <sup>32</sup>If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Three: Reasons to Investigate - The Implications

**A**LL OF US HAVE BEEN APPROACHED AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER by an acquaintance who offers us a deal we “just can’t miss.” They may not be able to make a guarantee, but the potential benefits are too great to allow them to slip by. In actuality, of course, it is often not the benefits that are so great, but the rather the allure of the benefits.

At such times, we must really be on guard, and we must be certain to do our due diligence. For there are implications both of making the right decision—financial gain, early retirement, nice vacations as top resorts—and of making the wrong decision—financial loss, assets surrendered, even bankruptcy. Fear and anticipation are competing emotions, and some investors thrill at the opportunity to play the two against one another and emerge having made an excellent choice.

When our investigations take a turn toward eternity, the potential implications become exceedingly great. If there really is a heaven, we would miss everything by not going there. And if there is a horrifying place called hell, well, we would be smart to do every last thing to avoid such a place.

But Christian belief purports not only eternal heaven and hell, it suggests that there is a better life to be lived here on earth; there is a payoff even now in following Jesus Christ. So spiritual due diligence may have both short- and long-term ramifications.

With all this in mind, this lesson introduces the Bible’s teaching on heaven and hell, with the intent of allowing you to see why the one is more desirable than the other.

### **More important than heaven and hell**

While we will see that the Bible speaks openly of heaven and hell as actual places of eternal destiny, it is important to understand before exploring those descriptions that the essential difference between the two is the presence of God. For eternity, the Bible teaches, each man and woman will live either in the presence of God or apart from Him, separated from the Lord Almighty. If this is true, every person must choose during their earthly life where they will spend eternity—connected to God or cut off from Him. This alone presents huge implications, pointing to the biggest decision we must make during our lifetimes.

### **Heaven**

Now we have the beginning of a biblical definition of heaven: eternal life with God, the one who is called “a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Nehemiah 9:17).

“But,” you may be asking, “what about all I have heard with regard to singing angels and streets of gold and all that business?” That is found in the Bible as well, for the

future time when a new heaven and a new earth are established for the eternal dwelling of God's redeemed people. Consider this remarkable account from the Revelation of John:

*“And (the angel) carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone like the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had twelve high gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.” (Revelation 21:10-12)*

Doubtless, there is no place on earth as amazing as the lowest place in heaven. No wonder it is worth considering!

### Hell

But for all of heaven's wondrous attributes, it is met in starkness with the pictures we are given of hell, and its eternal manifestation as a lake of fire. Whereas heaven is a place where there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4), hell is presented as a place where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Without the presence of God, there will be no respite from the worst existence we can imagine, replete with fear, fury, and pain.

### BIBLE STUDY

*Read Revelation 20:11-15.*

These few verses are often referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment, depicting the future day when Jesus Christ will separate those who will spend eternity in heaven from those who will spend eternity in the lake of fire. What is the condition for being thrown into the fire?

*Read the words of Jesus to His disciples as recorded in Matthew 10:28-31. According to this teaching of Jesus, who is the One who is able to destroy body and soul in hell? How does this passage strike a balance between God's judgment and His care?*

### REFLECTION

Many people have great difficulty reconciling the place called hell with their idea of God. Where do you stand in this regard? Does the theology of God's judgment cause you to balk?

### REVELATION 21

<sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away.

### MATTHEW 25

<sup>30</sup>And throw this good-for-nothing slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

### REVELATION 20

<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup>I also saw the dead, the great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books.

<sup>13</sup>Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works.

<sup>14</sup>Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the fire.

### MATTHEW 10

<sup>28</sup>Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup>Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent. <sup>30</sup>But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. <sup>31</sup>Don't be afraid therefore; you are worth more than many sparrows.

### WHAT CHRIST SAID

Although some modern theologians have posited that God's love trumps the concept of hell, their thinking does not follow the historical line of orthodox Christian thinking traced back to Christ Himself. Simply, you cannot hold to Christian thinking without holding onto the words of Christ—and those include many words about hell.



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Four: Reasons to Investigate - Evidence in Nature

**A**NYONE WHO HAS ENJOYED OUTDOOR SPORTS like golf, fishing, skiing or hunting for any period of time has gained access to the innate sense of wonder that occurs when we see something large in scope and power. The crashing waves of the ocean provide such an awe, as do the highest mountains and the broadest stretches of prairie or desert.

