**Phase Four**

**Imitators of God**

**Week # 1**

**I Remember You in My Prayers**

### Key Passage

### *Ephesians 1:15-18 (NASB)*

### *For this reason, I too having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance inthe Saints.*

**Introduction**

There are a few aspects of the Christian life that are non-negotiable - prayer is one of them. But, so often prayer is oversimplified with statements such as, “Prayer is talking to God.” But it is so much more than that. It’s multifaceted - like a diamond. Yet quite frankly, there are somethings about prayer that are mysterious, heavenly, supernatural even. Paul understood this. Therefore, his prayers for the saints in Ephesus, as well as the other prison epistles, merit a closer look. They afford us an opportunity to gain a deeper comprehension of this weighty and valuable privilege purchased for us by the Lord Jesus. That being said, the ultimate goal for this lesson is not to learn a new set of rote prayers to recite, nor to study prayer for the sake of information. This is about increasing our prayer lives as we partake in communion with our Lord, thus becoming, as it were, “a house of prayer”.

***Isaiah 56:6-7 (NASB)***

***“Also the foreigners who join themselves to the lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My alter; For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”***

**What is Prayer?**

Every event in our lives can be an occasion to ascertain life transforming truths. That is, if we will avail ourselves of these teachable moments. This was Paul’s mindset. As previously noted, Ephesians was the first of four prison letters. So one might think Paul would be wallowing in self-pity while he languished there on house arrest. (Acts 28:16-31) But not Paul. “A thankful heart, is a happy heart!”, as the adage goes. Why was Paul so happy in spite of his circumstances? He was happy because of the news he received from the churches, from Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae - the church planted by Epaphras - one of Paul’s disciples from Ephesus. Even though he was in Rome, Paul heard about their faith and love, which prompted praise, thanks and prayers on their behalf. Let’s point out several things about prayer from Paul’s example. For one, we see that one facet of prayer is praise and worship. Actually, thanks and praise ushers us into the presence of God.

***Psalm 100:4 (KJV)***

***Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.***

Moreover, David said that God, “inhabits the praises of Israel” (Psalms 22:3) (KJV). In other words, when we worship and praise God, regardless of the situation, the Holy Spirit feels “at home” with us. After all, worshiping God is the main activity in heaven. Certainly worship can be singing songs of praise; that’s what Paul and Silas were doing in Acts 16:22-29. But, as we will see in the following word search, prayer is a form of worship. What? “I though prayer was asking God for things I need” you may say. That’s only a small part of it.

**Intersession**

***Ephesians 6:18-20 (NIV)***

***And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and request. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***

Is there a person in your life that you can count on when you are in need of prayer? Can others count on you? In my estimation, prayer is one the most unselfish acts one person could do for another, because you can’t focus on yourself and someone else at the same time. No one exemplified this more than our Lord as He made intersessions for us, even His enemies, upon the cross. But His prayers did not end while He was on earth. As we learned in the lesson, Abba Father, as our Great High Priest, Jesus is praying for us even now. (Hebrew 7:25; Romans 8:26-27,34) Yes, we are physically apart, while we’re on earth, we are connected to Him through prayer and joined to the very heart of God. (Ephesians 3:14-21)

***2 Timothy 1:2-3 (NASB)***

***To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.***

Now let’s look at Paul’s example from our key passage. Did this prayer include their physical needs? In other places he did. But his greatest concern was for their spiritual needs. So often, though, we are putting the cart before the horse in prayer by seeking temporal things before eternal things. Yet we forget that if we would seek first His kingdom and righteousness, everything else will fall into place. (Matthew 6:33) Since worship is the priority in the kingdom of God, should it not take the preeminence in our lives also?

***1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 (NIV)***

***Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.***

**Eyes of Your Heart**

We have already seen the great love and concern the apostle Paul had for the saints with whom he had invested three years of his life. In Paul’s prison letters, we find the most powerful intercessory prayers we could ever pray on behalf of others. (Colossians 1:7-13) Theses are heavenly prayers. Through them we gain insight; insight that only comes from the Spirit of God, who is our great intercessor. (Romans 8:26-34)

While in Ephesus, Paul wrote the letters to the saints in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 Paul tells his story of a divine encounter which happened sometime between his conversion and first missionary trip. (Acts 9:30-13:1-3) He received visions and revelations from the Lord that left him with a thorn in his flesh. This affliction, it has been suggested, was an eye problem that led him to seek the medical service of a Greek doctor named Luke. While Luke treated Paul’s physical eyes, Paul opened Luke’s spiritual eyes to the revelation of Jesus Christ. It was the “beloved Doctor, as Paul called him, who wrote the gospel of Luke. He was the same one who recorded the events of Paul’s miraculous conversion in the book of Acts.

Just as we have eyes in our head to see physically, we also have eyes in our hearts to see spiritually. Until we are born again, we don’t have spiritual sight because the eyes of our heart are blinded. (2 Cor. 4:2-6; 1:22; 1 Cor. 2:1-16; 1 John 2:20, 27) We receive spiritual sight at the moment of salvation; but only with the aid of the Holy Spirit, can our spiritual eyes adjust to the light of revelation. While we will never fully comprehend all the hidden treasures of Living Word of God – the Lord Jesus, we can grow in grace and knowledge of God through the revelation of the written Word. Growing involves learning and having a teachable heart. Only those whose hearts are receptive to the truth will have spiritual vision.

***John 16:12-15 (NASB)***

***I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore, I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.***

When it comes to prayer, we presuppose that the Lord of creation desires to fellowship with us and furthermore – His willingness to hear us and answer our prayers. And lastly, we believe, as Paul asserted, that Jesus Christ is all powerful and is actively engaged in the details of our lives. Without this kind of confidence, we simply will not approach Him in prayer. (1 John 5:14-15)

***Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)***

***And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

**Communication**

***John 15:7-10 (NASB)***

***If you abide in ME and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to My Fathers Glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in my love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.***

Now in order to forge any lasting relationship there must be open communication which fosters deeper understanding. But when communication breaks down, so does intimacy. And consequently, love grows cold. Sadly, that’s what happened to the saints at Ephesus. Because prayer and the Word of God are the two lifelines that connect us to the Lord, maybe they drifted away from the Lord by neglecting these two areas.

Now what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering it over and applying it to our hearts.

**Topics:**    **Source:** Spiritual Secrets of George Muller.

You see, the Lord speaks to us through His written Word, and we converse with Him through prayer. The Holy Spirit acts as the liaison between the two. Do you remember Joney whose testimony we read in another chapter? Here is a portion of the rest of her story. Just a few years ago, she lost the love of her life - her husband Calvin. They were married for 49 years. She has over 100 letters that he wrote to her while he was away in the U.S. Navy. These letters are treasured tangible expressions of his love for her. God’s word is like that. Until we see Him face to face, the Bible is His love letter to us - His bride. How do I know that Jesus loves me? Well, as the beloved children’s song goes, “The Bible tells me so!” Now let’s suppose you pray, but don’t open God’s Word. How are you going to hear His reply? That’s a one-way conversation and it does not equal communication.

* In the following passage, how does the Lord feel about the prayers of those who refuse to hear His Words? *Proverbs 28:9 (NIV) If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, even their prayers are detestable. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
* Describe a time in your life where you spent time in prayer but neglected to open your Bible. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Song of Songs 2:10-14. Here the king speaks to his beloved. What mental picture can you draw relating to Jesus and you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

If you’ll remember from the lesson, “Signs of Life,” remaining in God’s Word is a prerequisite for answered prayers and an indication of salvation. Although, we may not always see discernible results when we pray, nonetheless we can be sure that God hears us. Besides that, prayer changes us. It brings the Prince of Peace into the chaos, confusions and conflicts of life.

Prayer, it has been said, is practicing the presence of God. What’s the motivation of Prayer? It is communication with God. The result of prayer is an intimate relationship with Him. However, the reward of prayer is God himself! Therefore, if we truly desire to stay connected to God, there are no shortcuts. To cultivate a divine romance with the Lord Jesus, we must join ourselves to Him through prayer and His word. How precious is God’s Word to you? It’s where we seek and find Him, hear His voice and get to know Him – to really know Him. And this was Paul’s request on behalf of the saints -supernatural ability to grow in the knowledge of Jesus. (Hosea 6:3)

**To Know Him**

***Ephesians 1:15-17 (NASB)***

***For this reason, I too having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.***

Paul’s prayers were specific, purposeful and profound. Without God’s gracious response to the specific request, the saints would be left in the dark. His priority in this prayer was for the saints to Know the Lord Jesus Christ. The more we know Him, the more we realize we are merely getting a glimpse of His Glory. I do not believe any of us could take a full revelation of Him. If you have ever gotten even a glimpse of His glory personally through divine revelation, you know it leaves you with an insatiable quest for more. All that we can or will ever know on this earth about the Lord Jesus is revealed within the pages of God’s Holy Word, and the Holy Spirit is the interpreter. All spiritual wisdom, insight and knowledge come from the Living Word of God.

***Colossians 2:1-3 (NASB)***

***For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself,in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

***Colossians 1: 9-10 (NIV)***

***For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.***

**WORD SEARCH: from Strong’s Concordance:**

* **Pray/Prayers**: Greek Strong’s # 4335 pros-euche /4336Proseuchomai; prayer an oratory chapel pray earnestly; prayer. To pray to god, i.e. supplicate; worship: pray earnestly for. To approach; come near; visit; worship; draw near unto. (Eph. 1:6; Luke 11:1-2; 18:1;10; Phil. 1:9; 4:6; James 5:13; 1 Thess. 5:17; Romans 8:26; Colossians 1:9;
* **Pray:** Greek Strong’s #1162 Deesis; petition-prayer; request; supplication (2 Tim. 1:3; Philippians 1:4; 19; 2 Corinthians 8:4)

**Draw near**: pros-Euchmai; to approach; come near; visit; worship; assent to; draw near; go near to. (Hebrew 10:19-22; 11:6)

* **Face/ Presence** Greek Strong’s # 4383 Pros -open: The front, countenance, presence, face. (Acts 3:19, 2:28, 2 Corinthians 4:6)
* **Worship**: Greek Strong’s #4352 Pros-kuneo-(#2965- a dog a hound.) WORSHIP: to kiss like a dog licking his master’s hand; to fawn or crouch; to prostrate oneself in homage do reverence to adore; worship. (John 4:20-24)
* **Continually**: Greek # 4342 Pros-Katereo: earnest toward; persevere, constantly diligently; attend assiduously to all the exercise or to a person; to adhere closely to (As a servitor) attend give self continually, continue with; wait on continually. (Acts 6:4)
* **Seek:** Greek Strong’s #2212 Zeteo: to seek; to worship (GOD); desire; enquire; endeavor; require; seek after. (Luke 11:9; 12:31)
* **Face / Presence** Hebrew Strong’s # 6440 Paneh: (This is only a small portion of the definition.) The face, before, presence, shewbread, (bread of His presence) (Psalms 16:11, 27:8, 45:12, 95:2; Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:14)

You may be wondering why we have all these Greek and Hebrew word searches. Because, when we see why the Holy Spirit uses certain words in certain places, it gives us the proper context and can help us to better apply the passage. For instance, in both Hebrew and Greek, the words face and presence are the same words. Hence, to seek the face of God is to seek to be in His presence.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 45:5-6, 53:12; Ezekiel 18:3-4; Psalm 24:1; 1 Samuel 2:1-6; Luke 23:33-34; Romans 8:9-15,26-34; Hebrews 7:24-25; 9:22-24; 10:19-25; John 17:1-26; James 4:6-10: Colossians 3:15-16

**What Happens When We Pray?**

***Deuteronomy 4:7-8 (NIV)***

***What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?***

A.W. Tozer said, “Prayer,” said A.W. Tozer, “is the greatest power on earth if it is practiced in the true fear of the Lord.” Tozer brings up an important aspect of prayer, it is humility. In this posture we’re as close to God as we can be on this earth. (James 4:8-10) For when we pray, we not only come near to God, but He draws near to us. But, in reality, we are already near God. Remember- the saints are already “seated with Christ in the heavenly!” We could not get much closer than that! So when we pray, we are joining ourselves to the Lord and trafficking in the realm of the spiritual. And when our prayers are based upon God’s written Word and we align our lives to it, He has promised to hears us.

***Psalm 145:18-19 (NIV)***

***The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.***

* Read Psalms 73:28 and 16:11. At the right hand of God, the Father is the Lord Jesus. There is joy in the presence of Jesus. Now reread Isaiah 56:5-6, printed above. What is the connection with prayer and joy in these verses? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* How should the knowledge of our proximity to Christ affect how we pray? (Ephesians 2:5-6) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***John 14:2 (NASB)***

***In My Father’s house is many (dwelling places); if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you.”***

***John 14:12-15 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. "Whatever you ask in my name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be IN YOU.”***

***John 14:21 “He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and disclose Myself to him.” 23 He said “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our (home) with him.”***

There is a prerequisite to the presence and power of God in prayer. The Father and Son never promised to make their earthly dwelling in people who merely *say* God’s word in prayer, but they live with those who *obey* His Word. What’s the purest motivation for obedience? It is love for Him.

**Teach us to Pray**

***Luke 11:1-3***

***It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “LORD, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.” And He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”***

What is inferred in the above passage is that disciple makers are the ones who teach others how to pray – not only in a formal setting but by “bowing the knees together” and praying. This was first modeled by John the Baptist and Jesus. In this kind of relationship, we are privy to some intimate conversations between the Father and His children. We learn to pray by praying with, and for, others. Sure there are times when we prayer by ourselves. After all, we have been commanded to pray without ceasing. However, as pastor, David Lawrence, pointed out in a message on prayer, of the 37 times in scripture where Jesus taught on prayer, 33 of those passages were speaking of corporate prayer. Additionally, he noted that the prayer closet was a private meeting space like the upper-room where a small group of people prayed together. He then took us through the book of Acts and showed us clearly why the gospel was advancing with such great power. Every great movement of God was preceded by a group of people who were devoted to prayer.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Timothy 1:2, 2:1, 4:5, 5:5; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4-7, 22-24; Colossians 1:3, 4:2-3, 12; Ephesians 6:18; Matthew 6:5-6; Acts 1:14, 2:42, 3:1, 6:4, 10:4, 12:5 -12, 16:13-16, 20:36; 1 Peter 3:12; Philippians 1:3-10, 19, 4:6; Romans 10:1, 12:12; James 5:13-18;

**Discussion questions: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Do you have a spiritual parent who loves you and has your back in prayer?
2. Does this person bring you with them before the mercy seat of God in prayer?
3. According to the following passage: who teaches others to pray? (Luke 11:1-13)
4. If you were locked up, would your prayers be all about yourself or focused on others?
5. How much of your prayers are focused on people’s eternal souls?
6. In the following passages, whose prayers are heard by God? (1 John 5:12-15; John 15:7-8,16; Heb. 10:19-23; Eph. 2:12-22; Gal. 6:4; Romans 8:9-15)
7. Do you sometimes feel far away from God when you pray?
8. Read the Isaiah 59:1-2. What blocks our prayers?
9. In the following passages what Priority does Jesus place on prayer? (Isaiah 56:6-7; Luke 19:46; Rev. 5:8-9; Matthew 28:18-19)
10. Have you ever experienced God’s presence manifest to you through prayer?
11. Read the following passages and explain this statement: The prayers that originate in Heaven will be heard on earth. (1 Peter. 3:12; Proverbs 15:8, 29; Isaiah 59:1-3; James 5:16-18; Psalm 145:18)

**WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* Knowledge Strong’s #1922 epignosis; recognition, i.e. full discernment, acknowledgment: - knowledge. (Eph. 1:17; Colossians 1:9-10; 3:10; Phi. 1:9) #1921 egiginosko, to know upon some mark, i.e. recognize; to become fully acquainted with, to acknowledge; have known - well, perceive. (Matthew 7:14, 1 Cor. 13:12)
* Knowledge Strong’s # 1108/1107 genosis; knowing knowledge, science. / genorizo; to make known, to know-certify, declare, make known, give, and to understand. (Colossians 2:3; Eph. 3:3,5,10,19; 1:9; 6:19,21)
* Knowing #1492 eido; To SEE, by implication to KNOW: - be aware, behold, have knowledge, look on, perceive, see, be sure, tell, understand. (Eph.1:18; 6;8-9; Colossians 3: 24; 4:11; 2 Tim. 3:14; 2 Tim 1:12; Phil. 1:19 ,25; 1 John 5:13-15; Matthew 12:25; John 1:47-50)
* Know #1097 ginosko to know allow be aware of, feel, have, known-ledge, perceive, be resolved, can speak, be sure, and understand. (Phil. 3:10; Eph. 3:19; 5;5)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Look at the word translated in Ephesians 1:18 as know. Do you see another word that is translated as see?
2. What is the difference in head knowledge and heart knowledge? The difference between the head and the heart is 18 inches. (1Samuel 16:7)
3. Is saving faith in the head, or in the heart? (Romans 10:9-13)
4. Read: 2 Cor. 4:3-6) When God opened the eyes in your heart to see His glory in the Face of Jesus, what was revealed to you? Be specific.
5. Read: Revelation 1:1, 8, 12-19. What was revealed to John?
6. Read: 1 John 1:1-4. What did John see that He proclaimed?
7. In John 17:3 what did Jesus say was eternal life?

***John 17:3 (NASB)***

### *This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of the insights and personal applications.**

* Phi. 1:3-10; 3:7-11; 1 Cor. 2:9-10,16; 1 John 2:20,27; 2 Peter 1-10,18

**“Let There Be LIGHT”**

***Psalm 119:130 (NASB)***

***The unfolding of Your words gives light;***   
***It gives understanding to the simple.***

How important is your sight and your hearing? Like many gifts, we don’t realize how important they are until they are gone or impaired. True? The Word of God gives spiritual sight and spiritual light. All vision begins when God Speaks “Let there be light!” The Lord Jesus is the Word of God and the Light of the world. The nations will walk by His light, but without the Word of God we are utterly in the dark. If you are vision impaired or near sighted, you can begin to understand this concept. What happens when you put on a pair of glasses? When the Holy Spirit puts God’s glasses on the eyes in our heart, we have spiritual illumination through the lens of the Word of God. Until this happens we cannot see from God’s perspective. What does God see when He looks upon this world He so loved? (John 3:16) He sees people who are perishing without a true knowledge of Him. These individuals are all around us, but without God’s sight, we don’t see them perishing. We need to put on His glasses to see what He sees and love what He loves and be moved and mobilized to action!

***Hosea 4:6 (NIV)***

***My people Perish for lack of knowledge.***

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

### Read: 1 Samuel 3: 1, 7, 19-21; Proverbs 29:16-18

### Is the Word of God rare in your life?

### What do you think God meant when He said about his word: “It is your life!” in Deut. 32:46-47. Compare Hebrew 4:12-14; Matthew 4:4; John 6:63

### Can you describe a time when the Holy Spirit opened your eyes of understanding to a passage that you had never understood?

### In John Newton’s great hymn “Amazing Grace” we find the line: “I once was blind, but now I see.” Explain this concept?

### Read Paul’s conversion experience as recorded by Luke and explain the contrast between physical sight and spiritual sight.

