

A two-session adult Bible study
to be used in connection
with the program,

A Light in the Darkness

Prepared by



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A Light in the Darkness

Strength and Courage from God's Promises

A two-lesson adult Bible study to be used in connection with
A Light in the Darkness.

SESSION I

Opening Prayer:

Dear Lord, as I face the hardships and challenges of my life, I need the kind of strength and courage that can only be found in Your Word. Please lead me into that Word, and help me to find there the encouragement that I need. Amen.

Introduction:

The exile of the Volga Germans is a story of courage and fortitude. When we see what these men and women went through, we come face to face with some of the worst suffering the world has to offer. The injustice inflicted on these innocent farmers and tradesmen is a vivid example of the power of sin which exists in our world, and their survival — a beautiful witness to God's love.

The Witness of the Volga Germans:

Begin your session by watching the first 26:30 minutes of the program, "A Light in the Darkness." Listen closely to the remarkable story of their journey through the darkness. Stop the tape when you hear the woman singing and can see the cross in the bottom right hand corner of your screen.

Into God's Word:

1. Why does cruelty exist in our world?
 - Genesis 6:11-12 and Romans 5:12-14 offer an answer.
2. The persecution of the Volga Germans began many years ago, but such cruelty is still a part of our everyday lives. What effects of sin do you see in our world today?
 - Galatians 5:17-21 lists some of them.
3. The Volga Germans are one example of Christians whose faith has carried them through severe hardship. Many times in the video they mention their faith in God as a source of strength and courage. Even in the face of death they were able to see God and His hand of love. But among Christians this faith story is not unique. There are many examples in the

Bible of people being sustained in the face of adversity by their faith in God's promises. An early Christian named St. Paul is a fine example. Read some of the astounding challenges he suffered while serving Jesus Christ:

- Acts 14:19-20 — Paul is stoned in the city of Antioch.
- Acts 16:16-25 — Paul and his helper Silas are thrown in prison.
- Acts 19:23-34 — A mob of people riot in Ephesus.
- Acts 27:13 –28:10 — The amazing account of Paul's shipwreck on the way to Rome.

Paul certainly did not lead an easy life, yet through all these hardships, he was strengthened and encouraged by his faith in his Savior, Jesus Christ. He tells about his victory in 2 Timothy 4:7-8. Through faith, God promises each one of us the same crown that Paul was given.

4. Paul is not the only person who, through faith, was able to survive great hardship. Throughout the history of the Church, many others have been sustained by their faith, in the midst of incredible suffering. What about you? Where do you turn when things get tough?

- We all need to turn to something or someone. When a child is afraid of the dark, he or she might seek out a favorite doll or teddy bear. As we get older, and our fears more complicated, many people turn to alcohol or drugs. Others seek fulfillment and meaning in their job, or in their social status. Tragically, many turn to suicide out of hopelessness and despair.
- But in the promises of God we find hope and peace for our lives. We learn about His concern for us in Matthew 11:28-30, in Psalm 55:22, and in Isaiah 46:4. Our loving God will never leave us or forsake us!

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, our God, we see the effects of sin all around us. We know that what we experience now is not what You intended for our world. We give You thanks for the gracious gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who defeated sin and death for all time. Bring us to faith in Him, so that we might know Your forgiveness and acceptance. Then we can turn to You for comfort and hope in every time of trouble, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SESSION II

Opening Prayer:

Dear God, in Your love we can find hope, and peace, and joy. Please lead us into Your Word, so that we can learn more about that love, and be encouraged by Your concern for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction:

In this second half of the videotape, the Volga Germans are finally allowed to return home. What they find is not what they had left so many years ago. Their homes were destroyed or were being lived in by someone else, and the church had been taken over by the government. Still, they were able to begin church services again in their former church building. Once again, they were able to regularly worship God and receive His gifts through Word and Sacrament. God had sustained them through their trials, and they gather to give Him thanks and to ask for His continued presence in their lives.

The Witness of the Volga Germans:

View the second part of the program, "A Light in the Darkness," beginning at the 27-minute mark. The Volga Germans give a strong testimony about their faith.

Into God's Word:

1. It is tempting to think that God has forgotten you when times are tough. Why do you think this happens?
2. Many people think that being a Christian guarantees that all will go well in life. What does God have to say in Acts 14:21-22?
3. What kinds of suffering and hardship have you experienced in your own life? Was it difficult for you to find the strength and courage to endure these things?

There is no doubt that life is difficult. There are many times when we cannot rely on our own resources to carry us through our trials. That's why the promises of God are so meaningful. His love, His presence in our lives, His power and wisdom are just what we need to support and encourage us. Let's take a look at just a few of those promises:

1. Read 1 John 4:8-10.
 - How does this passage define God?
 - What evidence does it offer to support that definition?

2. What does God promise us in Matthew 28:20?
 - How did the Volga Germans experience the presence of God in their lives?
 - How does God's presence affect the way you face your own struggles?
3. When we are in pain, or facing extreme testing, we often cry out, "Why me, Lord?" We wonder why God would allow such disasters to happen. There is a strong word of encouragement in Romans 8:28.
 - Have you ever known this to be true in your own life?
 - How did things work out for the good, even though you felt only the evil at first?
4. Sometimes our trials are less threatening if we can understand why they are happening to us. What important insight does Hebrews 12:7-11 offer into why bad things happen to us?
5. We all experience good times and bad, times of weeping and times of rejoicing. There is one thing that all of those times have in common. Nowhere is it described more powerfully than in Romans 8:38-39. God's love in Christ Jesus is for you—in every time of your life!

Conclusion:

The story of the Volga Germans is remarkable. But the most remarkable part of that story is its witness to the amazing story of God's love for us. That love is so strong that He gave up His own Son, in order that we might be given the hope of eternal life. Faith in a loving and sustaining God is what supported the Volga Germans throughout their struggle. They held onto that faith in spite of everything that was going on around them. That same faith can support you in times of difficulty and distress. God is with you, to lift you up in every time of trouble.

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, Heavenly Father, You have shown Your love toward us by giving up Your own Son to pay for our sins. Lead our hearts to faith in Him, so that we can know the hope, strength, and encouragement that He offers to us. Even though we in no way deserve it, we ask that You would continue to show us Your love, as we hold onto Your promises to uplift and sustain us in all things. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who promised to be with us always, even to the end of all time. Amen.