In the same way, the elements—blustering winds, thunderous clouds, torrential rains—all lead us to recognize that forces of nature are far greater than we are. We will be forever one-upped when we attempt to challenge the earth and the skies.

Of course, you do not need to be a sportsman (or woman!) to appreciate how much bigger and more powerful nature is than we are. Any walk on the beach or drive through the hills can give us this understanding and create a sequence of questions about our place in the universe:

- Was there a creative hand in all this grandeur?
- If so, who was involved and for what purpose?
- Is that great creator still there?
- Is there any chance that I can establish a connection with this creator?

### Humanity and the animals

In addition to geology and meteorology, a look at zoology shows some stark differences between the animals and human beings. While the theory of evolution offers some plausible arguments for the development of animate creatures, it cannot explain where humans gained their sense of purpose.

Or lack thereof. That's right, for while every animal species has been shown to have an individual place in the biological web of life, one living being has no such purpose. That being, of course, is the human being. And if humans lack a unique ecological or biological purpose, other questions are begged:

- Might humanity have a spiritual purpose beyond their physical bodies?
- If so, where did that purpose come from and where is it directed?

### Science and God

Because the flow of scientific study and reporting since the time of Charles Darwin has pursued a causal course of evolutionary history, with one event naturally following another, many evidences have been offered to that end. And because some of these evidences appear to contradict the Genesis accounts of Scripture, it is often taught and assumed that the two sides—the Bible and science—cannot coexist.

More rightly, however, if the God of Scripture is as omnipotent (all-powerful) and

omniscient (all-knowing) as Scripture declares Him to be, then His overall design would be brilliantly organized and its individual components would be meticulously structured. Science may be the very best proof for God’s stunning design—except for one thing.

*The best evidence of God’s design is you.* Consider the intricacies of the bodily systems that keep you alive. Consider the machinations of your own mind, able—even in its weakest subject areas!—to fathom the words on this page, understand the figures in your checkbook and investment portfolio, discern the difference between lies and truths that your children tell you, and weigh the myriad options in most every decision you make. Consider the feelings you have for others, and your ability to act on or suppress those feelings according to a number of learned and unlearned filters, including manners and morals. Consider your ability to create and/or appreciate art and music. And, finally, consider the fact that your individual genetic makeup, as well as your personality, talents and interests are combined in you in a way that they have occurred in no one else in history.

You are amazing, and you should be, for in the midst of those famous Genesis accounts is this striking line: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). Spiritual due diligence must consider the fact that the Bible suggests we are made in God’s image, for if it is true, we have a purpose that far outdistances any pursuit we have ever established for ourselves.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

*Read Acts 14:16-17 and Romans 1:18-21.*

According to Paul’s spoken (Acts) and written (Romans) words to the people of his time, what has creation revealed about God? How have people throughout history responded to these revelations?

*Read Psalm 8:1,3-8.*

David offered this song of praise to God. What did the king have to say in considering his place in the universe? How do his words point to a greater purpose for God’s created people?

#### **REFLECTION**

How much have you assumed to be true about science and false about the Bible (or vice versa) without really investigating the matter? Has this lesson led you to a place of connecting the greatness of God with the discoveries of science?

#### **ACTS 14**

<sup>16</sup>In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way, <sup>17</sup>although He did not leave Himself without a witness, since He did good: giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and satisfying your hearts with food and happiness.”

#### **ROMANS 1**

<sup>18</sup>For God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, <sup>19</sup>since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened.

#### **PSALM 8**

<sup>1</sup>Lord, our Lord,

how magnificent is Your name throughout the earth!

You have covered the heavens with Your majesty...

<sup>3</sup>When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You set in place,

<sup>4</sup>what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?

<sup>5</sup>You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup>You made him lord over the works of Your hands.

You put everything under his feet:

<sup>7</sup>all the sheep and oxen, as well as animals in the wild,

<sup>8</sup>birds of the sky,

and fish of the sea

passing through the currents of the seas.



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Five: Reasons to Investigate - The Progression of History

**W**E DO NOT HAVE TO RETRACE THE STEPS OF HISTORY very far to find stunning, even frightful, examples of the disintegration of a strong, established force. Such demises have happened both in governmental and financial arenas in our lifetimes.