### *Acts 9:1-18 (NASB)*

### *Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” 5And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” 7The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, 12and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” 13But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; 14and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” 15But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” 17So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized.*

### *Footnotes:*

[*Acts 9:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27218) *Later called Paul*

1. [*Acts 9:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27218) *Lit threat*
2. [*Acts 9:7*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27224) *Or sound*
3. [*Acts 9:8*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27225) *Lit was seeing*
4. [*Acts 9:12*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27229) *A few early mss do not contain in a vision*
5. [*Acts 9:13*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27230) *Or holy ones*
6. [*Acts 9:15*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27232) *Or vessel*

#### *Cross references:*

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5. [*Acts 9:2*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27219) *:* [*Gen 14:15; 2 Cor 11:32; Gal 1:17*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen%2014:15,%202Cor%2011:32,%20Gal%201:17&version=NASB)
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9. [*Acts 9:6*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.1:15-16;Joshua%201:8;Acts%209:1-18&version=NASB#en-NASB-27223) *:* [*Acts 9:16*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%209:16&version=NASB)
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**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Hab. 2:1-2; Ps. 19:7-9; Ps. 119:105; 2 Cor. 4:2-6; Mat. 13:10-23; Isaiah 6:1-10, 2 Peter 1:19-21

***Psalm 119:18 (NASB)***

***Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.***

**The Hope of Our Calling**

***Ephesians 1:18 (NASB)***

***I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory ofHis inheritance in the Saints.***

Brother Herb Hodges is man who truly has spiritual vision. His gift to the body of Christ is a vision of Biblical disciple making. He is being used as an instrument of God to open the spiritual eyes of the Church, to our “great omission” of the Lord ‘s “Great Commission” to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:19-20) All over the world people who have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church are being equipped with the tools to obey and follow the Lord in reaching the world. In His Chapter “How Vital is Vision?” Brother Herb states:

“*Human intelligence will always* ***give you your point of view. Only a miracle of illumination will give you God’s point of******view. Therein lies the difference between ‘no Vision,’ without which ‘the people perish,’*** *and ‘vision,’ by means of which the people flourish.”* He gives this formula concerning vision:

*“No vision = total failure; Limited vision = little success; A vision - a plan – action = only a dream; A vision + a plan – action = a haunting dream (guilt); but A vision + a plan + action = a spiritually productive ministry. Note that the test of a person’s vision is in the action that is stimulated by the vision. Without action, both you and your gifts will remain in the category of “potential.” Potential is dormant ability that is never mobilized through vision.*”

***Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)***

***Where there is no vision, the people Perish.***

### This is my paraphrase of Herb Hodges quote: Little Word of God in a life= little light to walk in the darkness of the world; little light = little vision; little vision = little knowledge of God. Without the knowledge of God people perish!

### WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance

* **Hear** Hebrew: -Strong's #8085- shama: carefully hear, be obedient, obey, understands, can tell, witness. Psalm 78:1-8-Isaiah 59:21
* **Hear** Greek: Strong’s #191- akouo: hear, understand
* **Follow** Greek: Strong’s #190 –akolo: -theo-to follow as a disciple, to reach. (Matthew 4:19)
* **Obey** Greek: Strong’s #5219-hupa-akou:to hear under as a subordinate, to listen attentively, to head, conform to a command or authority, hearken, be obedient, to obey. Romans 6:17, 10:16, Philip. 2:12, 1 Peter 1:22

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. What is the first call of every Saint? Mark 3:13-14; Acts 2:39
2. What will we do if we follow Him? Matthew 4:21-22
3. Why did God choose to reveal Himself to Paul?

***Galatians 1:15-16 (NIV)***

***But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood.***

1. Why did God reveal Himself to the apostle John? (1 John1:1-4)
2. Do you know the hope of your calling? (John 10:26-30)
3. Do you have blessed ears and blessed eyes? (Matthew 13:15-17)
4. Why did God give you spiritual sight and hearing? (Luke 8:11-21)
5. Do you see and hear Him calling you to come be part of this glorious plan to receive His inheritance?

***Matthew 13:15-17 (NASB)***

***For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they SCARCELY HEAR, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.’ 16But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.***[Matthew 13:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013:15-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-23555) : [Is 6:10; Ps 119:70; Zech 7:11; Luke 19:42; John 8:43, 44; 2 Tim 4:4; Heb 5:11](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isa%206:10,%20Ps%20119:70,%20Zech%207:11,%20Luke%2019:42,%20John%208:43-John%208:44,%202Tim%204:4,%20Heb%205:11&version=NASB)

[Matthew 13:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013:15-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-23556) : [Matt 13:16-17: *Luke 10:23, 24*; Matt 16:17; John 20:29](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2010:23-Luke%2010:24,%20Matt%2016:17,%20John%2020:29&version=NASB)

1. [Matthew 13:17](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013:15-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-23557) : [John 8:56; Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 1:10-12](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%208:56,%20Heb%2011:13,%201Pet%201:10-1Pet%201:12&version=NASB)

**Think On These Things**

**MEMORY VERSES**

**The Doctrine of**

**Storms, Sorrows and Suffering**

**Key Passage**

**2 Corinthians 6:4-10 (NET)**

***But as God’s servants, we have commended ourselves in every way, with great endurance, in persecutions, in difficulties, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in troubles, in sleepless nights, in hunger, by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by benevolence, by the Holy Spirit, by genuine love, by truthful teaching, by the power of God, with weapons of righteousness both for the right hand and for the left, through glory and dishonor, through slander and praise; regarded as impostors, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well-known; as dying and yet – see! – we continue to live; as those who are scourged and yet not executed; as sorrowful, but always rejoicing, as poor, but making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.***

**Introduction**

In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon so aptly described the rhythms of life when he said, “There is a season for everything.” Along with blessings come trials, and joy is often intermingled with deep sorrow. “Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief.” (Proverbs 14:13) The good, the bad and the ugly are all fragments that make up the mosaics of our lives. Yet, even though we know this in our head, we resist the seasons of trials when they come; but come they will. It is just part of the human experience. Moses must have been in one of “these seasons” himself when he wrote this prayer, “The length of our days is seventy years -- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.” (Psalms 90:10) (NIV) So there you have it – the sum total of our earthly existence.

Now that you know the heavy theme we will be tackling, you may be saying, “I think I might just skip this lesson and go do some laundry!” Now granted, suffering may not be anyone’s favorite topic, but it is however, everyone’s reality. I hope you will see this through to the end because this could possibly be the most personally applicable lesson yet. We are going to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about the Christian life. Our aim of this lesson is to offer encouragement and help us remember that pure joy awaits us on the other side of suffering. To the extent that we grasp this, will greatly affect how we weather the inevitable storms of this life.

**The Cost of Discipleship**

**Luke 9:22-26 (NET)**

***… “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders,chief priests, and experts in the law,and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Thenhe said to them all,*** ***“If anyone wants to become my follower, he must denyhimself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it benefit a personif he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamedof me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that personwhen he comes in his glory and in the gloryof the Father and of the holy angels.***

Large crowds were flocking to Him. They wanted to be healed. They wanted to be fed. They wanted to see what miracles He would perform next. They thought the Messiah would come to set up His kingdom on earth and set them free from the tyranny of Rome. In other words, He came to fix all their problems and make them healthy, wealthy and happy. But, little did they know, He had an altogether different agenda. Holding nothing back, He told them all exactly *why* He came. He said, and I will paraphrase here, I came to bear your grief and carry your sorrows -- I am going to suffer persecution, rejection and death. Simply put – I came to this earth to suffer and die. I am going to the cross. Now, after He clarified where He was headed, He turned to them and basically said, who wants to go with me? What would you have done if you were in that crowd? It’s a tough question. On a number of occasions, He reiterated His mission statement, but they were slow to get it. They didn’t want to get it; it was not what they wanted to hear. I can relate.

It would appear that Jesus was trying to dissuade people from following Him, doesn’t it? In truth, He was just letting them know the cost of discipleship. To be His disciple requires death -- death to sin, self-rule and love for the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, apparently didn’t entertain any illusions about what Jesus meant. He wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” As someone has fitly put it, “The ‘tongue’ in his mouth, matched up with the ‘tongue’ in his shoes.” In other words, his talk matched up with his walk. He practiced what he preached. He followed Christ, and was executed for his faith. (1 Corinthians 15:20; John 11:25)

By the way, the name Christian means a follower of Christ. And likewise, the Greek word for follow means to be in the same way with or to follow as a disciple. To the mind of a lost person, it defies commonsense to follow a leader whose mission is to suffer and die! The crowds chose comfort instead of Christ. (John 6:60-69; Galatians 2:20) Indeed the road is *narrow* and only a *few* follow Him. Are you one of the few?

**Hebrews 2:10 (NET)**

***For it was fitting for him, for whom and through whom all things exist,in bringing many sons to glory, to make the pioneer******1 of their salvation perfect through sufferings.***

In Webster’s Dictionary, one definition for the word *passion* is “The suffering of Christ on the cross.” This is where Mel Gibson got the title for his movie The Passion. The movie was quite realistic to be sure. However, there is no way anyone could adequately portray the magnitude of suffering Jesus endured. In fact, the word excruciating is derived from the Latin word crux or cross. God showed the prophet Isaiah the real “passion of the Christ” and the excruciating pain of a Suffering Servant 750 years before Jesus came to earth. Isaiah called Jesus “A Man of Sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:1-12) It bears noting that Isaiah was rejected and suffered a martyr’s death by being sawed in half. (Isaiah 6:1-13) But no one, not Isaiah, the disciples, or anyone else has ever experienced more sorrow and suffering than the Lord Jesus. And lest we forget, as He walked this sin cursed earth, He was as much man, as He was God. Thus, Jesus has become our faithful and merciful High Priest because He is intimately acquainted with our sufferings. (1 Peter 4:1-2; Hebrews 2:10-17, 4:15-16)

So, how does Jesus’ teaching match up with what is often peddled today as the gospel? Some have termed these “easy believe-ism,” or “prosperity gospels.” You know, the ones that by-pass the cross of Christ and only preach of crowns without cost. This gospel bears no resemblance to the gospel that Jesus and Paul preached. Quite the contrary. How do you explain this concept to our brothers and sisters who have lost their jobs, homes and loved ones?

Furthermore, the fires of persecution are aflame all over this world today. I highly recommend the book and documentary by Rik Ripken titled The Insanity of God. It’s a real wake-up call to the church. Yet, most of us are clueless to the plight of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are even now being martyred for the gospel and the Word of God. They are being starved, imprisoned, raped and beheaded for their faith. One, of many, recent examples was the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians who refused to deny Christ. Their executioners called them “people of the cross.” Ask their grief-stricken mothers and widows if this world is really their best life? But you see, that is not the end of their story. Did you know that these martyred saints are in the Bible? The names witness and martyr is the same word in Greek. The word is martus; see Acts 1:8, 22:20; Revelation 17:6.

* Take a moment to read 1 Corinthians 15:25-27; Revelation 6:9-11, 14:13, 20:4 and 21:1-9. What do these passages have to say about them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

There are two credible ministries that help the universal persecuted church: Voice of the Martyrs and Open Door Ministries. My family supports them both. When I read about my brothers and sisters who are suffering, and I begin to pray for them, it gets my eyes off of myself. My problems seem trite. (This is Biblical, read Isaiah chapter 58).

Now, on the other hand, for the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. In reality for them, living in this sin cursed world is truly all the heaven they will ever experience. Satan gives the best at first and saves the worst for last. Yet, for the saints, our temporary residence in this world is all the hell we are ever going to know. Not only has our Lord saved the best for last, but our best life will last forever! Our eternal hope and future home is a place where there is no sin, no suffering, no death, no crying or pain. The more we suffer here, the more we long to go home. For when we have been saved from this wicked and perverse generation, we become increasingly uncomfortable with the darkness that is so prevalent in the here and now.

**DIGGING DEEPER Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Luke 9:18-22, 47-59, 16:9-13, 17:33, 18:28-30; 14:25-34; John 6:60-66; Matthew 8:19-20, 10:16-39, 16:13-26, 19:29; John 15:18-21, 16:1-4; 1 John 4:1-6; Mark 8:31-34, 10:24-31, 38-39; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 2 Corinthians 1:5-11, 5:21; Hebrew 12:1-13, 13:12-14; James 1:2-4; Revelation 21:1-9
* From the above list of passages, make a list of everything you find about the cost of being a true follower of Christ. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Now answer this question: Did you find any place in these passages that exempt anyone who is part of the body of Christ from suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Did you find two different categories of followers? If not, what is inferred here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + In John 16:33, Jesus makes two promises. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Jesus’ sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12. Make a list of the kinds of people Jesus called “Blessed.” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* The apostle Peter wrote 1st and 2nd Peter to the churches who were suffering horrific persecution. Read through 1 Peter chapters 1-5. From this text, what are some truths we can apply to our situations when we are suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and answer the following questions. Who are the great crowd of witnesses? What was the joy set before Jesus that gave Him endurance in suffering? Other than the cross, what else did He endure so that we will not grow weary and lose heart?

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**Paul’s Suffering**

**Acts 9:15-16 (NET)**

***But the Lord said to him, “Go, because this man is my chosen instrumentto carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”***

From the moment of Paul’s conversion, he was enrolled in the school of suffering. Right off the bat, Jesus called Paul to a life of suffering for the sake of the gospel. In fact, you might even say, he had earned his Ph.D. in the subject. Of course, we must not forget, he had formally been an instrument of Satan inflicting great suffering on the church. What goes around, they say, comes around. In our key passage is a brief synopsis of what it had cost him thus far to follow the Lord. To simply say his life was hard would be a colossal understatement!

Then, while in Ephesus, Paul recounts a very strange, almost unspeakable, encounter he had when he was “caught up to paradise.” Maybe this is when the divine mysteries were revealed to him. However, when a mortal man is allowed such an awe-inspiring privilege, you can be assured it will come at a cost. For Paul, it was a humbling thorn in his flesh. Some say it was his sight. This makes since when you think of it. This was the second time his human eyes were allowed to see a heavenly vision. The first was when he was blinded by the Glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus (Acts 89:1-19). Here is the point – suffering humbles us. It reminds us of our insignificance and mortality.

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NET)**

***Even because of the extraordinary character of the revelations. Therefore,so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to troubleme – so that I would not become arrogant. I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. But he said to me, “My grace is enoughfor you, for mypower is made perfectin weakness.” So then, I will boast most gladlyabout my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside inme. Therefore, I am content withweaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficultiesfor the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.***

At the end of his three years with the saints at Ephesus, the Holy Spirt reminded Paul that imprisonment and afflictions were coming at every turn. Nevertheless, he could not be detoured because he was resolved to finish the race. Looking forward to the joy to come when he reached the finish line surely must have helped him to keep his eyes on the prize (Hebrew 12:1-2; Philippians 3:12-14).

**Acts 20:22-24 (NET)**

***And now,compelledby the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem*** ***without knowing what will happen to me there, exceptthat the Holy Spirit warnsme in town after townthatimprisonmentand persecutionsare waiting for me. But I do not consider my lifeworth anythingto myself, so thatI may finish my taskand the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good newsof God’s grace.***

It was approximately five or six years later, while he was on house arrest in Rome, that Paul wrote his letters to the beloved saints in Ephesus and to the church at Philippi. Don’t forget he was incarcerated. (Ephesians 3:13, 4:1) But, Paul gladly accepted his lot. In fact, he rejoiced to “share in Christ’s suffering.” Instead of these things making him bitter, they made him more like Jesus. You see, Paul discovered a secret. With every trial, he came to know Jesus more and gained an even deeper intimacy with his Lord.

**Philippians 3:7-11 (NET)**

***But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things – indeed, I regard them as dung! – that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness– a righteousness from God that is in factbased on Christ’sfaithfulness. My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*** *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ**and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Through a prophet named Agabus, the Lord showed Paul how his earthly journey was going to end, and it wasn’t in a blaze of glory -- at least not by man’s estimation (Acts 21:11). As Paul drew near the finish line, his circumstances worsened considerably. At this time, his spiritual son Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Meanwhile, the evil and barbaric emperor Nero had Paul chained like an animal in a cold damp cell in Rome. Only Luke was with him at the end. It is interesting that as Paul was close to the end of his life, he wanted three things: his cloak, his parchments (his Bible) and lastly he wanted to see his dear son Timothy. Last words are always the most important. So what was on Paul’s mind? He wants Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel. It is traditionally believed that Paul was beheaded by Nero around May or June of 68 A.D., and on June the ninth Nero committed suicide. Paul’s suffering came to an end; his killer’s eternal torment had just commenced.

**Acts 14:21-22 (NET)**

***After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium,*** ***and to Antioch. They strengthenedthe souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continuein the faith, saying, “We must enter the kingdomof God through many persecutions.”***

There are three things we can learn from observing Paul’s life. The first is just that life, even the Christian life, is full of difficulties. The second thing is that the gospel must be preached regardless of the cost. And finally, Jesus is the prize that awaits those who endure until the end, and that is all that really matters. The question that begs to be asked is this: Is it really worth it? This is what Paul told the Corinthians, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). If we were to ask Paul that question, I believe he would answer unequivocally -- yes! Jesus was worth it all!

**2 Timothy 3:10-12 (NET)**

***You, however,have followed my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, as well as the persecutions and sufferingsthat happened to me in Antioch, in Iconium, and in Lystra. I endured these persecutions and the Lord delivered me from them all. Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.***

**WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* Afflictions/Trouble or Tribulation: Strong’s #2346 in Greek is tibia-: *to crowd, afflict, suffer tribulation.* It comes from Strong’s #2347 in Greek – thlipsis: *Pressure, affliction, anguish, burden, persecution, tribulation, trouble, suffering, afflictions.*
* Suffer*:* Strong’s #3958 in Greek is pascho: - *to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful) feel, passion, suffer, vex.* (Luke 9:22, 17:25; 1 Corinthians 12:26)
* Suffer: Strong’s # 4841 in Greek is sumpascho: - *to experience pain jointly or of the same kind (specifically persecution; to “sympathize”) suffer with.* (Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 12:26)

**DIGGING DEEPER Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 2:42, 9:15-16, 14:19-22, 19:23-41, 20:22-27; Acts 21:11; 1Timothy 1:3,10, 4:6,13, 6:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:1-26, 3:10, 4:2-4; Titus 1:9; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11; Philippians 1:12-14
* Read Philippians 2:20-22. How did Paul describe Timothy? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* After reading the following passages, state why Paul endured all this suffering. Ephesians 3:13; Romans 1:16-18; 2 Timothy 2:3-12 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* In light of the reality that everyone but Luke abandoned Paul, now read about Onesiphorus. Acts 19; 2 Timothy 1:15-18, 2 Timothy 4:19 What can we learn from Onesiphorus that we should emulate? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Look at the above Word Search and find the Greek word that means to sympathize or suffer with (1 Corinthians 12:26). When was the last time you suffered with someone this way? Has anyone ever suffered with you?
* Why is it so important to have close spiritual relationships in our life for times like these?

**Faith Tested by Fire**

**1 Peter 1:3-9 (NET)**

***Blessed bethe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you,***  ***who by God’s power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.***  ***This brings you great joy, although you may have to sufferfor a short time in various trials. Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold – gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away– and will bring praiseand glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Youhave not seen him, but you love him. Youdo not see him now but you believe in him, and so you rejoice*** ***with an indescribable and gloriousjoy, because you are attaining the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls.***

You know, it’s been said that we are either coming out of a storm, we are in one now or one is just over the horizon. Life’s storms come in a variety of forms. They can manifest as illness, deaths, broken relationships, loss of jobs or income, rebellious children or even natural disasters. And when they hit, they will expose the kind of foundation our lives are built upon. They test our faith. Anything or anyone we trust in other than the Lord Jesus Christ will prove to be sinking sand, and every life built on sinking sand will ultimately collapse. Have you noticed how quickly our faith falters when adversity strikes? What is more, our lack of faith is amplified during these events.

Now, storms usually hit us unexpectedly, and they seem to come at the most inconvenient times. Have you noticed how they wreck all of our “well made plans” bringing life suddenly to a screeching halt? And sometimes, just when you think it cannot possibly get worse -- it does. On some level, we have all experienced this. Still other events are so catastrophic, that they seem to split our lives in two. You might even characterize these kinds of traumas in terms of “before this or after that.” In addition to a few of my own painful experiences, I have observed this phenomenon up close and personally in the lives of others. My dear friend Cathy is one of them.

**Here is Cathy’s Story:**

I know you have heard about “those people.” You know the ones who have had their lives pretty much destroyed by a series of devastating losses. If you are like I was, you say, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” Then perhaps, if you are a person with a lot of empathy, you avert your gaze. To look at “those people” for too long is too painful. And what can you do for them? That is what I used to do. Then I became one of those people.

There are some days when it is easier to talk about these things than others: my faith is strong and my outlook is positive. Then there are the other days when my outlook is not so good, and I want to return to the pity party that the devil would love to keep me mired in. But, I cannot do that. So, for what it is worth, here is my story. If you are a person suffering a loss or if you are experiencing depression, I hope there is something here that will help in some way.

It all began one afternoon in March of 2014. It took one year and forty days to lose just about everything I had including my best friend, my husband, Ronald. I got a call from Ronald’s doctor saying that the bladder cancer that they thought was under control had, in fact, gone into several of his vertebrae. I knew what meant. It was the most painful moment I can ever remember. Ronald suffered for many months and died 10 days before Christmas. That was the saddest day of my life and a true breaking point.

You would think I could have spent some time mourning my loss, but I was not afforded that luxury. Ronald and I had run a small business for years, and it functionally died with him. So, I had no income; I had no children; I had no siblings; I had no parents; I had no savings. What I did have was problems: large ones and small ones. Sixteen days before Ronald died, I had visited the emergency room and had been told I had an un-ruptured brain aneurysm. They said that it needed to be taken care of…soon. So, shortly after Ronald passed away, I went to a neurosurgeon who recommended an experimental device be placed in my brain. But how to do that? I had all these pets and no one to take care of them. I could not even figure out how I would get back and forth from the hospital.

But the coup de grace came three days before the brain procedure was to occur. I got sick – really sick and I stayed sick for 40 days and 40 nights. I know…I counted. My white count was way too low, and my red count was way too high. I was too dizzy and weak to stand in the shower for fear that I would fall. I was overwhelmed with grief. And, as soon as my life situation began to dawn on me there were other emotions too: fear, self-pity, a sense of abandonment and anger. As the problems mounted, I began to wonder just what was going on. I felt a strange (well, maybe not so strange) kinship to Job. I seriously began to wonder if the devil had put me in his crosshairs for some unknown reason. And I wondered, “Just where is God. Does He not love me?” “I love God,” I thought. “I really do. What has happened?”

One afternoon, I got myself up to feed some stray cats at my back door. I did something I almost never do. I closed the door behind me. I knew immediately I had locked myself out. It was still in the twenties in Memphis, and all I had on was my flannel pajamas and my fuzzy house shoes. Now what. I began to walk the street to see if I could find a neighbor at home. No one was. I muttered to myself as I walked, “Really, God, really. Is it going to be like this- EVERY SINGLE DAY?” Finally, one neighbor came home, and they let me in to call a locksmith. He came, opened my door and took my last fifty dollars.

“Lord, please do something,” I prayed out loud. And, of course He did. Not what I expected, maybe, but what I needed. There it was -- an email. My friend, Ginny, had sent me a chapter that she had written, and she wanted me to read it over. And tonight it *was* just what I needed. I curled up on my gray couch with one of my remaining pets at my feet, and I read. And I was comforted. I loved editing, and the words always brought me great joy. Turning to my Bible, I read 2 Corinthians, chapter 1. It seemed written just for me. I smiled and curled up and drifted peacefully off to sleep. Praise our wonderful Lord. Jesus did hear me.

It was the coldest winter I ever remember, and the weather mirrored my life. And then, in the midst of my illness, I had my brain procedure. The Lord, in His mercy, supplied some Christian women to come help me and take care of my dogs. Eventually, I was able to get up and move about again. I knew I had to move; I had no options left. I had an elderly aunt who lived alone, and she graciously offered to let me live with her. But she lived 500 miles away. So, I was forced to sell everything I owned because I had no place to keep it, and I needed the money anyway. Yet, I could not even begin to think through the process. Once again, God supplied a group of lovely Christian ladies who surrounded me with love, and they did what I could not do for myself. In just a few days’ time, they helped me sort through a lifetime of memorabilia and helped me sell off my possessions. And off I went, with an envelope full of the money they gotten from the sales, a few boxes of prized possessions and my one remaining dog. In one short year, I learned just how quick it can all be taken away. But through it all, I still had Jesus. He had been with me all the way.

So there is the story. Now is the question: how did my trials affect my spiritual life, and how did my spiritual life guide me through my trials? When Ronald was sick I became a tower of strength. I had to be strong. Perhaps it was sheer adrenaline. I suppose that is true in part, but my real strength came from Jesus. I could feel his presence with me as I walked hospital floors at night. Because the Lord knew suffering, He was my example and my partner in these trials. And, of course, the prayers of my Christian friends sustained me.

I would like to share a few lessons learned. The first is the will to have faith. I was inundated by negative emotions. And those emotions were rational. I had a reason to feel bad. But do not let your emotions get between you and God. No matter how angry, depressed and alone you feel, call out to HIM. Even if all the faith you can muster is as small as a mustard seed, God will take it, grow it, and hope can spring forth from it! At my lowest point, that mustard seed was about all I had. But I made a choice to believe God. Yes, I complained, cried and wallowed in self-pity at times. I felt guilty about that. But do not let that guilt keep you from God.

The second point is that you should always put yourself “in the way” of God. I cannot tell you how many nights the scriptures sustained and comforted me. Yes, that is where I found Him, right in those ancient texts. At the time though, I didn’t even realize, God’s Word was saving my life. Do the same for yourself. No matter what your current life situation, begin a regular, daily meeting place with the Lord. When hard times come, this habit will be an invaluable help.

The third point is the importance of establishing true relationships with mature Christian believers. There were countless instances of help and support that came from some trusted Christian friends. After I moved to my new home town, I had a conversation with a well-connected, professional woman. I told her about my “estate sale” and how a group of people had worked so hard to help me sell my possessions and clean up my house. Their efforts on my behalf were truly amazing and heartwarming. One of my memories of that day was of one of the women, red faced from the heat (yes, Memphis finally warmed up) and dusty, rushing about my house as though it were her life, not mine, that depended upon it. I told her about Joney, a widow herself, who had been busy caring for her dying brother with cancer, yet took the time to come and help me. And then there was Karen and her young son up in my dusty, hot attic, and Fred packing my computers and doing heavy lifting. I told her about Robin with health problems of her own, helping me.

This woman looked at me for a long moment and then said resignedly, “None of my friends would ever have done that for me.” I paused for a moment and thought to myself, “What would she say if she knew that half of those people barely knew me.” You see, these people were the hands and feet of Jesus. Christian friends are a lifeline when we are sinking in sorrows.

Finally, I want to say that as I look back, I can see that as bad as things felt at the time, the Lord was working to take care of my every need. I would not have survived without Him. At every point in my long journey, there was help. Yes, a brain aneurysm was discovered a few days before my husband’s death. But then, it was discovered before it did any damage. And, it just so happened that I lived in a city where there were great neurosurgeons. And, it just so happened that those doctors were working on a clinical trial for a narrow class of aneurysms -- ones just like mine.

But the most important blessing of all was how the Lord brought my husband to salvation only three weeks before He took him home to heaven. God used Pastor David Lawrence who kindly and persistently visited my husband and talked to him about Jesus. AND, HE JUST KEPT COMING BACK. Thank you Brother David. Thank you Lord. There were many, many blessings. Too many to count. In fact, I no longer look at my life simply as a sad story of loss, but as a story of miracles too. My precious husband is alive, more alive now than I am. One day, I will see him again. The Lord Jesus is my treasure, and the best is yet to come.

I have never known another person like Cathy. I have watched her walk, sometimes crawl her way through all of this, and I am amazed. She has been with me through some of my storms too.

There are a few more recent examples in the lives of other sisters in Christ. One is Kellee. Despite our fervent prayers for his healing, her husband, only 48 years old, suddenly died and went home to be with Jesus. She is still reeling from the shock and numb with pain and anger -- one of the stages of grief. It’s hard to think or see clearly when your eyes are swollen from crying. And for a woman who is fairly new in the faith, this is a hard pill to swallow. Yet, there is another kind of death that is equally as difficult to take. When your husband, after more than a decade together, decides he wants a divorce. Such is the case for another sister whose also part of our disciple group. And when one of us is hurt -- all of us hurt. That’s just the way it is when you form true spiritual relationships.

Little doubt, someone reading this can relate to these women. If so, then this lesson offers some relevant and practical truths that are going to minister comfort and hope to you. Now on the other hand, if you are presently experiencing a sabbatical from the storms, sorrows and suffering of life, you may want to keep this lesson handy because you’re going to need it sooner or later.

**The Rude Awakening**

**Philippians 1:29-30 (NET)**

***For it has been granted to younot only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, since you are encountering*** ***the same conflict that you saw me face and now hear that I am facing.***

It’s confession time. Maybe it was naivety, but when I was a babe in Christ, I got the notion that this world should be like heaven and that being a Christian would somehow insulate me from suffering. Well, I did not get this idyllic doctrine from the Bible -- that’s for sure. No one gets a pass from heartaches, pains, sufferings and sorrows. I guess a chasm exists between the knowledge of such things and reality. It is kind of like the idea of getting married and living happily ever after. (We will return to that subject in another lesson).

Furthermore, I assumed that Jesus came into my life to make me happy; I did not know His ultimate goal for my life was not just happiness, but holiness. Yet, without being discipled, how was I supposed to know that I was appointed not only to believe on Jesus, but also to suffer with Him (Romans 8:17)? Suffice it to say, now I know better! Experience, so they say, is the best teacher. And while my trials, troubles and sufferings don’t even come close to the Lord Jesus’, Paul’s, or theses others, they are, nonetheless, personal and painful to me. (As I am sure yours are to you).

It is easier to write a lesson on life’s storms when you are not smack-dab in the middle of one of these painful seasons. For this reason, it has been a real challenge to find a good time to write, what is in my opinion, a crucial doctrine in the life of a Christian.

Now, at this very moment, my husband and I are having a reprieve from work and the cares of the world. We are at the beach, one of my favorite places on earth, and we just happen to be celebrating 30 years of marriage. It is early in the morning, and Art is asleep. I am outside on the patio of our rented condominium with my Bible open and coffee in hand. I am all alone with my Lord Jesus; it just doesn’t get much better than that! It is a rainy day, and the usually calm glassy ocean is alive with white caps. In the near distance, thunder follows an incredible display of lighting. Instead of slowly lapping on the shore, the waves are crashing in one right after the other, obscuring the usual parade of dolphins that swim along the gulf coast. I am relatively confident that this storm will soon pass, and the sun will come out. I will have the joy of walking along the abandoned beach and talking to the Lord about whatever is on my mind at the moment. For now, all is calm, and I am so far removed from some of the greatest storms and sorrows of my life that I can speak of them without being hurt all over again.

Sometimes it is helpful to look back just long enough to learn the lessons from the past and see the faithfulness of God. But it is notgood to live there. For when we camp-out in the past, grief can make us become self-centered, and our hurts can become idols. The Lord gave me the following verses that have helped move me beyond grief and lift my head to look up from the ashes. When my gaze is fixed on Jesus, He keeps me from sinking further into despair. He gives me the one thing that none of us can live without: hope. That hope is Jesus; He is the health of my countenance and the lifter of my head. Besides that, our hope is not in the past; it is before us.

**Isaiah 43:18-19 (NET)**

***“Don’t remember these earlier events; don’t recall these former events. “Look, I am about to do something new. Now it begins to happen! Do you not recognizeit? Yes, I will make a road in the desert and pathsin the wilderness.***

**Philippians 3:12-14 (NET)**

***Not that I have already attained this – that is, I have not already been perfected – but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of Godin Christ Jesus.***

**Psalm 30:11 (NET)**

***Then you turned my lament into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and covered me with joy.***

**DIGGING DEEPER Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Peter 1:3-16; Psalm 39:7, 42:5, 43:5; Roman 15:13; James 1:2, 2:4-12

As I share some personal examples, I wish to be as transparent as possible, but at the same time, I must also be mindful of others. I apologize if I don’t give specifics. My goal, however, is to be real. I cannot present to you a picture perfect example of how to suffer. But, however, I can share with you a few coping mechanisms and hard won lessons I learned while suffering through some trials. You will be happy to know; I won’t be sharing them all! These are the “classrooms,” if you will, where I learned the doctrine of storms, sorrows and suffering.

The day started out like any other. I got up, made coffee, did a little housework and sat down at my dining room table to study a lesson I was to teach my Sunday school class. The picture on the Sunday school book was a man hanging upside down, and the name of the lesson was “When life suddenly turns upside down.” But then, without warning, it hit me. The letters were moving on the page and so was the upside-down man. I struggled to focus. Then the next indication that something was not right was nausea. I stood up to walk to the bathroom. It was like I was on a rocking boat, and I clung to the wall to stay upright. I called Art at work and asked him to please come home to help me. When he got there, I could not even stand. We went straight to the doctor who diagnosed me with vertigo. The medicine he gave me did not help. And then came the high fever. To make a long story short, I ended up in the hospital for several days. After much testing, we found out it was an infection in the middle of my brain where the brainstem connects to the inner ear. Thankfully, within a month the infection was gone, and I was back upright. Life was normal again, at least for the time being. Thankfully, this health crisis was short lived. And all things considered, this was an easy trial.

***Deuteronomy 33:27***

***“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”***

When my children were little and storms threatened, I would make them sleep downstairs with me. If the storm was bad enough, we would grab these essentials: flashlights, pillows and Bible, and then we would hunker down in the closet. A few years back we had a rash of tornados that left a path of destruction over several southern states. My husband was seven hours away from home when he called to ask for help to navigate through the tornadoes. Simultaneously, the news reporters were telling us, “Take cover NOW!” The sky had become as black as midnight, and a tornado was coming straight for our small community.

My sons were eighteen and twenty at the time. And would you believe -- they would not get into the closet with me! At this point, none of us knew how destructive this storm was, or how many lives were being lost. This “mother hen” was having a fit of fear and frustration. How dare my grown babies refuse to get under my “wings of protection” in the closet! You see, as a mom, not only do I not want to suffer, I want to keep my children from suffering. But in reality, it is just one in the same because our hearts are so bound to them. I might add, as a recovering control freak -- they have always thought I over react. With phone in hand, I was telling Art about the tornado about to hit us, when I heard a terrifying sound on the other end of the line. A drunk driver hit my husband’s car, I could hear the sound of the impact and squealing tires. (My blood pressure goes up just remembering that night). As you might imagine, I forgot all about the tornado. I think I stopped breathing until Art’s car came to a stop, and I heard he was all right. Praise the Lord, he was not hurt. The tornado missed our house, and only the Lord knows if that wreck kept Art out of the path of a deadly tornado. We dodged these bullets.

So our family survived these storms, but then, only two months later, came the record breaking floods. When the waters overflowed the banks of the Mississippi River, the flood waters reached our small town just north of Memphis. Once again, I needed to hear from God, so I got out my Bible. When I am paralyzed with fear, so often I find my voice in the Psalms. There is hardly a human emotion that is not expressed there. The psalms are packed full of powerful prayers to cry out to the Lord in every circumstance. The following are a few examples.

**Psalms 56:3-4 (NET)**

***When*** ***I am afraid, I trust in you. In God – I boast in his promise–in God I trust, I am not afraid. What can mere mendo to me?***

**Psalms 29:1-11 (NET)**

***Acknowledge the Lord, you heavenly beings, acknowledge the Lord’s majesty and power! Acknowledge the majesty of the Lord’s reputation! Worship the Lord in holy attire! The Lord’s shout is heard over the water; the majestic God thunders, the Lord appears over the surging water. The Lord’s shout is powerful; the Lord’s shout is majestic. The Lord’s shout breaksthe cedars; the Lord shattersthe cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and Sir ionlike a young ox. The Lord’s shout strikeswith flaming fire. The Lord’s shout shakesthe wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The Lord’s shout bendsthe large trees and stripsthe leaves from the forests. Everyone in his temple says, “Majestic!” The Lord sits enthroned over the engulfing waters, the Lord sits enthroned*** ***as the eternal king. The Lord giveshis people strength; the Lord grants his people security.***

**Psalm 46:1-10 (NET)**

***God is our strong refuge; he is truly our helper in times of trouble. For this reason, we do not fearwhen the earth shakes, and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, when its wavescrashand foam, and the mountains shakebefore the surging sea. (Selah) The river’s channels bring joy to the city of God, the special, holy dwelling place ofthe sovereign One. God lives within it; it cannot be moved. God rescues itat the break of dawn. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms are overthrown.Godgives a shout, the earth dissolves. The Lord who commands armies is on our side! The God of Jacobis our protector! (Selah) Come! Witness the exploitsof the Lord, who brings devastation to the earth! He brings an end to wars throughout the earth; he shatters the bow and breaksthe spear; he burnsthe shields with fire. He says, “Stop your striving and recognizethat I am God! I will be exalted*** ***over the nations! I will be exalted overthe earth!”***

**From the Mountain Top into a Deep Pit**

*Footnotes:*[*1 Peter 2:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30404) *Lit chosen; or elect*[*1 Peter 2:5*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30405) *Or allow yourselves to be built up; or build yourselves up*[*1 Peter 2:6*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30406) *Or a scripture*Of all the stormy trials of my life, none can compare to the year 2001. The physical, relational, spiritual and emotional sufferings of that year were unprecedented. But looking back, I can see the blessings that were birthed out of all this pain. I can truthfully tell you that the blessings far surpassed any suffering I had to endure. “They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”—C.H. Spurgeon. As this quote so beautifully puts it, all of my painful trials were, in reality, valuable life lessons … rare pearls indeed! Yet, admittedly, when you are caught in the vortex, struggling to regain your equilibrium, you cannot imagine how anything good could possibly come of it. With that said, I want to major on the good and minimalize the bad, and if possible, I’ll do my best to make these long stories short.

**Isaiah 45:3 (NET)**

***I will give you hidden treasures, riches stashed away in secret places, so you may recognize that I am the Lord, the one who calls you by name, the God of Israel.***

It all started towards the end of 2000. First was the beginning of my parents’ divorce and the inevitable drama that followed. It does not matter if you are 8 or 38 when your parents’ divorce, it’s very much like a death in the family. The difference is that wounded people are still walking around trying to function. If you have been there, then you know what I am talking about.

After the divorce proceedings began, I received a diagnosis of cervical cancer. One of my coping mechanisms is to go into denial – that was impossible in this situation. One thing is for sure, when life is going good we tend to drift away from God, and seeking Him is not a high priority. But all that changes when things like this happen. Thankfully, I had enough history with the Lord to know that if I was going to survive, I had better cling tightly to God’s Word. And so, before I went “under the surgeon’s knife,” I got a little black book and wrote down a list of passages to meditate on right up to the moment they put me under anesthesia. One of these passages, quoted below is Isaiah 43:1-5. These verses subdued my fears and fortified my faith.

Because God will not revoke a single promise He has made, we can bank on the fact that He will always keep His Word. My black book of verses has become my “go to bank” when I am fearful. Did you know that God has given us three hundred and sixty-five “fearnot” passages in the Bible? That is one for every day of the year! And most of the “fear nots” are followed by these words - “Because*,* *I am with you.*” Why is this so important to know? Because, when we are hurt and afraid is when we so often feel most alone.

**Isaiah 43:1-5 (NET)**

***Now, this is what the Lord says, the one who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel: “Don’t be afraid, for I will protectyou. I call you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you passthrough the streams, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harmyou. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your deliverer.***

***I have handed over Egypt as a ransom price, Ethiopia and Sabain place of you. Since you are precious and special in my sight, and I love you, I will hand over people in place of you, nations in place of your life. Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. From the east I will bring your descendants; from the west I will gather you.***

Now back to my story. When God answered my prayers and saved my husband, I was on the mountain top. I stood in my church and earnestly prayed Philippians 3:7-11. This prayer was a prelude to the worst year of my life. That was on Saturday; the next day Art and I were baptized together. But, little did I know we had another baptism to endure, and for both of us it was a baptism by fire. Just three days later, on a Monday morning, I went from the mountain top into the deepest, darkest valley of my life.