Consider, for instance, the fall of the Berlin Wall and then the Soviet Union. The Wall, of course, represented the broader influence of Communist dictatorships throughout Europe. Seven decades in the making, the military might of the Soviets and their allies was unmistakable. And yet, when other influences gained a voice in the societies of the repressed people, freedom won out. In 1989, the Wall came down. The following year, Germany was reunified, and in 1991 the Soviet Union was dismantled.

More recently, the financial examples of Enron and Arthur Andersen remind us that “nothing lasts forever.” Both giants in their industries, unethical leadership led to illegal practices, the bilking of investors’ millions, and the effective death of both companies. Arthur Andersen, the founder of the Big Five accounting firm in 1913, had built his company’s reputation on a stalwart commitment to honesty on behalf of investors. To protect a beefy client, a few self-preserving executives sent the firm to the grave, reducing it to a relative handful of employees who spend the bulk of their time handling lawsuits against the firm.

### **The resilience of religion**

And yet there are the Jews and Christians. Throughout the course of history, the Jews have been ruled and raided, including by those who were bent on their extermination. The Romans, Spaniards, Russians and Germans have all had a hand in oppressing the Jews—all in the hope that their existence would end. The Portuguese, English and French have also attempted to expel the Jews.

Likewise, Christians have faced great opposition, beginning infamously with their persecution by Rome’s Emperor Nero. In many places in the world today, Christianity is outlawed, and Christian believers are jailed and tortured.

Perhaps more despicable than all this is the fact that the Jews and Christians have warred against one another. Jewish leaders wanted nothing to do with the Christian “sect” in the first century; the apostles were routinely jailed for speaking of Christ. Later, in the First Crusade (1095), Pope Urban II urged a Christian effort to take Jerusalem from the Muslim residents. This violent program also ignited organized onslaught against the Jews, in a series of pogroms historians have referred to as “the first Holocaust.”

Despite all of this resistance to Jews and Christians (and you may also include the

evils conducted specifically against adherents of Islam in the name of religion), none of these religions has been obliterated. In fact, it is often persecution that promotes the expansion of a church. Consider, for instance, the underground Christian church in China. Despite the illegal status of these local congregations in China, they have flourished almost since the harshest Communist rule in the 1960s and 1970s. As many as 80 million Chinese citizens may now be part of these churches, in spite of the fines, heavy labor and imprisonment that can result as part of their involvement.

The ability of religion and religious documents like the Bible to survive through such repeated attempts at persecution and extermination is not only amazing, it also invites key questions:

- Are religions only man-made systems?
- If so, how have they survived and even expanded in spite of violent, organized opposition?
- Is history only the progression of man's decisions, or is there a driving force behind the unfolding of human events?
- Is there one God who created this faith and worship in Him and who has sustained faith and worship in the face of earnest attempts to wipe out the practice of religion?

The man or woman who is diligent in their investigation of spiritual matters is compelled to consider these questions.

#### BIBLE STUDY

*Read Ezekiel 5:5.*

From God's point of view as delivered through the prophet Ezekiel, from what geographical place does the world radiate? What perspective does this give us about the place of Jerusalem and Israel in history?

*Read Genesis 12:1-5*

This passage establishes the initiation of the relationship between God and Abram. This relationship resulted in the ancestry of Abram (later called Abraham), who was to be the father of both Isaac and Ishmael. From the former sprang the Jews and then the Christians; from the latter came the Muslims. How does this context inform our thinking about the long course of history?

#### REFLECTION

Reviewing the history of your own life, have you suspected (or even believed) at times that an outside entity was piecing together the course of your existence? How were these times different than other days or seasons of your life?

#### EZEKIEL 5

<sup>5</sup>"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her."

#### GENESIS 12

<sup>1</sup>The Lord said to Abram, "Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land I will show you.

<sup>2</sup>I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

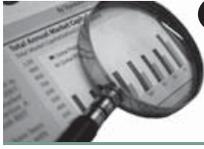
<sup>4</sup>So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. <sup>5</sup>He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and all the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

#### ESTHER

The Bible itself tells the history of a campaign to annihilate the Jews. You will find this account in the book of Esther, which can be read in a single sitting.