In the *Daily Light Journal* by Anne Graham Lotz, I found a vivid description of my soul. The day was March 15, and the title was “Perfect through Suffering.”

***‘My soul is exceedingly* sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.’ He went a little farther and fell on *His face, and prayed, saying ‘O MY Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood on the ground.***

***The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone- to take pity, but there was none; and comforters, but I found none. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul.***

***He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.***

(Hebrews 2:10, Matthew26:38-39, Luke 22:44, Psalm 116:3, Psalm 69:20; Psalm 142:4, Isaiah 53:3)

The question Anne Graham Lotz asks is this: “How are you suffering today? How did God in Christ suffer in a similar way?” I had prayed to know him in his *sufferings* – I am now sure I did not really understand what I was asking of the Lord just three days earlier. At the bottom of the journal, she says, “God understands – in the flesh -- what it feels like to suffer physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.”

Even though the salvation of both my husband and my father is the eternal good that came out of it all, were it not for God’s abundant grace and mercy, I seriously doubt I would have made it through that year. And honestly, at my lowest point, I despaired of life and just begged the Lord to please take me home. I had had enough of this place, and I wanted to be in heaven with Him! Suffice it to say, this request was not granted.

I will spare you the details of my suffering. But if you have suffered deep sorrow, and if you live long enough, you surely will, then you can relate. A few months into my very bad, horrible year, I went to camp with our church youth group. When I got on the church van to leave, I was in tears. On the first day of camp, I wrote in my prayer journal, “*Where are you Lord? Have you forsaken me?”* I was alone in my pain because, in spite of the fact that I was active in church, I did not know what it meant to have real spiritual relationships. No one else knew the deep sorrow of my heart – but God knew. The last night of camp we were in an open air pavilion when a man walked up out of the darkness and asked our youth pastor, Ron, to pray for him and his son. His wife had abandoned them. Ron prayed for him, and as he stepped out to leave, I felt drawn to him like a moth to a flame. But, as I approached the man, the youth gathered around him. I stood listening as he spoke to them. Yet, then, to my surprise, the man stopped and locked eyes with mine, and said to me: “You know what I am taking about don’t you?” I did not say a word to the man; I just nodded my head. He began to speak as if the Lord Himself had walked up into the darkness to answer my question “Where are you?” Then he said these very words: “God wants you to know that when you are broken, the way you are broken now, He has never been closer to you.” I took off running to get as far away from everyone as I could because I wanted to open my mouth and let go of the pent up flood of emotions of my broken heart. As I ran, I began to weep. Sometimes, what we really need is to get alone with Jesus and cry our eyes out. It was the Psalmist who wrote that the Lord has kept our tears in a bottle and recorded them on a scroll (Psalm 56:8). When I read that, I was imagining how full my bottle must be!

You may question the ability of God to speak personally to us through others. But consider this, if God can speak through a donkey, then don’t you think He can speak through a broken man or broken woman? Now let’s test this story against God’s Word to see if it has any Biblical validity or if it is just my vain imagination. First off, Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice.” When we hear the Word of God, there is no doubt God speaking. To those who are crushed in spirit - *Psalms* *34*:*18*-*19* *The LORD is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.* *He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.*

Surely you are aware that the year 2001 was a very tragic year for the United States of America. Many lives were forever changed by the events of September 11. Yet, that horrible day seemed to be a blip on my Richter scale with all that was shaking in the world around me. When you are in the midst of your own storm, it is difficult to see beyond your own pain to others, isn’t it? You go into a survival mode. Virtually everything that gave me security was removed. I felt completely alone and as if I were standing on the edge of a cliff as the wind pushed me toward the edge. I was filled with anxiety, even to the point of needing medication!

To be brutally honest, I have had bouts of depression throughout my life. Actually, depression runs in my family. This season of my life, however, was unparalleled to anything I had ever faced before. The Devil assaulted me with every lie in his arsenal. I knew them well. Such as, “You’re unlovable, and your life is useless. No one cares about you and you deserve everything that’s happened to you. Why don’t you just end it?” Please don’t miss this: If Satan can tempt Jesus -- who is God -- to kill Himself, don’t think that he won’t use the same tactic on you, especially in your darkest moments. Why do you think there are so many suicides?

“Mental pain,” said C.S. Lewis, in his book entitled The Problem with Pain, “is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say “My tooth is aching” than to say “My heart is broken.” And so, here are a few tips for those who desire to help those who are hurting. When someone’s heart is shattered, quoting verses to them or offering pithy little sayings pose little consolation, especially if you have not walked in their shoes. Perhaps it would be best to be quiet and just listen. As I said, I was alone in my pain because no one knew what I was going through, and the few who did, either stayed away or inflicted more grief with their words. But, my lifelong friend Elaine was with me at the camp and watched me suffer. When I finally swallowed my pride and told her my story, she did something for me that that no one else had ever done, and it is hard to describe how it ministered to me. Would you like to know what it was? She wrapped her arms around my neck, and she wept for me and with me. She did not even realize that she was *living* the Word of God.

* Do you think that “suffering in silence” is Biblical? Does it help or hurt? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Romans 12:15 and Galatians 6:2-10 and answer the following questions. What are some ways you can apply these passages in situations like I have just described?

What are some ways that others have ministered Grace towards you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Now it is your turn. Have you ever felt that you were being assaulted by Satan’s lies? If so, what were the circumstances? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

When we are suffering, we are prone to fall into depression. This may be a good time to share an excerpt from a lesson that is rather applicable here. It is entitled The Health of My Countenance, and in this lesson are some very practical suggestions that may be of help in this area. (For a copy of this lesson, go to [www.catalystmissions.org](http://www.catalystmissions.org) and click on the link for women’s discipleship) The following quote is from a devotional by John Piper. (solidjoys.desiringgod.org)

**Six Ways Jesus Fought Depression**

**Matthew 26:36-39 (NET)**

***Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.” Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if possible,let this cuppass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will.”***

There were several tactics in Jesus’ strategic battle against despondency. 1. He chose some close friends to be with him. ‘Taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee...’ (Matthew 26:37). 2. He opened his soul to them. He said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death…’ (v. 38). 3. He asked for their intercession and partnership in the battle. ‘Remain here, and watch with me’ (v. 38). 4. He poured out his heart to his Father in prayer. ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me (v. 39). 5. He rested his soul in the sovereign wisdom of God. ‘Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’ (v. 39). 6. He fixed his eye on the glorious future grace that awaited him on the other side of the cross. ‘For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God’ (Hebrews 12:2).

**Psalm 37:39-40 (NET)**

***But the Lord delivers the godly; he protects them in times of trouble. The Lord helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from evil men and delivers them, for they seek his protection.***

You may ask, “So where was God when I was in pain?” He was right there with me. I just couldn’t see Him for the darkness. As Jacob said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” Genesis 28:16 (NASB). Do you suppose that tears open our eyes to see God as He truly is? At the end of Job’s suffering, he proclaimed, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5).

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* 2 Timothy 3:12; Romans 8:17-22; Philippians 1:29, 3:10, 4:4-6; 1 Peter 3:10-18, 4:13, 5:7;

2 Corinthians 1:5, 4:7-11, 6:4-10,7:5, 11:23-28; Colossians 1:24; Luke 9:21-26;

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4; Acts 9:15-16; 14:19-22, 16:22, 19:11-41, 20:17-24, 22:38; Psalms 23:4, 56:13, 138:7-8; Daniel 3:8-30, 6:10-24; Job 42:1-6

**Why Suffering?**

I don’t fully understand the ways of the Lord, nor can I give you the answer to why God allowed your suffering or mine. God is not obligated to explain Himself to us. Just ask Job. But I submit what we can know Biblically. For the child of God, suffering always has purpose. One such purpose is the refining influence it has on our life. It cures us of being enamored with the world. Suffering is part of our sanctification.

Another reason for suffering is that God can use your situation to help others who are hurting. Take Joni Earekson Tada for example. In her booklet, Where’s The Miracle? (page 22-25), she wrote of the benefits of suffering. As one who has lived in a wheel chair as a quadriplegic since 1967 and traveled the world ministering to hurting people, she is acutely aware of suffering. She writes, “God’s purpose in redeeming us is not to make our lives happy and healthy. God’s purpose in redeeming us is to make us more like Jesus. And often suffering is God’s choicest tool to do just that.”

**2 Corinthians 1:3-10 (NET)**

***Blessed isthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troublesso that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any troublewith the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferingsof Christoverflowtoward us, so also our comfort through Christ overflows to you. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort that you experience in your patient endurance of the same sufferings that we also suffer. And our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you share inour sufferings, so also you will share inour comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, regarding the affliction that happened to us in the province of Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living. Indeed, we felt as if the sentence of death had been passed against us, so that we would not trust in ourselvesbut in God who raises the dead. Hedelivered us from so great a risk of death, and he will deliver us. We have set our hope on thathe will deliver us yet again.***

In her book In the Secret Place of the Most High, Cynthia Heald describes the soul cleansing work of the Lord’s discipline and correction. But before we go there, I would like to add this disclaimer: When the Lord allows suffering into the lives of His children, we must not be hasty, like the friends of Job, to jump to the conclusion that our sorrows are the discipline of the Lord. Sometimes they are. And yes, God disciplines those who He loves (Hebrew 12:1-11). So, this quote is not a perfect illustration. However, the insight found in it about the end result of suffering is spot-on. Cynthia Heald quotes C. Jerdan and he said, “Sorrow accepted as Divine chastisement refines and sanctifies the soul. It stirs its tenderest emotions, and touches its richest cords. It draws the heart towards God himself, as its only Rest and Strength and Joy. The most beautiful human faces are not those which show merely the most regular features and the purest complexion; they are those saintly faces which have been beautified by chastisement- made perfect through sufferings.”

Nevertheless, we still grapple with the age old question of why God allows pain and suffering, especially in the lives of His Children. This, I believe, is the very heart of the matter. Am I going to believe what the Bible says about Jesus? Does Jesus Christ have all power in heaven and on earth? Has the Father really placed all things under His feet? These are legitimate questions, and in my opinion, it is not necessarily wrong to ask them. Still, at the end of the day, we have a decision to make. Are we going to believe God? And if the answer is yes, then we must believe that He rules over the affairs, even the details, of our lives. And this includes our pains and suffering. Furthermore, when the world around us is on the brink of collapse, if we are going to survive with our mind and faith intact, we must be at peace with the One who commands the wind and the waves and they obey Him. Jesus *is* our peace. (Job 22:21-25; Mark 4:41)

* Read the following passages and then answer these questions. Is suffering always a sign that God is angry at you or that you are being punished for sin?

Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-4; Acts 7:51-60; Job 1:1-22, 4:1-9; 8:20; Psalms 34:15-19, 36:6-7, 37:25 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Read the following passage and answer this question: What is one good thing that can come from afflictions? Psalms 119:71 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Job didnot understand why he was suffering the loss of everything. His wife and three friends did not help; they added to his pain with words. What can we learn from their poor examples when we see disaster and tragedy strike in someone’s life? What How should we respond in a way that will help them and not hurt them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**A Note to Those Who Are Suffering**

**Nahum 1:7 (NET)**

***The Lord is good– indeed,he is a fortressin time of distress,and he protectsthose who seek refuge in him.***

Maybe this lesson hits close to home. Perhaps some fiery trial has consumed your hopes and dreams, and you realize that you don’t have a leg of faith upon which you could stand. Are you sitting among the ashes of what was your life, wondering if God exists and if he loves you? Are you wondering why would He let this happen to you? What are we to do when all that makes us feel safe and secure is removed from us? You are not the first to ask these questions. They are echoed in a Psalm of David where he asks, “When the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do.” (Psalms 11:3) And then there is Job. See if his words ring true with you; I know they did for me.

**Job 10:1-9 (NET)**

***Iam wearyof my life; I will complain without restraint;I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, ‘Do not condemnme; tell mewhy you are contendingwith me.’ Is it good for youto oppress, todespise the work of your hands, whileyou smile?***

***on the schemes of the wicked? Motivations of God “Do you have eyes of flesh,or do you seeas a human being sees? Are your days like the days of a mortal, or your years like the yearsof a mortal, thatyou must search outmy iniquity, and inquire about my sin, although you knowthat I am not guilty, and that there is no one who can deliverout of your hand? “Your hands have shapedme and made me, butnow you destroy me completely. Remember that you have made me as withthe clay; willyou return me to dust?***

My friend, while I may be as much of stranger to you as that man at the youth group camp was to me, I want to be the voice of truth that you need to hear today. I only wish I could look into your tear-filled eyes and tell you this. Please understand this: God does not stand aloof, untouched, or unmoved when we suffer (Matthew 9:35-38; John 11:1-44). I know how the enemy is trying to isolate you from God and others by telling you that no one cares. But the truth is, God was there with you when it happened, and He has felt your pain. And while you might not know Him and His matchless love, He knows you intimately (Psalms 139:1-16).

Even now, in your brokenness and sorrow the Lord Jesus is saying, “I AM HERE… I LOVE YOU… I SUFFERED AND DIED TO SAVE YOU… I AM ALIVE… I OFFER YOU LIFE, HOPE AND A FUTURE!” Although your circumstances may not change, in Christ, you will find real love, joy and peace that can sustain you. And then, one glorious day, when this night of weeping is over -- eclipsed in everlasting light, the nail-scared hands of Jesus will wipe away every tear! In the meantime, God has given you some great and precious promises to cling to. They have been deposited into your account, and whenever you should need them you can make a withdrawal.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Have you ever seen a righteous person suffer unjustly? How did they respond? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4. What did Paul tell the saints in Thessalonica about suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Jesus said, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). What did He mean by this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Chances are, is it raining in your life even now. If so, will you describe your situation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you describe a time when you went into a survival mode and the reason for this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. When we have been hurt, we have a greater propensity to protect ourselves. Is it possible to protect ourselves and deny ourselves at the same time? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you personally experienced abandonment at a time of your greatest need? If so, did you run to God or from God?

**Think On These Things**

Did you learn something new? Did you find a new promise to claim as your own? Did you find a command to obey, a sin to confess or avoid? Is there a passage you could turn into a prayer? Did the Lord speak personally to you through this chapter? What action will you take in obedience to God’s voice? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Memory Verses

**Romans 8:15-18 (NET)**

***For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whomwe cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself bears witness toour spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be comparedto the glory that will be revealed to us.***

**Week # 2**

***Imitators of God / Practical***

***Ephesians 4:17-32, 5:1-12, 6:1-7***

**Cure for the Poison of Bitterness**

***Ephesians 4:26-32 (NIV)***

***“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.***

***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

**Introduction**

Every time I write or teach a Biblical lesson, the Lord will put me to the test to see if I will practice what I preach. And so this is the case for this lesson. I very quickly experienced two situations that forced me to be a doer of this word and not just a hearer or teacher of it!

When was the last time you were really hurt by someone? Do you know what I’m talking about?... This kind of offense replays like a broken record that skips to the part where you heard the words or deeds that cut you like a knife. From that instance on, the battle is on in your mind. If you are brutally honest, this kind of wound leaves you secretly fantasizing about getting even, even if it’s just passive aggression. When this happens, and you indulge your flesh, it will grow roots and these roots will choke the life out of you. If left unchecked, it will move from repression to depression, and finally, expression. The Psalmist graphically depicted what bitterness looks like when it is expressed: *“When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.” Psalms 73:21-22 (NIV)* These words describe a person who is so full of unresolved anger and bitterness, that they act like a wild beast. Actually, they are acting like the devil.

Twice in my life, I have been the target of such a person. In both cases, I quickly learned that I was just one of many, unfortunate people, who came along their path. And, just like the devil, they were looking for someone to devour. As you read this I wonder if a particular person is coming to your mind. If so, then this lesson just might save your life, and I'm not kidding! In this lesson, we’ll grapple with this subject until we find the antidote for this deadly sin.

**The Consequences of Un-forgiveness**

The most self-destructive sins are not abusing drugs or alcohol. Although, some will use them to "self-medicate" in an attempt to mask their real problem. Ironically, this approach does just the opposite. When people are under the influence, it magnifies the ugly that’s in their heart. What’s in the well, as they say, is what comes up in the bucket.

So what is the most harmful sin to a child of God? The worst of all is un-forgiveness that leads to bitterness. It’s like poison to the soul. Furthermore, it never stops with the wounded; it spreads like gangrene until is defiles every relationship in their lives. The root of bitterness is a proud unforgiving heart. Unresolved anger pierces our heart, and it invites God’s discipline. (Psalm 107:10-20) God always has our best interest in mind. He is the Great Physician, and it's His Word that diagnosis our sickness, and it gives the antidote. He desires our holiness as well as our health. Yet, we can't have physical health, without spiritual holiness. We are incapable of healing ourselves of the poison of bitterness and forgiving others, without Christ Jesus. Therefore, no lost person has the ability to forgive anyone else; only Christ Spirit within you can do it.

When a person refuses to forgive those who hurt them, their actions reveal that they have never received the forgiveness of God. You see, you cannot give away what you do not possess. Therefore, forgiveness is not a hard thing to do, it's impossible! Only God in you can do it. Please stop, and read carefully, the definition of the following Greek words found in the Strong's Concordance -and especially, the words bitterness and gall or angry. Do you see the word...poison? Somehow, haven't we always known that bitterness was poison to our souls? And we mustn't forget that our souls live within our body. What effects on, will affect the other.

**WORD SEARCH: from Strong’s Concordance**

* **Bitterness**: Greek Pakria: - acridity, **poison,** bitterness, from #4089 pikros: sharp, piercing, pungent, acrid, and bitter. Acts 8:23; Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15
* **Gall/angry:** Greek #5521 chole: - greenish hue, gall, bile, **poison** or an anodyne, wormwood. Acts 8:23: Matthew 27:34; John 7:23.
* **Anger:** Greek # 3709-3710 orge: - desire; violent passion; abhorrence; punishment; anger; indignation; vengeance and wrath. Ephesians 4:26; Matthew 5:22; Colossians 3:8
* **Forgive:** Greek #606 apoluo: - too free fully, relieve, release, dismiss, let die, pardon, divorce, forgive, let go, put away, release, set at liberty. (It is only used in Luke 6:27-38)
* **Forgive:** Greek #5483 charizomia: - (it comes from the word grace) to grant as a favor in kindness, pardon, rescue, to deliver, forgive, freely give, grant. Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13, 3:13
* **Forgive:** Greek #859 #,863aphesis and #863 aphiemi: - freedom, pardon, deliver, forgiveness, liberty, remission, to send forth, cry, forgive, forsake, leave, let alone, remit, suffer, yield up. Romans 4:7; Luke 7:49; Matthew 11:25-26, 18:21, 35; Colossians 1:13-14; Ephesians 1:7

The following passage on *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant,* is an object lesson that every child of God should not take lightly. As a matter of fact, it should put the pure fear of God within your heart. That is, if you believe the Bible and take God at His word. To say that this story doesn’t end wee for the unforgiving servant, would be a great understatement! What person, in their right mind would want God to turn them over to the demons to be tormented? If that were not bad enough, they will also have to pay back every penny that they owe. Definition: they will lose everything!

***Matthew 18:21-35 (ESV)***

***Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.***

***“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* James 1:21-25, 2:8-13, 5:15-16, 19-20; Proverbs 4:20-27; Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalms 50:7-13; Romans 8:5-17, 12:14-21; Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 4:25-32; Hebrews 10:26-30, 12:2-15; Colossians 2:11-14, 3:8-9, 12-15; Matthew 5:21-22, 38-48, 6:12-15, 18:22-35; Luke 6:27-37, 12:4-5

If the consequences of un-forgiveness, are not enough to persuade you to obey the Lord and forgive, "as you have been forgiven," then I don’t know what could. You see, not only will it poison, it will defile every relationship in your life. As the wise King Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And so the wise person, not only hears what God says, but out of love and reverence will do what He says. (Luke 6: 46-49) Only a fool would do otherwise. At times, I have been a fool, and I've got the scars to prove it. But God, will turn scars into beauty marks when we turn to Him in repentance.