In this book, Haman is determined to exterminate the Jews because of his own bigotry against them. He devises a wicked plan, secures the approval of the king, and proceeds to set a date for the murder of all Jewish men, women and children.

Esther, queen to the Persian king Xerxes, risks her life before the king to plead for intervention on behalf of the Jews. By God's hand, the Jews are saved and Haman is put to death.



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Six: Reasons to Investigate - The Testimony of People

**A** HUGE CHUNK OF BUSINESS, as well as a huge chunk of life, is propelled by reputation. Any business leader's dream is to have his or her customers do the advertising for the company by telling their friends all about its products or services. They know that the good experiences of one customer can go a long way toward bringing many others.

No doubt, you have travelled to some of your favorite recreational spots—golf courses, fishing holes, spas, shopping areas, theaters, and more—upon the recommendation of others. First you may read about a great spot in a magazine or see it on television. This gets your mind to thinking in that direction. But when a friend comes home from the place, raving about its amenities and service, you set your own mind to getting there. And why not? For now you have the confirmation of a trusted friend.

Two factors often lead us to go forward in life: the testimony of the masses, whether we know them or not, or the testimony of a close friend or two whose words you certainly value.

### Stories of religion

When it comes to religion, we are often cautious about getting involved. This is almost certainly true if you did not grow up in church. It can be equally true for those who have had a bad experience in church and are hesitant ever to return.

Caution is not always a fault. Stories of religion gone awry in our time are well-documented—normally accompanied by the names of men like Jim Jones or David Koresh, or groups like Heaven's Gate, which committed mass suicide in San Diego in 1997. The activities of these groups led to deadly ends, all in the name of religion. Surely no one would fault a seeker who is trying to avoid connection to such erroneous groups.

Likewise, what many people see on television has turned them off: preachers speaking like no one else speaks, expecting things of God that seem rather self-centered. They often rage about issues that matter only to their followers. And then there is this criticism: they are always asking for money.

If the only pictures we have of religion were like these, or like the bloody historical battles among believers of different faiths—or even different sects of the same faith!—it's no wonder people stand at a distance from religion.

But the truth is, there is a critical mass of people out there who claim that what they have is not religion, but a relationship with God. Can so many people be wrong? And then, too, there are those who we know well, whose lives really do reflect “a better way of living.” They are honest, caring people who trace their characters to the influ-

ences of their religious practices, including regular worship, the study of the Bible, and prayer. We can say these people are built in such a way as to need “a crutch” like religion; but then again, don’t we all seek help in our own ways? Maybe there really is something to what they’ve got!

### Internal testimony

Even without to the testimony of others, many people possess a seed of belief. While they are hesitant to pin down one line of theology about God, they are convinced that there is likely a single supreme being, who not only created and sustains the world, but is in some way personal.

Indeed, there is a natural tendency among humans to atone for their sins—a man, for instance, realizes that when he has offended his wife, he may get back in her good graces by bringing home a bouquet of flowers or a piece of jewelry. Could this be because we have an inborn sense of sacrifice and worship that would find its ultimate fulfillment in being directed to God?

All of these forms of testimony—sheers numbers of people, personal experiences of individual people we admire and trust, and the inner leading toward atonement—may cause us to look further at who God is and what He might offer to us.

### BIBLE STUDY

*Read Ecclesiastes 3:10-11.*

The writer of this wisdom book observed the relationship between God and man and suggested that God had placed something in people’s hearts. What was it? Does this seem possible to you?

*Read Psalm 106:20, 34-38.*

This is an account of the Old Testament people of God. Notice how when they turned away from Him, they still worshipped other gods. How does this align with our discussion of our inherent drive to worship?

*Read Acts 14:11-13.*

Here is a New Testament account where people show similar worshipful inclinations, though this time the attention comes from non-Hebrews. Barnabas and Paul had a difficult time keeping the people from sacrificing to them, even after explaining that God alone gave them power.

### REFLECTION

Do you know those whose lives are worth emulating and whose words point to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ? How have these words affected your interest in Christ?

### ECCLESIASTES 3

10I have seen the task that God has given people to keep them occupied. 11He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but man cannot discover the work that God has done from beginning to end.

### PSALM 106

20 They exchanged their glory (some translations: *Glory*)

for the image of a grass-eating ox...

34 They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them,

35 but mingled with the nations and adopted their ways.

36 They served their idols, which became a snare to them.

37 They sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons.

38 They shed innocent blood—the blood of their sons and daughters whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;

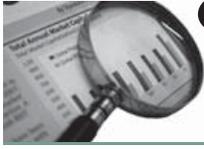
so the land became polluted with blood.

### ACTS 14

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in the form of men!’ 12 And they started to call Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the main speaker. 13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gates. He, with the crowds, intended to offer sacrifice.

### 1 JOHN 5

5 If we accept the testimony of men, God’s testimony is greater, because it is God’s testimony that he has given about His Son. (The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.)...And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Seven: Reasons to Investigate - The Words of Scripture

**I**N MANY OF LIFE'S ARENAS, we discount people's claims about themselves. In a court of law, for instance, we would expect a person to stand up for his or her own side, so we want to hear what other witnesses have to say.

Advertisers also know this to be true. This is why, with all the flash available to them today, many still rely on the affirming words of satisfied customers to tell their story.

No doubt, the words of people about others typically have greater power than the words of people about themselves.

And yet, when we know a man or woman to possess long-proven integrity, to be "honest to a fault," we will listen to what they have to say, even in describing their own conditions and circumstances. This is because they exaggerate neither their own strengths nor the grievous acts committed against them. They have the ability, whether innate or practiced, to be, as far as it is possible, impartial in their judgment of themselves.

It follows, then, that if God is reliable beyond all men and has said particular things about Himself and about His Scriptures, we should investigate those words.

### God on God

Men and women have made many statements about God through time. Some consider Him their best friend, while others say He is more like an enemy. The former testify that He supplies their needs and heals their wounds; the latter say He reveals their sins and piles on a host of expectations. Of course, there is a certain degree of personal perspective involved in either of these assessments of God, and the many others that exist. And we have little way of knowing how well these people know what they are talking about.

But what does God say about Himself? The most common expression in Scripture is this, which God first spoke to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7:

*"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (New International Version)*

Now if God is God, the impartiality toward oneself demonstrated by a person of utter integrity applies most to Him. He balances the fact that He is forgiving with the fact that He is just, punishing sins as they deserve. God shows His anger, but He shows it slowly, long after giving people their opportunity to worship Him.

### God on His works

While God sometimes spoke in an audible voice in the accounts of Scripture, more typically He revealed His words through prophets like Amos, a simple shepherd. And among Amos' declarations was this:

*“Indeed, the Lord God does nothing without revealing His council to His servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:7)*

What this tells us is that the historical accounts of the Bible should be traceable to the prophetic words offered there. When we read the New Testament, what do we find there that was revealed to these Old Testament prophets? If there is significant correlation, we have reason to wonder at the reality of a God with such foresight.

### God on His Word

Finally, if the Bible is regarded as the Word of God, written down by men, it is important to know whether God Himself supports that position. Here is what we find in Scripture:

*“First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

Sure enough, God's own Word states that the Holy Spirit (of God) inspired the prophecies recorded in Scripture. The Scripture seems to invite us to investigate its contents to see if we find it to be as true as God states that it is.

### BIBLE STUDY

*Read Isaiah 46:9-11.*

Here, God speaks of His fulfilling His promises. How trustworthy do you deem Him to be in a passage like this? How much does one's present level of belief play into what one thinks about such a passage?

*Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.*

For what are the Scriptures useful according to this passage? Would this make them useful even to someone who does not really believe in God?

### REFLECTION

To what degree are you comfortable with the idea of prophecy?

### 2 TIMOTHY 3

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

### ISAIAH 46

<sup>9</sup>Remember what happened long ago, for I am God and there is no other; I am God, and no one is like Me.

<sup>10</sup>I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will.

<sup>11</sup>I call a bird of prey from the east, a man for My purpose from the far country. Yes, I have spoken, so I will also bring it about. I have planned it; I will also do it.