**The Cost and The Cure**

Imagine, if you will, that you were bit by a snake, and its poisonous venom was moving quickly towards your heart. Now, someone comes along and offers you the antidote, would you not take it? This little analogy is not too farfetched, when you compare it to the story in Numbers 21:1-9. Jesus made reference to this account, in His dialog with Nicodemus. You may want to read this also. It's found in John 3:1-18. What's my point? At the cross of Christ, the cure for the poison of bitterness and un-forgiveness was purchased at a high cost. Jesus gave His life so that He could forgive you, and me. As a matter of fact, that was His last prayer for us as He was dying for our sins. He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." (Isaiah 53:4-12; Luke 23:34) When we forgive others, we are never more like Christ Jesus. (Hebrew 9:22, 10:17-18; 1 John 1:7-10; Romans 5:6-11)

The cure for the poison of bitterness is repentance for the sin of un-forgiveness. You may balk at that statement, because if you use worldly reasoning, that does not make since. If I'm the one who was wronged, then why do I need to repent? The short answer is, because, God said so, and furthermore, if we don't forgive them, God will not forgive us! (Luke 13:1-5, Matthew 3:8-12) But that is not the only reason to forgive. When we refuse to repent of the sin of un-forgiveness, not only do we invites the Lord's discipline, we open the door to the one who comes to kill, steal and destroy our lives! God’s disciple is always for the purpose to bring us to Godly sorrow and repentance. This is the only way to be at peace with God, and when we are a peace with Him, He will make, even our enemies, be at peace with us.

May I share a personal example with you? The greatest spiritual battle I have ever faced in my life came with the greatest hurt and betrayal. After years of teaching Bible studies on forgiveness, here I was at the crossroads. I finally dropped to my knees and confessed to the Lord that it was impossible. I could not forgive the ones who hurt me. But then the Lord reminded me of two scriptures. Number one: the passage in Luke 5:21: "Who can forgive sin but God alone?" Number two is Philippians 2:13 and 4:13: "For it is God who works in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure." I can't forgive … but God, who lives in *me* can, and praise His name...I did!

My pastor, David Lawrence, taught us what *forgiveness* *is not. He said, "*Forgiveness is not approval of the offense, excusing the offense, justifying the offense, reconciling with the offender, forgetting the offense, or lastly, pretending we’re not hurt!" Ok, so what is forgiveness? Dr. Chuck Hannaford, is the Godly counselor who helped me weather the worst storm that ever hit my life. This is how he defines forgiveness, he said, “*Forgiveness is an act of my will making use of God’s grace in order to cancel a debt owed me…forgiveness is a choice.”*

***Hebrews 12:14-15 (NASB)***

***“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the LORD. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness spring up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 3:19, 2:20; 2 Corinthians 2:11, 7:9-12, 10:3-6, 11:3-16; Hebrew 12:4-17; Revelation 3:19; Proverbs 16:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:13-15; 1 John 3:7-13, 4:14; John 8:44-45; Galatians 4:29; Matthew 7:16-22, 13:36-43

In the Old Testament is found an interesting story that parallels our New Testament cure for bitterness. You can read it in Exodus 15:22-26. The Hebrew word for bitterness is marah: bitter, angry, chafed, discontented, great, and heavy. The cure is a cut down tree that makes the bitter sweet. Now for the comparison. We must remember that a tree was cut down to make a cross. When we mentally visit that tree, and see all our sins, including bitterness, anger and un-forgiveness, hanging upon the One who hung on that tree, how can we not forgive others? Do you remember what they offered to Him to drink as He hung there on that tree? It was a cup of bitterness and gall. He died so that we may be forgiven and then He rose again to give us new life and make our bitterness sweet. (Colossians 2:11-14, 2 Corinthians 4:7-11) Because He loved us so and we all have been forgiven much, we too should give to others what we have received. (Luke 6:35, 23:34; Acts 7:60)

Many people are sick emotionally, mentally and physically because of bitterness. God desires to heal us, but we must take His medicine if we want to get well. Repentance and forgiveness is the cure. I encourage you to make a list of the ones who have wronged you and the things they did to hurt you. Take your catalog of their sins to the cross and lay it beside your canceled debt. Think about it, can you honestly say there is a comparison to what your sins did to Jesus -, including the sin of un-forgiveness? (Hebrew 12:2-6, Isaiah 53:3-11, 1 Corinthians 13:4 -7) What has it cost you to hold this person in bondage to the debt they owe you? Is it really worth it? If we will humble ourselves before God and forgive, as we have been forgiven, He will heal us! (Exodus 15:23-26; Psalm 107:10-20)

There can be no ***peace of God*** without first ***making peace with God***. Even after we have been saved, we must daily relinquish the right to rule our own lives. We must repent of thoughts that have grieved the Holy Spirit, emotions ruled by our flesh such as: a critical spirit, anger, un-forgiveness, fear, guilt. Sinful words and actions always follow the mind- set on the flesh. Today we can make peace with God through confession and repentance. (1John 1:9-12) This is, “well –pleasing” to the Lord, and we have a promise found in Proverbs 16:7, “that if a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD; He will make even his enemies be at peace with Him.” (Psalms 34:12-19, 85:10, Proverbs 12:20-21, Hebrew 12:11-15, 1 Peter 3:8-12)

**WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance:**

* **Peace** in Hebrew: - Shalom: - well, happy, friendly, welfare, health, prosperity, peace, favor, friend, good health, perfect, be at peace, rest, safety, be whole. From this word: shalam: to be safe in mind, body or estate, to cause to make complete, make amends, make good/at peace that is perfect peace, make restitution, restore.
* **Peace** in Greek: - prosperity, one peace, quietness, rest, to set at one again.

**The Prince of Peace**

***Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV***

***“For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The Zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”***

The **Peace** of God is to be found in the **Person of Christ**, The **Prince of Peace**. Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7, John 14:27, 16:33, Ephesians 2:14

***John 14:27 HCSB***

***“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful.”***

**The Way of Peace**

***Luke 1:77-79***

***“To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”***

***Luke 2:14***

***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among men with whom He is pleased.”***

Who (on earth) has **peace**? With whom is God **well pleased**?

***Romans 5:1-2 NIV***

***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have PEACE with God through our LORD JESUS CHRIST, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”***

**Peace of God**

***Colossians 3:15***

***“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be Thankful.”***

***Proverbs 14:30 NIV***

***“A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”***

***Psalm 29:10-11NIV***

***“The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to His people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.”***

**Peace with God**

***2 Peter 3:13-14***

***“But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in PEACE, spotless and blameless.”***

***Romans 8:6-10 HCSB***

***“For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind- set of the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God’s law, for it is unable to do so. Those whose lives are in the flesh are unable to please God. You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.”***

***Colossians 1:19-23 (NASB)***

***“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for ALL the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made PEACE through Him, I say, whether things on earth or in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.”***

***Isaiah 53:5 NIV***

***“But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us PEACE was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”***

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. What are the two Greek words that are defined as poison?
2. Have you ever struggled with forgiveness?
3. Have you ever known someone who was full of rage and bitterness?
4. If so, describe the effects it has had on their lives.
5. Why do we need to repent of un-forgiveness?
6. In the two Old Testament accounts that were used as allegories, make a list of the lessons to be learned from these comparisons.

**Think On These Things**

**Memory Verses**

***Exodus 15:26***

***“And He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, The LORD, am your healer.”***

**Be Imitators of God**

***Ephesians 5:1-20 (ESV)***

***Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

***But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says,***

***“Awake, O sleeper,***  
***and arise from the dead,***  
***and Christ will shine on you.”***

***Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,***

**Take off and Put On**

**Ephesians 4:17-25**

***So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.***

***That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***

***Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “***

**Introduction**

We have now turned a corner in Paul’s letter to Saints in Ephesus. Now we will shift from all that God has done to, the extremely practical, real life lessons.

Have you ever heard of a practical atheist? I’m not talking about a theological atheist, that is another thing all together. What I mean is this: When someone says that they believe in God and that Jesus Christ is their Lord, and yet they live as if He doesn’t exist, then that person is a practical atheist. How our faith plays out in everyday practical life is what matters. Regardless of what we call ourselves, when our cause is to run our own life apart from God, then we are living in rebellion against God. As noted in an earlier chapter, this describes the first twenty-six years of my life, and the first forty years of my husband’s life also.

**Practical**

1 John 1:9,1 John 1:7, Acts 10:15,11:9, John 13:10-11, 15:1-4,16

* First fruits: John 15:2&6, Matthew 3:2-10, Acts 20:26:18-19, Luke 13:3-9, 23-28, 2 Peter 3:9.

***Philippians 2:1-4, 14-16***

***Colossians 3:5-11 (NIV)***

***Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.***

**Submission to Authorities**

***Ephesians 5:21- 27 (ESV)***

***Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.***

# ***Wives and Husbands***

***Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.***

***Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.***

***Ephesians 6:1-9 (NIV)***

***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”***

***Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***

***Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.***

***And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.***

**2 Peter 2:6-10; James 3:17**

**Work Ethics**

***Ephesians 4:28***

***Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.***

**Titus 3**

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

**Faith’s Expression**

**Key Passages**

***Ephesians 1:15-16 (NASB)***

***For this reason, I too having heard of the Faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the Saints do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers.***

**Introduction**

In previous chapters we saw the Spirit is the pledge and seal of our new birth. Likewise, there is one identifying mark of a child of God…. love. At the very moment we receive Christ, the Spirit of God comes to live in us, and we bear the characteristics of God; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But the greatest of these is love. How can we know if we have true faith; what marks us as the true Bride of Christ? Love! When we love others, we look the most like the Bridegroom. This cliché is true: “You simply cannot give what you have not first received.” The origin of love is God – it’s what He does because of who He is. He doesn’t hoard love; He gives it away freely. (John 3:14-18)

When Jesus reinstated Peter, He asked Peter this question three times, “Do you love me Peter?” (John 21:12-17) The dialog between Jesus and Peter will apply to every true believer. If we love Jesus, we will love others.

***1 John 4:16 (NASB)***

***We have come to know and have believed the Love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.***

We can clearly see the seal of authenticity on Paul’s life. His letters reveal His new heart, filled with love, and gives evidence of a changed life. He went from a man who hated the church to a man who “Loved the Lord with all his heart and his neighbor as himself.” For three years Paul taught the Ephesians to obey all the commands of Jesus: the greatest of these was to love God and all the Saints, and last was to make disciples. (Matthew 22:46-40; 28:18-20)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Explain the following statement: “Our actions speak so loud; people can’t hear what we say.” (James 2:24-26)
2. What do people hear about your faith and love?
3. What is the first fruit or evidence of the Spirit? (Gal. 5:19-24)
4. Where is love to begin? (Titus 2:2-5)
5. What is the one and only source of love? (1 Tim. 1:1-3,14; 2 Tim.1:13; Eph. 1:4 1 Jn. 4:8)
6. How can you serve the body of believers in love? Make a to-do list.
7. Do you know the love language of your family members?
8. Ask them to fill in the blanks: I feel loved most when\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
9. What will you do to show love to the members of your family?
10. What is your labor of love? (1Thess. 1:1-5)
11. List the evidence of love between Paul and the Saints at Ephesus. (Acts 20:13-38; 2 Tim. 1:13-18)

***Galatians 5:14 (NIV)***

***The entire Law is summed up in a single command: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 John 3:14 -24 & 4:7-5:4; John 13:1-4, 34-35, John 15:7-13,17; 17:21-23; Gal. 5:12-15; Romans 5:5; James 2:8; 1 Cor.13:1-13; Colossians 1:1:4; Philemon 5; Ephesians 3:18; Matthew 22:34-40

***1 John 3:14 & 18-24 (HCSB)***

***14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. The one who does not love remains in death. 18 Little children, we must not love in word or speech, but indeed and truth;19 that is how we will know we are of the truth, and will convince our hearts in His presence, 20 because if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. 21 Dear friend, if our hearts do not condemn us we have confidence before God, 22 and can receive whatever we ask from Him because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in His sight.23 Now this is His command: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commands remains in Him, and He in him. And the way we know that He remains in us is from the Spirit He has given us.***

The one most recognizable birth mark of a child of God is love. The world will never know who God is and how much He loves them unless we represent Him well. In fact, in His prayer just before His passion, Jesus prayed that we would be united to one another in love. The greatest expression of our love for Jesus is to obeying His greatest command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This is how Jesus knows that we love Him. Let’s take this to heart and really become doers of the Word and not hearers only.

**Memory Verses**

***Galatians 5:6 (NASB)***

***For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision means anything, but faith working through love.***

­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­**Week # 3**

**WOMAN OF GOD PREPARED FOR BATTLE**

***Ephesians 6:10-20 (ESV)***

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.***

**Introduction**

The Bible truly is the greatest love story ever told. What little girl doesn’t dream of the knight who comes to her rescue ridding on a white horse? Would you like to know where this fanciful romantic image came from? It’s right there at the end of God’s story, and yes, King Jesus -the Prince of Peace – is the One who returns for His bride, ridding in on a white horse. Our heart’s cry is… even so Lord Jesus come take us home!

But as you know, every good story has a hero and a villain. In the Bible, the villain is Satan. His sinister work of killing, stealing and destroying, began on the first family. Remember, Cane killed his own brother Able? And as we will discuss in another week’s lesson, marriage, and family were God’s idea. Yes, God is pro - family and pro - life! And the family is the foundation of society and the first institution established by God. Little wonder Satan has amassed every weapon in his arsenal against the family. For he knows that when this foundation is destroyed, and everyone does what is “right in their own eyes,” there is no hope of any civilized social order. I don’t want to be pessimistic, but I fear that the “God blessed” United States of America may have reached the point of no return when it comes to upholding the integrity of the God ordained union between one man and one woman. May the Lord have mercy on His children when He pours out His righteous indignation upon this land!

**The Power of God in Christ**

The city of Ephesus was a hub of idolatry and evil spirits, and for this reason Paul included this particular passage in his letter to the saints who lived there. What was true of Ephesus, is also true of the church in all ages until Jesus returns for His bride. We can ill afford to stick our heads in the sand and pretend this battle is not real. Because if we do, we are defeated already. So the aim of this lesson is to become better informed and prepared for spiritual battles. This lesson will be extremely practical in nature. And so, if you will take these truths to heart, you will be better equipped for the spiritual battle that rages around us.

In his historical and insightful book entitled Power and Magic, Clinton E. Arnold educates the church of Jesus Christ on spiritual warfare. On page 22 he said:

We have thus far characterized Ephesus both as a center for magical practices and as a center for the cult of Artemis for Asia Minor. One may wonder if there was any connection between the two, and if so, what type of relationship the Artemis cult had with the practice of magic. Although it has been claimed that the Ephesian Artemis was not by nature a goddess of magic, she does seem to have had a direct link with the magical practices of the time. She was considered a supremely powerful deity and could therefore exercise her power for the benefit of the devotee in the face of other opposing ‘powers’ and spirits. Her power in this respect is well illustrated in a papyrus containing a magical formula apparently for the purpose of compelling the passion of a woman toward a man. Directly under the text is a crude drawing of the Ephesians Artemis, indicating that she is the power called upon to fulfill the wish (line 4: ‘take a leaf of lead and with a nail write the figure…’). Artemis plays an important role in Greco-Roman times as a goddess of the underworld.

Have you ever experienced, heart pounding, life threatening, crippling fear? Have you ever felt powerless? The majority of the time, our fears are unfounded. But, even though these fears may not have validity, they can cause us to spiral down into a crippling pit of anxiety. Do you know people who are held captive by fear? Have you been a victim yourself? Until we are placed *in* *Christ,* we can easily become a slave to fear. Where does a *spirit of fear* come from? The Bible assures us that it doesn’t come from God.

However, when we have a holy reverence and fear of God -- we need not fear anyone else. You see; perfect love casts out fear, because perfect love is a person...God incarnate... Jesus Christ (1 John 4:18). Yet, without a proper understanding of Jesus’ true identity you will not have a leg of faith to stand on when you feel powerless. A small view of God, leads to a world view skewed by fear, confusion and instability.

Now where does faith come from? Paul told the Romans that it comes from hearing the Word of God. So get ready to listen up, because we’re about to hear a lot of faith strengthening passages of Scripture. And, if we will hide it in our hearts, our lives will be empowered with enough faith to carry us through any fearful episode that we may face.

***Romans 8:15 (ESV)***

***For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”***

**The Battle is Close to Home**

As the day draws near when Jesus returns for His Bride, the battle is escalating. Satan is very busy working his plan to destroy holy matrimony between one man and one woman. Why would marriage be a target for Satan? Because he knows that marriage represents the union between Christ and His bride -- the church. Although Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, He knew that the home would be a fierce battle ground. Paul addresses this cosmic battle in Ephesians 6:10-18. The apostle Peter also warned that the devil is on the prowl, looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8-9).

For the last 20 years I have been in women’s ministry, and I have heard the stories of one woman after another who have endured unspeakable horror and abuse in their own homes. The secret place of a mother’s womb has become the death chamber of 55 million babies in the United States since 1962. And then there are the innumerable homes where domestic violence begins with sexual abuse. No place is safe from the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy.

Before the four hundred years of silence, the Old Testament ends with this warning: “***See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6).*** Speaking through the prophet Malachi, the Lord gives us great insight into His purpose in establishing the family and how he feels about marriage.

***Malachi 2:13-16 (NIV)***

***Another thing you do: You flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? He seeks Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the Lord Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.***

Surely the Heavenly Father grieves as He looks upon His broken humanity. I wonder how much we resemble the world in the days before the flood.

Until we are placed *in Christ*, we are like defenseless sheep against the schemes of the evil-one. How have you personally been affected by Satan’s distortion of God’s plan for marriage and family? As the product of a broken home, my life has been greatly affected. My husband and I began our marriage separated from God who holds everything together. Therefore, we know from personal experience, that without Him everything comes apart. Most of us don’t even realize the diabolical plans that are being devised by Satan to destroy our homes and families.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Timothy 1:18, 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:1-4, 4:7-8; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

**Unprepared for Spiritual Battle**

***2 Timothy 2:1-4 (NASB)***

***You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.***

Have you ever heard the old hymn “Onward Christian Soldier”? If so, have you ever considered what a Christian soldier is fighting against? Timothy was the pastor of the church of Ephesus when Paul, his spiritual parent and disciple maker, wrote 1 Timothy and 2Timothy. In these two personal letters, Paul repeatedly admonished his dear son to *fight the good fight of the faith*. It was here that we are introduced the concept that a Christian is a soldier in Christ’s army.

To be sure, precious few of us who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, have been equipped with the armor to defend ourselves. I most certainly wasn’t. The world in which we live is not a *playground*; it’s a *battle ground*. And yet, as a child in the faith, I had no idea of the battles I would face, and furthermore, I was clueless about how to use the weapons of God.

Consequently, I’ve learned these lessons the hard way, mostly through defeat. Yet thankfully, in the last few years the Lord has graciously brought into my life several strong, godly women. One of these women is Janet Warren Lane. In her book Fiery Darts: Satan’s Weapons of Choice, she says:

Satan has at his disposal a vast arsenal of weapons with which to wage war against God’s people.  While it is obvious he often draws upon weapons such as war, evil rulers, persecution, discrimination, poverty, adultery, murder, and broken homes, to highlight only a few, there is one weapon that is so subtle many Christians fail to recognize it as a weapon at all! This weapon is negative thinking or what I have come to call fiery darts, a weapon seemingly insignificant yet incredibly dangerous.  (5)

Finally, now in my fifties, I’m learning about the tactics of the enemy and beginning to win more battles than I am losing. I’m so thankful!

Sadly, when new believers are not disciple, their faith could be shipwrecked when the enemy begins to assault their lives. I have a question for you. Are babies and children aware of the dangers that surround them? Of course they are not! Would you leave a defenseless child outside in a storm to defend itself? We would call this child abuse. A person who is an infant in their faith does not even know he has an enemy, much less, that he has the Sword of the Spirit as a defense. Can you imagine how our perfect Heavenly Father must feel about the neglect of His children? Without a doubt, He feels the same way you and I would if someone was neglecting our own children. Who will love and care for God’s babies? Disciple makers, that is who. Make no mistake about it, we will be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ for the spiritual neglect of the babies in our sphere of influence.

***1 Corinthians 15:57-58 (NIV)***

***But thanks are to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Corinthians 3:9-14; 2 Corinthian 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:14

**The Enemy and His Tactics**

***1 Peter 5:8-9(NIV)***

***Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.***

When we were still in the kingdom of darkness, we were defenseless against the schemes of the evil one. But now that we have been rescued from his clutches, the devil has staged an all-out war against us. Yet most of us are not even aware of who he is and the methods he uses.

Dr. David Jeremiah admonishes believers to be equipped for battle. He said, “*The goal of every Christian should be to learn the identity, plans and purposes of the devil and to stand firm against him*!” I don’t disagree with Doctor Jeremiah, but I would add that equally, if not more importantly, we need to know the power of God in Christ, and then, as well-equipped soldiers, we can take our stand and win the daily battles.

***Psalm 138:7-8 (KJV)***

***“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me; You will stretch fourth your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand will save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; your loving kindness, O LORD, is everlasting; do not forsake the works of your hands.”***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of the insights and personal applications.**

* Col. 1:9-13; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 5:6-11; Deut. 1:29-31; 3:22; Psalms 97:9-10

**WORD SEARCH: from Strong’s Concordance:**

* **Devil** #1228 Greek word Diabolos: *false accuser, Satan, and slanderer*. (1Peter5:8, Acts 13:10, Heb. 2:4; Rev. 12:9; 20:10)
* **Schemes/Devices** #3540 Greek word Noema: *thoughts, perception, purpose, intelligence*. (2Cor.2:11)
* **Schemes/wiles** #3180 Greek word Methodeia: *trickery, to lie in wait*. (Eph. 6:11)

**Identify His Methods**

***2 Corinthians 2:10-1, 14 (NASB)***

***But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. 14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.***

These are some of the methods that the enemy uses against us: temptations of flesh, offense, sinful anger, unforgiveness, disputes, insecurities, fear, ignorance or deceptions, pride, distractions, confusion, delusions and discouragement. In the previous list, can you identify the methods the enemy has used on you?

***2 Corinthians 11:3-5 (NIV)***

***But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, Matthew 4:1-4, 7:7-14; James 1:19-25; **Ephesians 4:25-27;** James 4:1-11**;** 2 Corinthians 2: 10-11, 14-17, 11:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:3-4

**Identify His Messengers**

***1 John 3:7-13***

***Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. 9No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. 10This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.11For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. 13Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.***

***1 John 4:4-7 (NIV)***

***You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.***

Hence we get the term “cold War.” You know, it’s where you engage in the passive aggressive tactic of giving one another the silent treatment. Although people are sometimes used as the devil’s instruments, we are not fighting people! We overcome evil with Good (Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14-21; Matthew 5:43-44). Pastor David Lawrence tells us what *forgiveness* is *not*: 1. approval of the offense 2. excusing the offense 3. justifying the offense 4. reconciling with the offender 5. forgetting the offense 6. pretending we’re not hurt. What is forgiveness? Dr. Chuck Hannaford defines it, “*Forgiveness is an act of my will making use of God’s grace in order to cancel a debt owed me…forgiveness is a choice.”*

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of the insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 20:20; 2 Corinthians 2:11, 10:3-6, 11:3-16; 1 John 3:7-13, 4:14; John 8:44-45; Galatians 4:29; Matthew 7:16-22, 13:36-43

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of the insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 17:11; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6; Deuteronomy 4:2-6; Prov. 30:5-6; Revelations 22:18-20[**2 Corinthians 2:13**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28838) **:** [**2Co 7:6, 13; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18; Gal 2:1, 3; Tit 1:4**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Cor%207:6,%202Cor%207:13,%202Cor%208:6,%202Cor%208:16,%202Cor%208:23,%202Cor%2012:18,%20Gal%202:1,%20Gal%202:3,%20Titus%201:4&version=NIV)[**2 Corinthians 2:13**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28838) **:** [**S Ac 16:9**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2016:9&version=NIV)[**2 Corinthians 2:14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28839) **:** [**Ro 6:17; 7:25; 1Co 15:57; 2Co 9:15**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%206:17,%20Rom%207:25,%201Cor%2015:57,%202Cor%209:15&version=NIV)[**2 Corinthians 2:14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28839) **: Eze 20:41; Eph 5:2; Php 4:18**[**2 Corinthians 2:14**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+2%3A11-14&version=NIV#en-NIV-28839) **:** [**S 2Co 8:7**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Cor%208:7&version=NIV)

**Defensive Armor**

***Romans 13:11-14 (NIV)***

***And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh]***

***Ephesians 6:13-17a (NASB)***

***Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousnessand having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.And take the helmet of salvation.***

* **Verse 14 Truth like a belt!** The breastplate of Righteousness helps us do what is right when the enemy comes against us. This is imparted righteousness.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of the insights and personal applications.**

* John 14:6; 17:17; Revelation 19:7-9)
* **Verse 15 Feet ready with the Gospel of Peace.** We must be at peace with God, reconciled to Him through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. Then, if our ways are pleasing to the Lord, our commander, He will make our enemy be at peace with us. ***Do you have beautiful feet? Who prepared you with the gospel?***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Romans 1:1-10, 8:5-11, 10:15-18; John 17:9-21; 2Timothy 2: 1-4; Proverbs 16:7;2 Cor. 5:18-20
* **Verse 16 Shield of faith. Who is teaching you the Word of God?**

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Romans 10:17; John 6:63; Romans 8:11; 1 Tim. 6:12
* **Verse 18 Helmet of salvation** guards your mind -- the battlefield. Where is your mind set? (Romans 8:5-11) **Arrows are thoughts, false perceptions, and speculations**. He will attack you with the following: past-Justification (1 Cor. 6:9-11), present-sanctification (2 Cor. 5:17; John 17:17; Ephesians 4:22-24), and future-glorification. He is already defeated, for we are in Christ!

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Romans 5:1-11, 8:1-39, 12:1-2; Colossians 2:10-15

**Offensive Weapons of the Spirit**

***2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NASB)***

***For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.***

***2 Corinthians 6:7b (NIV)***

***with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.***

***Ephesians 6:17b-20 (NASB)***

***The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.***

**Word of God**

***John 6:63 (NASB)***

***It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.***

We must use the very same strategy as Jesus to combat our enemy (Matthew 4:1-4). The Sword of the Spirit is the use of ***very*** ***specific scriptures***; truths that combat the lies. (See the **WORD SEARCH: from Strong’s Concordance** below to define the difference in the **two** words translated in Greek for ***Word*** of God.) In this spiritual battle, we must use spiritual weapons (Ephesians 5:1-18). To be filled with the Spirit, we must be yielded to the Spirit and under His control. However, if we turn from hearing God’s Word, He will turn his face away from us when we pray.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Proverbs 15:8-29, 28:9; Isaiah 1:15, 59:1-3, 49:24-26, 54:13-17; Micah 3:4; 1 Peter 3:12; John 15:7-8

For example, once my family had a real battle on our hands when we came in contact with a woman who was obviously possessed with the devil. (She was chasing her own children around with a butcher knife). My husband and I both had our guard down, and we began to argue about what should be done about this situation. We both were unaware that, through unforgiveness and going to bed angry at one another, we left an open door for the devil. That was all he needed to come into our home, and when he did, a man connected with the demonic woman began to call and threaten to kill my youngest son. We were tricked into thinking the other was the enemy, and all the while the devil was gaining ground. That is until we came to our senses and began to humble ourselves in prayer and go to the Word of God for direction and correction (Eph. 4:17-32; James 1:19-25; Matthew 6:16-22).

Taking back surrendered ground requires confession and repentance. When we see our sin in the mirror of God’s Word, we need to agree with God and come clean (James 4:6-10; 1 John 1:9). The devil loves to do his work in the dark. Yet when we confess our sins to others, we are shedding light on the work of the Devil.

To stand, you must first bow to Jesus in humble submission to His Lordship. Satan can only take the ground we give to him when we have failed to obey God’s Word! Some of us are living defeated lives because we have surrendered ground to the adversary by failing to bow to the authority of God (2 Timothy 2:22-26; Luke 6:43-48).

**WORD SEARCH: from Strong’s Concordance**

* **WORD- Greek-Logos:** The divine expression –i.e. Christ-communication-utterance-mouth used in the following passages: John 1; 1-14 and 1 Peter 1: 23, Hebrew 4:12, John 8:31, 14:23, 1 John 1:1, Rev. 19:13
* **WORD- Greek- Rhema**: an utterance a specific a matter or topic command –Word. See this used in the following verses: **Matthew** **4**:**1**-**6**; Romans 10:8, 17; 1 Peter 1:26; Ephesians1:13; 5:26 & 6:1; Hebrews 1:3, 11:3; John3:34, 6:63 & 68; John 15:7; 1:25.
* **PRAY- Greek PROS-EUCHE or Prayer-PROS-EUCHOMAI**: Worship-oratory chapel-pray earnestly - pray to God i.e. supplicate, worship.
* **Worship- Greek is PROS-KUNEO**: to kiss like a dog licking his master’s hand-to fawn or crouch-to prostrate oneself in homage - do reverence to adore - WORSHIP. (John 4:20-24)
* **Continually-Greek PROS-KARTEREO:** earnest toward-persevere, constantly diligent-attend assiduously to all the exercises or to a person - to adhere closely to (as a servitor) attend give self continually, continue with - wait on continually. (Acts 6:4) KJV

**The Power of Prayer**

***James 4:3-10 (NIV)***

***When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.Your adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in u.But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”7Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.***

There's a direct correlation to my humbling myself in prayer and my awareness of His presence in the midst of spiritual battle. Because when we pray, not only do we draw near to God, but he also He comes near to us.

“Prayer is the greatest power on earth if it is practiced in the true fear of the LORD.” -- A. W. Tozer.

***Deuteronomy 4:7 (NIV)***

***“What other Nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our GOD is NEAR US whenever we pray to him?”***

The Lord Jesus prayed for us and taught us to pray for deliverance from the evil one (John 17:13-21). The prayers that start in heaven will be powerful on earth!

***Psalms 145:18 (NIV)***

***“The LORD is Near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in TRUTH.”***

God’s Word is truth! Whose prayers are powerful?

***James 5:13-16 (NIV)***

***Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Romans 8:26-27; 31-39; 1Peter3:8-12; Proverbs 28:9; 15:8, 29; Isaiah 59:1-3

***Psalms 27:1-3 (ESV)***

***The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes,  
it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.***

In his book Power and Magic, Clinton E. Arnold gives a thorough historical background of the concept of power as described in the book of Ephesus. On pages 38 and 39 he said:

The Epistle to the Ephesians was written to western Asia Minor with the likelihood of Ephesus as one, or perhaps the first destinations point. Ephesus functioned as a strategic center for Asia Minor- commercially, economically, in communications, and not least of all, in terms of its religious influence. In this respect, Ephesus served as the center for the worship of Artemis and the widespread practice of magic. An understanding of the worship and cult of Artemis and the practice of Hellenistic magic may therefore be quite important to an understanding of the background of the converts to whom Ephesians was written. The worshipers of Artemis extolled their goddess as supreme in power, a “cosmic” power that was believed to be superior to that of any other deity, astrological fate, and evil spirits. Artemis was closely linked with Hekate as a goddess of the underworld. For this reason, she could be called upon for protection from pernicious ‘powers.’ She could also be invoked to raise the dead, heal the sick, and protect the city.

He went on to say, “A knowledge of Hellenistic magic may very well be the most important background for understanding why the author highlights the power of God and the ‘powers’ of evil in Ephesians. This background may also help to explain the motivation for the lengthy admonition to prepare for engaging in ‘spiritual warfare’ and the particular emphases in the way the teaching on power is expressed in the epistle.”

**WORD SEARCH: FROM STRONG’S CONCORDANCE**

* **Power:** Strong’s # 1411 in Greek is Dunamis: force, miraculous power, a miracle itself, ability, abundance, power, strength, violence, mighty, wonderful work. (Ephesians 1:19A; 3:7, 3:30; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 1:3; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:5; Matthew 24:30; 26:18)
* **Power**: Strong’s # 2904 in Greek is Kratos: vigor (great) dominion, mighty, power, strength. (Eph. 1:19B; Colossians 1:11; 1 Tim. 6:16; Rev. 5:13)
* **Power**: Strong’s # 1849 in Greek is Exousia: capacity, competency, privilege, freedom, right, strength, mastery, delegated influence; authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power. (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; Matt. 28:18; John 1:12; Rev. 18:1; Jude 25; Colossians 2:10)

In the following verses, you can see that power and belief are closely connected. Could it be that the all surpassing power is unleashed only when we believe the Word of God?

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* + - * Mark 4:39, 9:23; Matthew 19:26; Luke 8:22-25, 9:37-43, 17:6, 18:18; James 1:5-8

Colossians 1:9-23; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 3:18-22; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; 13:4-6; 1 Cor. 1:18-25

With all the worship of false gods and evil deities in Asia Minor, no wonder they lived in fear. Prior to receiving salvation, these evil spirits ruled and dominated their lives. The powers of the kingdom of darkness is all they knew.

This explains why Paul put so much emphasis on the power of God in Christ. Evidently, after all the teaching and preaching they had received, they still needed to be reminded that God was in control. Sometime later, when Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote these words of encouragement to him: *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but* of power, *and* *of* *love*, *and* *of* *a* *sound* *mind* (2 Timothy 1:7, KJV). Although the power of God had certainly dispelled and overcome the kingdom of darkness, believers still lived in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation as sheep among the wolves. And so it is with us. But the good news is that, while we may be outnumbered, we will not be overcome…the gates of hell will not prevail against us… not now, not ever! “Now that,” as my pastor would say, “would be a great place to say AMEN!”

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Romans 5:5-6, 8:15, 31-37; Luke 12:4-7, 24:49; Acts 19:11-20; 2 Corinthians 5:11; Psalms 27:1; 1 John 4:1-4; Philippians 2:15; Matthew 10:16; Matthew 16-17-19

***Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)***

***Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.***

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. In the above passages, what is under the Lord Jesus’ power and authority?
2. Have you ever lived under the oppression of crippling fear?
3. If so, can you identify the root cause of this fear?
4. Read: Hebrews 2:12-18. In this passage, what did Jesus do to free us from the fear of death?
5. Read: Hebrew 1:1-3, what specifically does the Word of His power do?
6. Review the following list and see if you can identify the methods the enemy has used on you? His methods are: temptations of flesh, offense, sinful anger, unforgiveness, disputes, insecurities, fear, ignorance or deceptions, pride, distractions, confusion, delusions and discouragement.
7. Think about times of defeat. What weapons or armor were missing?
8. Who prepared you for this daily battle?
9. Is this person missing in your walk of faith?
10. Have you been taught to pray?
11. Read: Luke 11:1-3 and Matthew 6:16-22. Who teaches others to pray?
12. Are you preparing someone else to stand?
13. For a more in-depth study on this subject, we recommend the book, **Fiery Darts**, by Janet Lane. You can find her link on our resource page.

***Romans 8:35-39 (NIV)***

***35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

**Cross references:**

**Week #4**

**Promised to One Husband**

**Key Passages**

***Ephesians 4:13-15 (ESV)***

***Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.***

**Introduction**

Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as the Husband of His people. In fact, in the book of Hosea, this is one of His self-descriptions. Then, as we know, Paul unveiled a divine mystery that the church is the bride of Christ. It was during his time in Ephesus that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I promised you to One Husband – Christ.” It’s only natural then that he would choose this analogy in his rebuke of these saints. With the heart of a spiritual father, or spiritual match-maker, if you will, Paul was deeply concerned about their devotional, as well as, doctrinal purity.

***2 Corinthians 11:2-4 (NASB)***

***For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.***

One day, the Lord Jesus Christ will return for His bride -a pure bride. If we are going to remain pure until He comes, then we must be rooted and grounded in faith. If our doctrine is wrong, it will be reflected in a lack of devotion as well. And most of us, myself included, would be hard pressed to articulate what we believe and why we believe it. As Paul asserted in the key passage, those who are ill equipped can easily be led astray. In this age of deception, the church can no longer afford to be as some have said, “A mile wide, but an inch deep in doctrine. Therefore, in this lesson, we will learn about our historical foundation of the faith, how to defend it, and see what the Bible has to say about false teaching.

**Why does Doctrine Matter?**

Why is this so essential? Well for starters, an enormous amount of Scriptures, no less than 18 specific passages of the New Testament, are devoted to exposing false teachers peddling false doctrines. Therefore, if we are going to be a people of “The Word,” then we can’t ignore the what the Holy Spirit has to say here. Think about this: If the church is the pillar and foundation of Truth, then why is the world around us crumbling under the weight of satanic deception? Part of the reason, in my estimation, is that the church is seeing what the Lord warned us about in Matthew chapter 42. One sign of His return is a great falling away, or divorce, from the Church. Our churches, that once held hundreds, now, could easily fit its members into a class room. And it seems to me, that the only “Buildings” that are packed full, are the ones where seldom a Scripture is quoted or a Bible opened!

***1 Timothy 4:15-16 (NIV)***

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

Being the Old Testament scholar that he was, Paul understood the importance of teaching sound doctrine. He drilled it into Timothy because he knew how it would affect future generations if they weren’t grounded in the Truth.This is why, he repeatedly warned and equipped the churches to identify false gospels, false teaching and those who would propagate them. In his final instructions to the church at Ephesus, Paul spoke prophetically about just such people who would infiltrate the church.

***Acts 20:28-31 (ESV)***

***Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God,which he obtained with his own blood.I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.***

As we just read, in Paul’s departing remarks, he warned the saints to be on guard because after he left them, “savage wolves” would infiltrate the church. And sure enough, when Timothy was the Pastor of the church in Ephesus, Paul begins his letter to his beloved disciple by addressing just such “wolves” as these.

***1 Timothy 1:15-20 (ESV)***

***The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.***

***This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.***

Unlike the Corinthians Church, the Church at Ephesus heard the Truth, from Paul, then Timothy, and Saint John- the last living disciple. When Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, didn’t address any issues of heresy. But this was the only letter where this subject was not dealt with. To underscore this fact, thirty years later, the church at Ephesus was still holding on to this teaching and they were commended by the Lord Jesus for their stand upon the truth. Yet, unfortunately, they had left their first love. (Revelation 2:1-7)

**WORD SEARCH: from Strong’s Concordance**

* **Doctrine**: Greek words are didache/didaskalia in Strong’s #1322, 1319; information, instruction, learning, teaching, doctrine. (Acts 2:42; Titus 1: 9-16; 2:1-10; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 2 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 4:12-15; 2 John 9-10)
* **Disciple:** Greek word is matheteuo- a learner; to become a pupil; to disciple; i.e. enroll as scholar; to be a disciple; instruct; teach.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of the insights and personal applications.**

* Ephesians 4:11-16, 5:22-32; Isaiah 54:5-10; Acts 2:46; 1 John 2:18-29; Jude; Psalm 78:1-7, 145:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2;

**ESSENTIALS BELIEFS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

To begin with, you should know where we got all of our historical Christian creeds and confessions. They were written by the early church fathers in response to false doctrines and heretics. Along with the inspired writers of the Bible, here is a partial list of important historical Christian apologists: Justin Martyr, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas. These men stood their ground in defense of sound doctrine.