### REVELATION 19

<sup>10</sup>Then I fell at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “Don't do that! I am a fellow slave with you and your brothers who have the testimony about Jesus. Worship God, because the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

*Bible teachers often say this: “In the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; in the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.” There is a link between the prophecies of the Old Testament and the accounts of the New Testament, and that link is Jesus Christ.*

*When in Revelation John was told by the angel in his vision that “the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” he was being instructed that prophecy (and Scripture) would not exist if it were not for Jesus and the testimony about Him. We cannot consider the God of the Bible without considering Christ.*



# The Need for Due Diligence

## Lesson Eight: In review—is there reason to continue?

**T**HE TITLE OF THIS STUDY IS “THE NEED FOR DUE DILIGENCE.” Obviously, there was something of an assumption made in that title, an assumption you must now consider in review. You must answer the question, “Have I been given reason enough to continue studying the presentation of the biblical Scriptures as they pertain to God, myself, and eternity?”

In order to answer this question with greater certainty, it may be helpful to review some of the key thoughts of this study.

### Reasons to resist

We began with two lessons that suggested the many reasons that people resist the exploration we have called spiritual due diligence. These included:

#### *The nature of the Church*

Many find the Church to be crusading, hypocritical, and full of infighting.

#### *The nature of God*

Many find God to be too weak to prevent pain, too engaged with more significant matters than their lives, or too judgmental in regards to their personal choices.

#### *The nature of science*

The proven findings of science through the past century and more have discounted accounts like those found in the Bible.

#### *The nature of life*

Circumstances in life—including scheduled events and unscheduled difficulties—demand too much attention to allow time to stop and consider spiritual matters at this stage.

#### *The nature of self*

Over time, each of us grows into our own comfort zones, and a major change in something as large as spiritual emphasis is too much to think about.

*Where would you say you find yourself in these arenas? Which of these concerns has kept you from investigating God in a more complete manner? Are you interested in taking more steps in investigating Him?*

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## Reasons to investigate

We then began to make our way through a series of studies that established reasons it would be important to investigate God, to do our spiritual due diligence. These were:

### *The implications*

With the possibility of eternal existence awaiting us after we die, we would be wise to investigate whether eternity is a reasonable assumption, as well as to consider what we might find in Scripture regarding heaven and hell.

### *Evidence in nature*

While science has been able to offer explanations for many matters, it has not been able to establish a purpose for human beings in the web of life. Humans seem to exist for a different purpose than other creatures, a truth that is borne out in our emotions and thoughts.

### *The resilience of religion throughout history*

Despite numerous attempts to extinguish various religions who worship the God of heaven, often by murderous persecution, people have not been discouraged from returning to the Bible and its teachings.

### *The testimony of people*

The sheer numbers of people who profess to have a relationship with God, as well as the personal differences we see in the lives of friends and family when they live for God, provide us with living stories to consider—is God really working in people's lives?

### *The words of Scripture*

The Bible has been read and revered for many generations. Its words provide us a picture of God, often through what He says about Himself. These words need weighing.

*At this time, which of these reasons would you say is most compelling in encouraging you to seek God more vigorously? Would you say that such an investigation is more important for someone who does not yet believe in God or for someone who is looking to advance their existing faith?*

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## WHAT'S NEXT?

This is the first in a series of studies on spiritual due diligence. The complete set of studies will allow for a thorough investigation of some of a number of spiritual matters, including:

- The nature of God and Christ
- The nature of Scripture
- Death and the afterlife
- What other religions teach in comparison to the Bible
- The invisible realm
- End times

The second study in the series, which you may explore next, is "The Nature of Man." Its goal is to consider the purpose and progression of humanity according to the Bible. Its lessons study the claims of humanism, the fall into sin, the continuing result of sin, the extent of sin in the individual, what sin looks like, how we know we have sinned, and whether there is reasonable hope for those who have sinned.

Our hope throughout these studies is that you will gain a greater and greater sense of who God is and how He promises to interact with you as taught in the Bible. If this occurs, you will have accomplished what many have not—you will have conducted your spiritual due diligence.

What you decide to do with the knowledge you gain is surely a matter between you and God. But we also believe that God has designed us to live in community with other people. Therefore, it is also important that you discuss what you are thinking with others who are also considering the claims of Scripture, be they "seasoned veterans" of Bible study or quite new at the task. If you are not in a study with others at this time and would like to be, call Links Players at 800-90-LINKS and we'll offer some suggestions for groups who might encourage you in your thought and discussion.