For example, the Apostles creed was written in response to the Gnostics and then the Nicene Creed was a response to Arianism. The same false Gospels and doctrines are alive and thriving in our day as well. (Galatians 1:6-9, 2 Corinthians 11:2-15) The Nicene Creed, drawn up in the fourth century, is emphatic in affirming the Deity of Christ, since it is directed against Arius. The Arians denied that Christ was fully God. The Apostles’ Creed, drawn up in the first or second century, emphasizes the true humanity of Jesus, including the material body. That is the point that the heretics of the time (Gnostics, Marcionites, and later Manicheans) denied. (1 John 4:1-3) The following is a list of the historical and Biblical foundations of our faith.

**Common Confessions**

***1Timothy 3:16 (NASB)***

***By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He, who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.***

1. **The Bible:**

Written over a span of 1000 plus years, the sixty-six books of the Bible were recorded by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of approximately 49 different writers. Each one of these men wrote as they were inspired by God. Throughout the ages God has preserved His Holy Book, and because of this, we can hold in our hands the very ***WORDS*** of ***GOD.***

We believe that the One, True, Eternal God has revealed Himself to humanity through the Holy Scripture. Saint Jerome (c. 347-420), historian, theologian, Doctor of the Church and Bible translator, said, “To be ignorant of the Bible is to be ignorant of Christ.”

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* John 1:1-18**;** 2 Timothy 2:3-6; 2 Timothy 3:13-4:4; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 1 Corinthians 2:4-16; 2 Corinthians 1:20-21; Hebrews 4:8-12

1. **The Holy Trinity:**

Some may argue that the word trinity is not found in the Bible. In this they are correct. Yet as we have already seen, in previous chapters, God has revealed Himself repeatedly in the Scriptures as Three Persons who co-exist as One. You may find it interesting to know that the original “Saint Nick” was an apologist. As one of the bishops who signed the Nicene Creed, Saint Nicholas stood his ground in opposing Arius, in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. In addition to his nontrinitarian belief, Arius propagated the lie that our Lord was created, not the Creator. Do you know what false religions today are pushing the same lie as Arius? Because we are fortunate to live in the information age, all these historical facts are readily available to anyone who will do their homework.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Genesis 1:1-27, 11:7; Exodus 20:3-6; Isaiah 6:8, 43:10, 44:6-8, 45:5-22, 46:9, 47:8, 48:16-17; Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19; Luke 9:28-36; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:3; John 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Romans 8:11

1. **The deity of Christ Jesus:**

Paul wrote to Timothy, while Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus, explaining that this truly was a great mystery: God was manifested in the4 flesh! (1 Timothy 3:16) We believe what the scriptures clearly state: The Lord Jesus Christ is the second person of the triune God. He is One with God the Father. He is God incarnate, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. Because of His virgin birth, in fulfillment of scripture, He is the Son of Man, and yet, He is 100% God. The God who identified Himself in the Old Testament as the great *I AM* is Christ Jesus. (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58)

In his annual Christmas message, Herb Hodges, recites a poem by Johnny Heart, the creator of the “B. C.” comic strip. It goes like this:

“It seems to me that since the ‘Fall’ — without even thinking it odd,

That man has had no trouble at all, believing that he can be God.

How he would do this I cannot conceive, Tho’ he certainly thinks he can;

And yet, he cannot bring himself to believe, That God can become . . . a man.”

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 43:10-14; Acts 10:34-48; Matthew 1:23; Micah 5:2; John 8:24, 58, 10:30-33, 17:24, 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 2:2; Romans 9:5-6, 10:9; Hebrews 1:1-13; Revelation 1:7-16; 1 John 4:2-3; 1 Timothy 2:3-6, 3:16

1. **The bodily death, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus:**

We believe, as was prophesied in the Old Testament, that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day. This is exactly as He predicted He would.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Hebrews 10:1-10; Isaiah 53; Psalm 22,40:6-7; Luke 24:37-39; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 4: 1-2; 2 John 7; Romans 10:9; Acts 13:33, 17:30-31; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-17

1. **The Doctrine of Grace:**

We believe that salvation is by grace alone and through faith in Christ Jesus alone. It is not of works. No one can earn righteousness or reconciliation with a Holy God. **Salvation is a *gift of grace*.**

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Ephesians 2:4-10; Titus 3:3-8; Romans 1:17, 3:20-28, 4:1-12, Galatians 2:15-16, 21, 3:15-16, 21, 5:4; John 6:28-29; James 2:14-26; Philippians 2:13, 3:9; Isaiah 64:6

1. **The Lord Jesus substitutionary atonement and justification of sinners:**

We believe the account of the fall and the doctrine of original sin. By birth into the human race, and by nature of our birth, we are in total depravity. Because of our sins, we are dead and separated spiritually from God our Creator. This fact necessitates a spiritual birth.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Ephesians 2:1-14; John 3:1-36; Acts 2:38, 16:31; Romans 3:22-26; 4:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; 1 Peter 1:22-25, 2:24

1. **His Second Coming:**

We believe that God will fulfill every word in the Bible. Therefore, one day, we know not when, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the world in righteousness, and He will ultimately reign over all. (James 4:12; Matthew 10:28, 24:29-51; Luke 21:25-38; John 5:21-23, 27, 9:39) Our hearts cry is: Come Lord Jesus!

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 1: 9-11; Philippians 2:9-11; Isaiah 45:23; Mark 16:19; Matthew 16:27; Revelation 1:7-18; Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-13; Psalms 2:1-12

**The Apostles Creed**

“*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one LORD, JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY SON of GOD, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, TRUE GOD from TRUE GOD, begotten not made, OF ONE being with the Father. Through Him ALL things were made. For us and for our salvation; He came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in the glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. WE believed in the Holy SPIRIT, THE LORD, the giver of LIFE, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”*

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal application**

* Revelation 22:16-20, 2 Peter 3:13-18, 1 Cor. 10:12, 1 John 2:21-27, 5:9-21, 2Peter 1:16-21

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Do your beliefs line up with the Bible?
2. What are the common confessions or fundamental doctrines of the faith?
3. Are there any of the common confessions that you do not believe?
4. Have you been taught any doctrine that is contrary to the above?
5. Do you believe in the inerrancy of the Bible?
6. If you have questions about whether or not you are a Christian, see the Chapter titled “Assurance of Salvation/ To See is to Know.”
7. Why does correct doctrine matter? Read: (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:20-21; 2 Corinthians. 11:1-15)
8. Read the following passages and answer this question: was correct doctrine important to the early church? Why or why not? (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1)
9. What are some teachings that you once believed that you now know were untrue?
10. Explain this statement: I will live what I believe even if what I believe is a lie.

**Phase Five**

**Wedding Preparation**

***Ephesians 5:28-30 (ESV)***

***In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.***

**He Cares for You**

The older one gets the more frequent the doctor visits and also the numerous funerals we will attend. Death is the great equalizer. The reality begins to sink in that one day we will breathe our final breath. That day could be sooner than we think.

***Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV)***

***He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.***

When faced with our own mortality, we’re forces us to deal with the fact that we are not the master of our lives, but one day we will meet the one who is. Are you prepared to meet your Maker? He alone has absolute rule over of death and life. Our bodies, as well as our souls, belong to Him, and will one-day return to the dust from whence we came. If we are wise, we’ll take this to heart.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

**Week # 1**

**A Profound Mystery**

***Ephesians 5:25-33 (ESV)***

***Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.***

**Introduction**

At last, we have arrived at the pinnacle passage in our study of the book of Ephesians. And because of its significance I’m earnestly praying for the help of the Holy Spirit in order to do it justice. “What’s so profound?”, you may ask. Well for starters, the marriage relationship between a man and woman is the one earthly commitment given that even comes close to portraying the intimacy that exist between Christ Jesus and His bride the church. That being said, we will look at both aspects of marriage – one being an earthly union and the other being divine. For you single folks, don’t worry, we will be majoring on the latter of the two.

Some time ago, while working my way through the study book entitled **Life Principles from The Women of the Bible**by Wayne Barber; Eddie Rasnake; and Richard Shepherd, the title of the last chapter naturally caught my attention. Interestingly enough, they chose the bride of Christ as the focus of their women of the Bible. Really, it makes since; the bride of Christ is the last woman of the Bible. Therefore, as a fitting introduction, I would like to share an excerpt from their study. It begins as follows:

“This is a different sort of lesson to find in a study on women of the Bible, but when God defined His relationship with the Church, he depicted her as a woman. He called the Church His bride. What is God saying through this? When we look at Biblical imagery, the pictures from the culture of the Old Testament and from the Jewish world of the first century can be very helpful in understanding the ways and will of God. The imagery of a bridegroom and a bride, of a husband and wife, gives us many pictures that help us understand our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as we look at wedding album to get a clear picture of a bride and groom, we can look at these pictures in scripture to see Christ and His Bride, the Church. Some pictures we will readily recognize. Others may be a surprise, but all that we see will bring us to a new and better understanding of what it means to walk with and follow our Bridegroom.”

**What is God’s Plan for Marriage?**

We had royalty in Memphis, Tennessee a couple of years ago. Princes’ William and Harry of Wales came to our humble city for a wedding. Fans and media came from all over the world just to get a glimpse of the future King of the United Kingdom. Do you think anyone who got an invitation to that wedding missed that once in a life time opportunity to possible rub shoulders with royalty? I doubt it. Furthermore, it really doesn’t matter if you have all the pomp and circumstance in the world and yet the King of King in not attending your wedding.

As it just so happened, that day marked another monumental event. However, it was scarcely noticed or acknowledged by anyone except my husband and me. It was our twenty-eighth wedding anniversary. Art and I talked over dinner that evening about how overwhelmingly merciful and gracious the Lord had been to us. He, who holds everything together, has held us together though some horrendous circumstances that would otherwise torn our house asunder. But its only because of the Lord’s intervention and salvation of two very broken, sinful and selfish people. Trust me when I tell you - it is nothing short of a miracle! God has taken a marriage that began with no semblance whatsoever to what was intended, and made it a trophy of grace.

There are several adages used to describe the wedding ceremony, such as tying the knot, jumping the broom, getting hitched etc. They obviously originated from some custom or another. This leads me to another subject and forgive me for getting on a soap box here for a moment. Now, not to take away the limelight from any one’s big day, but let’s face it - a wedding is a one - day event. And granted, it’s a great reason for rejoicing. Don’t get me wrong, I love weddings. However, in light of the fact that nearly half of marriages end in divorce, wouldn’t you agree that when a marriage has withstood the test of time, we should really have a celebration?! I mean spare no expense, dance till you drop, invite family and friends - kind of festivity! And do you know what? If you’re in Christ, then even if no one else shows up to celebrate, King Jesus will honor you with His presence.

This may sound strange for someone who owned a bridal business, but I have never thought of myself as a romantic. My mother, on the other hand, an avid reader, used to keep a ready supply of romance novels by her bed. I suppose Mamma could escape in these amorous fantasies to forget about her own broken marriage. No, romance novels were not my escape of choice. Mine was working long hours, being right in the thick of the joy and drama of happy brides preparing for their wedding day. I assure you, I was not the only one living vicariously through others excitement. Some of us will take happiness anywhere we can get it. Sadly, those seven years in business, I had several repeat customers. If we put as much emphasis on *who* we marry as we do the one-day event, maybe the divorce rates wouldn’t be so high.

“Marriage,” said G.K. Chesterton, “Is an adventure - like going to war.” Now I’m not quite sure if his observation is quite the same as mine. As far as I am concerned, it is war, but not the kind of war, we think it is. We fight as if our mate were the enemy, all the while the real enemy gets the upper hand on our marriage. I’m talking about the Devil. And, once again, this brings to light the vital role the older women in the church must play in equipping the younger women to love their husbands and children by the Biblical standard.

I am a poster child of what not to do in marriage, but I have learned a few things alone the way. Number one: we cannot give love if we have not received it. Number two: ***Jesus*** ***is*** ***love,*** and we will never know love until we receive Him as Lord and Savior because He is the One who our souls long for.

After I was saved, I had an opportunity to do an interview on our local Christian radio to advertise my bridal business. This was my first time to speak on the radio. My manager and all her single roommates were listening to the interview. She later said I made them cry. I really do not remember speaking that much about my business. But, I do remember what was on my heart, and that was making an appeal to Christian women to look for a man who truly loved Jesus. Because only a man in Christ, could give her true love. But even then, no early relationship was meant to fill the God sized void in our soul.

At best, even a wonderful marriage can only be but a shadow of the genuine article… God’s matchless, unfailing love!

In her book, Fiery Darts, Janet Warren Lane has two chapters devoted to this subject. She said,

“We could do nothing better to Prepare us to live life and love others, especially a future spouse successfully, by studying and applying the truths about love from the book written by the author of love! If we could get grounded in understanding true love because we have spent extended time in learning about true love from the source of true love, God, then we would enter relationships as a whole, healthy, and complete individual. We would handle problems we encounter in those relationships from a healthier perspective. Having been taught to recognize genuine love we would avoid relationships that offered anything less.”

Oh how I wish Art and I had known Jesus before we met and married! The only love we had to offer one another was a false love with strings attached. When the condition wasn’t met, we broke like a weak thread. Now, let’s compare this to God’s huge heart of love, so beautifully described in Hosea.

***Hosea 11:4, 8b***

***I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them”. 8b “My heart is chained within me; all my compassion is aroused.***

I gave my daughter Allie, and my daughter in law the same advice before they got married. I told them: As wonderful as that man is, he will never be your Jesus. No one can fill His shoes. And furthermore, they were never meant to. Only Jesus can fill the God shaped void in your life. It was Saint Augustine who said it best. He said, “Thou hast made us for thyself, Oh God, and the hearts of men are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

This is the best advice I could ever give a single woman who desires to be married. Fall in love with Jesus, and the man who God has chosen for you will be drawn to Christ in you. But, if you find yourself unequally yoked to a man who is not a believer, get to know Jesus intimately, let Him be your husband. Find a spiritual mother who will teach you how to love this man with the unconditional love of Jesus. Know this for sure: you are not an unloved woman who is married if you are the Bride of Christ!

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* John 1:1-3; Hebrew 1:1-12; Colossians 1:13-20; Isaiah 54:1-17; Proverbs 30:23

**Eternal Love**

British poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, said: “Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” What do you think about Tennyson’s observation? Is it better to have love and then lose it, then to never know love at all?

When my daughter was contemplating whether or not to begin a relationship with her would be husband, Justin, she was really struggling with the decision. I knew she really liked him and he was very much in pursuit to win her heart. So I asked her what was disturbing her most and she said, "I don’t want to enter this relationship if I might get my heart broken.” My answer to her was this: “You will never experience real love and protect your heart from being broken!” Real love involves your mind, emotions, and finally your will. When you stop thinking good thoughts about a person, and you don’t fell love from that person, then all that is left is a choice of the will. So people choose to leave us because they don’t value us; they leave and our hearts are broken. On the other hand, when we love someone, and they hurt- we hurt. And then there is the life–shattering reality that we all must face…we will bury people we love - and our hearts will be shattered into pieces. You cannot love and protect your heart. It is a fact of life. The heavenly Father did not protect His heart from pain when He gave His Precious Son to die to purchase us. This is how He showed His great love for us! And the Lord Jesus did not protect His heart from suffering in His passion on Calvary’s cruel cross. It was love that put Him there! In the words of a song from my youth---“LOVE HURTS!” The wise C.S. Lewis wrote, “If you love deeply, you’re going to get hurt badly. But it’s still worth it.” When love is lost it is devastating, it hurts deeply, and it breaks our heart. But this kind of pain may also be a catalyst to find true love, unfailing love, and eternal love…the kind of love, so perfect, that it puts us back together. When this happens…this sorrow is really a blessing in disguise.

Songs are really, stories or poetry put to music. They can make us cry, express emotions, or help us to find words to express how we really feel. I’d like to tell you about one such song. A few years ago Allie and I were watching television when we heard Rascal Flatts preform their song, “The Broken Road”. As we listened to the words, I said to Allie. “This song is about Jesus!” For me, this song ***is about Him***! Every-one who broke my heart, was pointing me straight to the one and only true love of my life…Jesus! I ask, as you read these lyrics, think about others who broke your heart; are you still searching for this kind of love?

The Broken Road

I set out on a narrow way many years ago - Hoping I would find true love along the broken road

But I got lost a time or two - Wiped my brow and kept pushing through

I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you - That every long lost dream leads me to where you are - Others who broke my heart, they were like northern stars

Pointing me on my way into your loving arms

This much I know is true - That God blessed the broken road- That led me straight to you

Yes, it did

I think about the years I spent just passing through - I'd like to have the time I lost and give it back to you - But you just smile and take my hand - You've been there you understand

It's all part of a grander plan that is coming true

Every long lost dream led me to where you are - And others who broke my heart they were like northern stars - Pointing me on my way into your loving arms - This much I know it's true

That God blessed the broken road -That led me straight to you

Yeah

And now I'm rolling home -Into my lover's arms - This much I know is true -That God blessed the broken road - That led me straight to you - That God blessed the broken road

Ooh, ooh

That led me straight to you

The Lord does not invite us to come, not to a place, nor to a work, although, He has good work planned for each of us to do; but too ***Him-self***! (Ephesians 2:10) The first call is the voice of the Father, “***This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”*** Then we hear the Beloved’s invitation, “***Is anyone thirsty let him come to Me and drink***” …. (John 7:37-38) The Lord Jesus’ words to the repentant sinner on the cross were, “***Today you will be WITH ME***.” (Luke23:43) To the weary and burdened soul His invitation is, “***Come to ME and you will find rest***.” (Matthew 11:26) You see, we ***were*** ***all*** far away from Him without God and without hope in this world, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought ***near*** through the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:1-22)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

**Think About These Things**

**Memory Verses**

***Isaiah 54:4-13 (NIV)***

***“Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth    and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.5For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.6The Lord will call you back  
    as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God.7“For a brief moment I of anger  I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting Kindness  I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord your Redeemer.***

***9“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. 10Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.11“Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,  
    I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with lapis lazuli. 12I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.13All your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their peace.***

**Week # 2**

**Prone to Wander**

**Gospel Advance and Benediction**

**Key Passages**

***Ephesians 6:21-24 (ESV)***

***So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.***

***Revelation 2:1-7 (NIV)***

***To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:***

***These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.***

***Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.***

Continuing with the history of the church at Ephesus, as we have already seen, these saints embraced sound doctrine, and that a good thing. But Paul closed his letter to the church at Ephesus with this reminder; doctrine means nothing if we don’t love the God that these doctrines point to.

***Ephesians 6:24 (NASB)***

***Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love.***

We have just read the last words that Paul penned to these believers. How quickly we tend to forget, because only thirty years or so later, their love for Jesus had eroded into nothing more than religious activities. They held onto these doctrines but they walked away from Jesus…. What a sad statement. Equally as tragic, is the fact that they were the recipients, and *the stewards* of perhaps more truth than any other church.

Let’s try to grasp the all-important take away from their example. We can know all the doctrines of the faith, take a stand against evil men, do good deeds, persevere under trials, explain deep truths of God, and yet it is all for naught if we let our love for Jesus grow cold. It occurs to me that it is easier to hold on to religious rituals than it is to walk in a love relationship with the Lord. Why is that?

# ***Jeremiah 2:2, 32 (NIV)***

***2“Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “This is what the Lord says:***

***“‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me*  
*and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. 32***

***32Does a young woman forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments?*  
*Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.***

Even those who have walked in close intimate fellowship with Him are prone to wander. An old hymn written in the 1700, by a man named Robert Roberson ends with a truth the saints, throughout the ages, would like to ignore, we are prone to leave the God we love. The song is “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”. The third stanza is as follows: “O to grace how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be! Let thy goodness like a fetter, bind my wondering heart to thee: prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here’s my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above. Amen”. The writer of those words describes what I know of my own sinful heart. After almost three decades of walking with the Lord Jesus and seeing His gracious acts on my behalf, at times I still drift away from intimacy with the Lord. What baffles me even more is just how frighteningly short are the steps from walking in intimacy with the Lover of my soul, to drifting away from Him into indifference or worse yet, blatant sin! Thankfully, God’s love and faithfulness toward us is not contingent upon our love and faithfulness to Him.

***2 Timothy 2:13 (NIV)***

***If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.***

This quote by G.K. Chesterton sums up what is too often missing in the life of the church: “Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.” Eventually the Saint left their first love. The building that was once the meeting place of the Saints in Ephesus is now a house of worship for another pagan god named Mohammad. Today the lamp that once burned brightly in Ephesus is extinguished. Their love for Jesus died!

The following is a quote from Mike Bickle the director of the international House of Prayer of Kansas City, Mo.

*“God designed us in His image to be lovers of God! The capacity to feel deeply and love passionately is truly one of the great expressions of being created in God’s image. Of course, this capacity can be dangerous and destructive if not stewarded properly. But the capacity to burn with deep desire in the heart is what separates us from the rest of Creation. Ultimately, the Great commission will be fulfilled by people lovesick for God and thus overflowing with compassion for other people. Lovers are more effective than mere workers. When workers become lovers, they throw away the obligatory checklist. They no longer need it. There lovesick hearts provide a higher and more trustworthy rule to live and work by. When we extravagantly obey God out of a fascinated, exhilarated heart, we come into the position of the bride in Song of Songs who pursues her Bridegroom out of “LOVESICKNESS.”* (Song of Songs 2:5, 5:8)

As the Lover of our souls, the Lord Jesus bids us to come, not to a place, not to a work, but to ***Himself***. His design and desire is a relationship, and He is not one bit pleased with our empty religious activities. Furthermore, our work for Jesus will be worthless if we do not love Jesus. Work is the overflow of worship. Only through abiding in an intimacy with Christ will we find our deepest desires met. And then we will know the glorious purpose He has for our life, plans made for us before the foundation of the earth.

This prayer by A.W. Tozer is a fitting conclusion for everyone whose hearts desire is to return to their first love.

A prayer by A.W. Tozer:

“O God, I have tasted thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more.

I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me thy Glory, I pray thee, that I may know thee indeed. Begin, in mercy, a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Then give me grace to rise and follow thee up from this lowland where I have wandered so long.”

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make note of any insights and persona you find.**

* Deuteronomy 6:1-7; Eph.6:23-24; John 15:7-17; 1 Cor. 3:5-17, 13:2; Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 2:1-13; Revelation 2:1-5

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. Have you ever experienced a time when you walked in intimacy with God?
2. If you’re not presently experiencing this kind of relationship with Him, what happened that extinguished the love?
3. What do people *do* when they are first “In love”?
4. Would you describe yourself as ***growing*** in adoration for the Lord Jesus?
5. Do you find yourself talking more about Jesus than to Jesus? (Isaiah 56:6-7)
6. Have you ever been taught how to have a quiet time with the Lord? (Luke 10:39-42)
7. What makes the bride of Christ beautiful to her Bridegroom? (Song of Solomon 4:10)

**Think On These Things**

**Memory Verses**

***1 John 4:19 (NIV)***

***We love because he first loved us.***

**Stewards of Great Treasure**

**Matthew 25:14-30 (NET)**

***At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Fiveof the virgins were foolish, and five were wise. Whenthe foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take extraolive oilwith them. But the wise ones took flasks of olive oil with their lamps. Whenthe bridegroom was delayed a long time, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him.’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. Thefoolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied. ‘There won’t be enough for you and for us. Go instead to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’***  ***But while they had gone to buy it, the bridegroom arrived, and those who were ready went inside with him to the wedding banquet. Thenthe door was shut. Later,the other virgins came too, saying, ‘Lord, lord! Let us in!’ But he replied,‘I tell you the truth, I do not know you!’ Therefore, stay alert, because you do not know the day or the hour.***

***“For it is like a man going on a journey, who summoned his slavesand entrusted his property to them. Toone he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The one who had received five talents went off right away and put his money to workand gained five more. In the same way, the one who had two gained two more. But the one who had received one talent went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money in it. Aftera long time, the master of those slaves came and settled his accounts with them. Theone who had received the five talents came and brought five more, saying, ‘Sir, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ His master answered, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’ Theone with the two talents also came and said, ‘Sir, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more.’ His master answered, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’ Then the one who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Sir, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed, soI was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered, ‘Evil and lazy slave! So you knew that I harvest where I didn’t sow and gather where I didn’t scatter? Then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received my money back with interest! Therefore, take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten. For the one who has will be given more,and he will have more than enough. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless slave into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’***

Now let’s contemplate the implications of the Parable of the Stewards.

Jesus had an innate ability to seize teachable moments. Always using the earthy things at hand to communicate spiritual truths. Many of these truths were hidden in parables, and they are chock-full of gospel messages. So, following the Master’s example, we will mine the gospel from a few of these parables. Let’s begin with The Parable of the Pearl of Great Worth.

**Matthew 13:44-46 (NET)**

***“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field.***

***“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls.*** ***When he found a pearl of great value, he went out and sold everything he had and bought it.***

After reading an abundance of commentaries from well trusted pastors and teachers, it is apparent that they do not all agree on the interpretation of the Treasure Hidden in the Field and The Pearl of Great Worth. However, just as each one of the four gospels examines the accounts of Jesus from their own point of view, God has supplied the church with gifted teachers for the same purpose. For instance, some say these two parables have identical meanings. That they both are symbolic of salvation. Others say that when we have received this rare and priceless gift, it’s worth is so great that we will give up all we possess to have it. And yet from another’s perspectives - Both the Treasure and the Pearl represent the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20; Isaiah 53:1-12). Some would say that the Christian is the merchant who is seeking Him. And then there’s the thought that the “field” that the treasure is hidden in is the gospel message. I am not quite sure how to reconcile all of these view-points, but proper Biblical exegesis requires comparing one passage to another, thus allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. So That’s what we will do.

**Seeking Merchant is The Hound of Heaven**

**Romans 3:9-11 (NET)**

***What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin, just as it is written:***

***“There is no one righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands,***

***there is no one who seeks God.***

Of all the messages I have heard on this parable, perhaps none are as clear as Dr. Adrian Rogers’ interpretation of the Pearl of Great Worth. You can hear his message on the following YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2H1mSS871g>. In this message, Doctor Rogers told the story of the Pearl of Lao Tzu. According to Wikipedia.org, the Pearl of Lao Tzu is the largest pearl (that human eyes have seen) was found in the Philippines in 1934. It was formed inside of a giant clam and weighed about 14 pounds. The pearl is said to be valued at nearly 60 million dollars. The diver who discovered it lost his life in an attempt to bring it up to the surface.

Clearly, it’s not difficult to see the similarities in Jesus’ parable and this story. But this is where the stories deviate. The value of the Pearl of Lao Tzu, pales in comparison to the Pearl in Jesus’ parable. In Dr. Rodgers’ message he said, (and I’ll paraphrase,) “We seek God as much as a criminal seeks a police officer!” We don’t seek God… He seeks us.

**Luke 19:10 (NET)**

***For the Son of Man cameto seek and to save the lost.***

Like the diver who found the pearl of Lao Tzu, the Lord Jesus left His kingdom and plunged into the depth of a sea full of broken, sinful humanity in search of the Pearl of Great Worth. The Lord Jesus is the Merchant. So what does the pearl represent? The pearl is the church – the bride of Christ. In the words of the old hymn, Victory in Jesus, it says: “He sought me and bought me, with His redeeming blood; He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him, He plunged me to victory, beneath the cleansing flood.”

The English poet, Francis Thompson, in his poem, The Hound of Heaven, wrote of a God who pursues His treasure. We have broken His commandments, and, just like criminals hide from the law, we hide from God. Even so, He searches us out, not to apprehend us or hold us accountable for our crimes, but to save us. He paid the highest cost to purchase a bride for Himself from every tribe and nation (Romans 5: 6-12; John 3:14-19; Ephesians 2:1-15). He knows who we are and where we are. We may run, but we cannot hide from the Hound of Heaven (Jeremiah 23:24).

Kiki Carson, a beautiful addition to our disciple group, tells us of how the Lord sought her when she was an exchange student in Morocco, of all places! Kiki said, “He was pursuing me like a Bridegroom pursues His bride.” Don’t you just love that? If you are in Christ, although you may have been unaware of it, He did the same for you. Although, sometimes, the instruments God uses to draw us, may seem like a contradiction to His love - especially when it involves suffering. During one such time in my life, the following passage became very real and personal to me.

***Psalms 18:16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me and drew me out of deep water. He rescued me.*** If I am being honest, Jesus is still rescuing me out of some mighty deep waters of many kinds. It comes as no surprise that the word *rescue* is found in the definition of the Greek words: ***forgive, grace, and save***.

What kind of circumstances did the Lord bring into your life as He wooed you to Himself? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Luke 15:1-10 (NET)**

***Now all the tax collectorsand sinners were comingto hear him. Butthe Phariseesand the experts in the lawwere complaining, “This man welcomessinners and eats with them.”***

***SoJesustold themthis parable: “Which oneof you, if he has a hundredsheep and loses one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the open pastureand go look forthe one that is lost until he finds it? Thenwhen he has found it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. Returninghome, he calls togetherhisfriends and neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.’ I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinnerwho repents than over ninety-nine righteous peoplewho have no need to repent.***

***“Or what woman, if she has ten silver coinsand losesone of them, does not light a lamp, sweepthe house, and search thoroughly until she finds it? Thenwhen she has found it, she calls together herfriends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the cointhat I had lost.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of God’s angelsover one sinner who repents.”***

Even when we leave the Father and squander the wealth of His love, the Good Shepherd will still leave the ninety-nine others in search of one lost sheep. “Repentance,” someone has said, “is turning away from sin and when you do, you will find Jesus -- the one who pursues lost sinners.” You see, God is a God of second chances.

Have you ever been curious about Heaven, or wondered what goes on there? Well, in the Parables of the Lost Things, we get a rare glimpse. Peeking through the window of God’s Word we see a party. What are they celebrating? In each of the above allegories, Jesus told us that a joyful party begins every time a sinner repents. Why might that be? For every time a sinner repents; we are one step closer to the culmination of all things. And His bride is longing for the day when King Jesus comes to get His bride. Now, if the celebration that happens in heaven when one sinner repents is something wonderful, can you imagine what the Wedding Supper of the Lamb will be like?

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15-16; John 17:18-23; Romans 1:16; 10:9-18; Isaiah 44:1-8; 49:6-10; Eph. 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:14-17, 5:10- 6:2

**Week # 3**

**The Best for Last**

**Key Passage**

***Ephesians 1:10 (NASB)***

***With a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him.***

**Introduction**

For the seven years that I owned the bridal gallery, most weekends I stood with the bride and usually her Father behind as set of doors and we waited for the cue of a special song: like, The ***Wedding march, or Here Comes the Bride***. As the doors opened, I would fluff her train and it would float like a cloud to the ground, usually strewn with rose pedals and there she was, with every eye in the room was focused on her, especially the bridegroom. But from my position, in the back of the church, my attention shifted from the bride to the groom. Sometimes, he became so overcome with joy at the sight of his beloved that it would bring him to tears. It was his face, beholding his beautiful bride, which moved me the most. For instance, just recently at my son’s wedding, when everyone stood and turned to see my beautiful daughter in law Jessica walk down the aisle, I looked at my son and saw tears of joy rolling down his face.

However, in the days when the Lord Jesus walked this earth, it was the bridegroom, not the bride, who was the center of attention.

For two thousand plus years, He has been preparing a place for us in His Father’s house. (John 14:1-3) But one glorious day the Father will say to King Jesus, “Son, go get your Bride, it’s time for the wedding.” Now let’s imagine Handel’s *Messiah* is the melody that’s playing as the pearly gates swing open. Everything and everyone else fades to the peripheral, the veil will be removed and we will see the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in all His glory. Just the thought of that day makes my heart beat with anticipation. For when that day comes, all things in heaven and on earth will be summed up and filled up in Him**.** When all is said and done… every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that***Jesus Christ is Lord****!* “And the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” (Rev. 22:17)

**A Sight for Sour Eyes**

***Psalms 45:1-12 (NIV)***

***My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king;***  
***my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.2You are the most excellent of men***  
***and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. 3Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one;    clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.4In your majesty ride forth victoriously***  
***in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.5Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king’s enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet.6Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.***  
***7You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.8All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.9Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.10Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house. 11Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your Lord.12The city of Tyre will come with a gift, people of wealth will seek your favor.***

[*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Or possibly Lilies*

1. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Possibly Contemplative, or Didactic, or Skillful Psalm*
2. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Lit is astir*
3. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Lit am saying*
4. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Lit works*
5. [*Psalm 45:1*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14599) *Probably refers to Solomon as a type of Christ*
6. [*Psalm 45:2*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14600) *Or through*
7. [*Psalm 45:3*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14601) *Or warrior*
8. [*Psalm 45:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14602) *Or fearful*

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6. [*Psalm 45:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14602) *:* [*Zeph 2:3*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zeph%202:3&version=NASB)
7. [*Psalm 45:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14602) *:* [*Ps 21:8*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2021:8&version=NASB)
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23. [*Psalm 45:12*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14610) *:* [*Ps 87:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2087:4&version=NASB)
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26. [*Psalm 45:14*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14612) *:* [*Song 1:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Song%201:4&version=NASB)
27. [*Psalm 45:14*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14612) *:* [*Judg 5:30; Ezek 16:10*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Judg%205:30,%20Ezek%2016:10&version=NASB)
28. [*Psalm 45:14*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14612) *:* [*Ps 45:9*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%2045:9&version=NASB)
29. [*Psalm 45:17*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14615) *:* [*Mal 1:11*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mal%201:11&version=NASB)
30. [*Psalm 45:17*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalms%2045:1-17&version=NASB#en-NASB-14615) *:* [*Ps 138:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps%20138:4&version=NASB)

There is an old hymn written by Charles W. Fry in 1881 titled: The Lily of the Valley. The writer finds his lyrics, in part; from Song of Solomon 5:9 “My ***Beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand”.*** The songs refrain is,“He is the Lilly of the Valley, the Bright and Morning, Star; He’s the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.” Another hymn of praise, written by Charles Wesley, states the frustration of his soul as he tries to describe the object of his affections. Wesley’s song begins with: “O, for A Thousand Tongues to sing... My great Redeemer’s praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!” Is Jesus the fairest of ten thousand to your soul? Is He the indescribable object of your affections, or is He just a “foot note” added to the end of your to-do list?

Try as we might, it is just not possible to communicate how great He is. Even the apostle John ended his gospel with these words: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:24-25) There are simply not enough words, in any language, to describe Him. Yet if we could write a thousand songs or placed ten thousand mighty men beside Him, none would compare to the *LORD JESUS*.

If we could write a thousand songs, or placed ten thousand mighty men beside Him, none would compare to the ***LORD JESUS.*** Oh for the ability to grasp that we, the Bride of Christ, have been placed in God… eternally! What an incomprehensible honor! Nothing in this world can compare to the matchless, magnificent, unfailing love of God be found in Christ Jesus our Lord. There are simply not enough adjectives in any language to describe Him. We cannot sing His praises enough, nor thank Him enough or ever possibly love Him enough!

I only pray, that I have magnified Him, make much of Him, and helped you in some way to know Him better. I plead with you, don’t keep these riches to yourself find someone to share the wealth with!

The ultimate goal of obedience to the Great Commission is to spread the knowledge of Him, so that His name and fame would be known to the ends of the earth, till His kingdom comes.

***Revelation 5:6-14 (ESV)***

***And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,***

***“Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”***

***Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,***

***“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!”***

***And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,***

***“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”***

***And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.***

***In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” 13Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”***

**A Happy Ending**

In his message, “A Complete Christmas”, Herb Hodges said: “With Jesus, the rest of the story is the best of the story.” And so we will end with the best part of the story. As we rap-up our study of Ephesians, let’s return to the story of its history. According to tradition, Saint John the Apostle spent his last years in Ephesus. Belief is, he died and was buried there around AD 98. Again, this brings to light the significance of the church at Ephesus. Most of the historical information we have on John was recorded and passed along through John’s disciple Polycarp, and his disciple Irenaeus - an important early church father.

It was during Johns residency in Ephesus that he wrote the gospel of John and his three other epistles. As the “Disciple Whom Jesus Loved,” it’s not surprising that the love of God was the central theme of his writing. (John 3:16, 21-24; 1, 2, 3 John)

I would like to point out that Paul and saint John had at least two significant things in common. In addition to the fact that they both personally ministered to the saints at Ephesus, they received revelation and interpretation of several divine mysteries. These mysteries had only been alluded to in the writings of the Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah and Hosea. (Isaiah 54:5-17; Hosea 2:14-23, 3:15) Paul and John were the recipients of the divine mystery that the Church is the blood bought Bride of Christ. Let’s not forget that both Paul and John were flesh and blood men, just like us. However, they both record for us the Revelation of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 8:1-7; 1 Corinthians 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1-6; John 1:14-18, 2:1-11; 1 John 1:1-4, 4:2; 2 John 7; Revelation 1:1-20, 19:11-18

John was the youngest of the disciples. He was there when Jesus performed His first miraculous sign - the changing of water into wine at the Wedding in Cana.

And it must have made an indelible impression on him. Because he testifies that this was the hour He first believed. John said, “He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him.” John saw Jesus glory on another occasion. He, his brother James and Peter were on the top of a mountain alone with Jesus when suddenly Jesus face shone with the glory of God and He was transfigured before their very eyes. “*Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.”* (Matthew 17:1-2) (NASB)

Many years later, John was eighty years old when he was imprisoned on an island in Greece. The Lord Jesus visited His beloved disciple. Once again, John saw the glory of God in Jesus. His face, said John, was “shinning like the sun.” It was almost too much for John to bear. John’s aged eyes were about to see the final vision of Christ Jesus in all of His glory. And John wrote what heard and saw:

***Revelation 1:17-19 (NASB)***

***When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.19Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.***

The Holy Spirit took, the Beloved Disciple, by the heart and showed Him the final chapter of God’s Book. I wonder if John was thinking to himself, the same thing the servants said at the wedding in Cana, when his spiritual eyes first received sight, “***You have saved the best for last!***” I picture John as he took out his scroll and began, with the trembling hands of a skillful writer, he recorded for us the vision of The Bridegroom…the Lamb of God who took away our sins…The Lord-God-Almighty…King-of-Kings…and Lord-of-Lords.

***Revelation 21:1-12 (NIV)***

***Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”***

***5He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”***

***6He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”***

***9One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10And he 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. 11It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.***

**The King Is Coming**

# **Our God and King will come, in all His majesty, riding on a white horse, and His Bride will see Him as He is, face to face in all His glory. (Rev. 19:7-16) I personally believe that when the trumpet sounds, and He comes to get his Bride in the clouds, the words we will hear are the words King Solomon spoke to his bride in Song of Solomon.**

# *Song of Solomon 2:8-10 (NIV)*

***Listen! My beloved!  
    Look! Here he comes,  
leaping across the mountains,  
    bounding over the hills.  
9My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.  
    Look! There he stands behind our wall,  
gazing through the windows,  
    peering through the lattice.  
10My beloved spoke and said to me,  
  “Arise, my darling,  
    my beautiful one, come with me.***

Just the thought of it makes the heart beat faster with anticipation. I imagine Handel’s Messiah is the melody we hear as the Pearly gates swing open and we are ushered into the presence of the Bridegroom-the King of Glory!

For the Bride of Christ, the author of our story has already written the last line…And they lived forever and ever… Happily-Ever-After!

**Think About These Things**

**Memory Verses**

# *Revelation 22:16-17 (NIV)*

***I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.***