## Spiritual Due Diligence

# Leading a group study

**I**T CAN BE DAUNTING TO BE CALLED ON to teach the Word of God. Indeed, many potential leaders have told us that while they are capable of and eager to bring a group together, or to act as host, teaching is an entirely different level, one for which they do not consider themselves prepared.

Others don't feel so much weight when it comes to teaching. They know their Bibles well, or they're naturals when speaking to a crowd.

It is, then, the precise goal of the structure of these Links Players Bible studies to provide a fully operational Bible study for those teachers who need much assistance and yet a format that leaves room for experienced leaders to bring their own learning to the table.

In each lesson, you will find these features:

- An **introduction** providing connections for the reader between what they see and know in their lives and the topic of study at hand. While we are primarily a sports-minded ministry aimed at golfers, our materials are used by many non-golfers. Therefore, these introductions use examples from more common experiences, as well as those tied to athletics.
- A **narrative** progressing through the main ideas of the lesson. Some leaders may choose to read this with the participants verbatim (or nearly so). Others may use it as a general guide for presenting the material.
- A **Bible study**, drawing from particular specific Scripture passages. These passages are included in the light green bar on the right side of each lesson. You may find that you wish to provide the broader context for these passages from your own Bible. You may also wish to look up these passages in other translations to see how the alternate wording can assist in understanding.
- A **reflection**, which challenges participants to make some mental connections and decisions about what they have studied.
- Some of the lessons also include **further thoughts**, which are presented in the dark green bars on the right of the lesson. Again, these are intended only to offer the basic information; your own study and knowledge can help expand these ideas.

In addition to these studies, as your group grows together, you will want to include opportunity for prayer among the participants. Even with a study like this one, which may include a number of participants who are just beginning their investigations of God, Christ, and the Bible, prayer is often an open door for those who are truly seeking God. Offering to pray for personal and family needs is often the best way to begin this practice.

We also strongly encourage leaders to stay in touch with participants throughout the week, simply making themselves available for further questions and discussion.

In the same way, we are available to talk to group leaders about their experiences and to answer questions regarding the studies. You may call us Monday-Friday at 800-90-LINKS.

# What is a Links Player?



## Spiritual Due Diligence

**T**HE LINKS PLAYERS BIBLE STUDIES, including "The Need for Spiritual Due Diligence," are produced by Links Players International, a Christian sports ministry aimed primarily at golfers. The good news is that sometimes in that aim, we miss! That is, there are plenty of non-golfers who have found benefit in the Daily Devotional, Bible studies, and magazines we have published through the years.

There is a reason for this, of course, and that is because truth transcends our human experiences. For instance, while we often hate to admit it, in many ways we cannot improve on how the previous generation lived. Technologically, we may have made some nifty advancements, but in terms of human interaction—and, we believe, humans interacting with God—we don't make any real progress through time.

Therefore, whether or not you are a golfer, we think that the chief principles we teach and learn can apply to you. A Links Player tries, by the power of God's Holy Spirit in them, to live according to the following principles:

**L**OVE GOD AND OTHERS. When asked the greatest commandment of Scripture, Jesus replied, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" He went on to say, "*This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" (Matthew 22:37-39)

**I**NTegrate CHRIST'S REIGN AND INTEGRITY INTO ALL OF LIFE. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowds, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the necessities of life) will be provided for you.*" (Matthew 6:33)

**N**ETWORK FRIENDS TOGETHER IN CHRIST. When the followers of Jesus met together after His ascension into heaven, it was said of them: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers.* (Acts 2:42)

**K**INDLE COMPASSION FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY. Jesus told a parable of the eventual judgment of each man and woman by God. In it, He provided insight into the standards of this judgment: "*The King will answer them, 'I assure you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'*" (Matthew 25:40)

**S**HARE CHRIST. One of the chief of Christ's apostles, Paul, wrote to the church at Corinth this reminder: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."* (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Today, you may find that you have reason to be reconciled to God and to become a Links Player yourself. If so, you need to tell God in prayer: *Heavenly Father, Through Your Son Jesus Christ, I am prepared to offer my life to You. Please take it and all of my sin, and begin to renew me as Your ambassador. Amen.* If you have prayed that prayer, you will also want to share your decision with a trusted friend who knows Christ. This way they can encourage and lead you in your new walk of faith. It will be a challenge worth every step!

