**A Profound Mystery**

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**He Saved The Best For Last**

**Book Four**

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Scriptures used are from the NET Bible and the King James version of the Holy Bible.

See notations after each passage referenced.

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And lastly, I thank God for Herb Hodges. He has been instrumental in my life in casting the vision for true biblical disciple making.

**The Author**

Mingled among cherished memories, and a few I would rather forget, there is a wedding theme woven throughout my life story. My Husband and I had just gotten married when we decided to open a wedding boutique. So, for the first seven years of our marriage, my career was preparing brides for their weddings. Sound’s wonderful, does it not? Love, marriage, and happily ever after are the kinds of things little girls dream of, right? Yet something very important was missing. It was the One who created marriage in the first place–God who is the source of love! And, without love as the key ingredient, inevitably, dreams fall apart. So here I was, a broken woman, from a broken home, in a broken marriage, dressing brides for their most important day.

When I was twenty-seven years old, I met the love of my life, the Lord Jesus Christ, and I became His bride. The next thirteen years were spent growing in intimacy with my Savior and persistently praying for my husband. After many painful trials and heartaches, Art also met the Lord Jesus. Finally, the two of us became one. By God’s grace, and His grace alone, Art and I have now been married for 30 years. The Lord has blessed us with three beautiful children, a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law that God handpicked for our children. But that’s not all, He has given us two of the sweetest granddaughters in the world. I can testify that God is the healer of broken lives. I am humbled and honored to have the joy of sharing with you, not only the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ but also bits and pieces of my life story as well.

Today, I am the Women’s Discipleship Coordinator for Catalyst Missions. My life is all about dressing the bride of Christ by making disciples, from my home to the nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 21:1-2). It’s all about spiritual relationship. So please invite a friend or two to join you as together we discover the riches of God’s love through the study of the gospel message from the book of Ephesians.

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**Introduction**

**Week #1**

**A Profound Mystery**

**Key Passage**

**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.”

**Oh How He Loves Us**

**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.***

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.

**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:** 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**

**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.***

**Introduction**

As we near the end of our study of the book of the history of the church at Ephesus, and see what became of these believers, let’s look at an Old Testament example found in the book of Hosea. The symbolism found in this book is a perfect analogy for the heart of God towards His bride- the church.

As we have already seen, the saints in Ephesus embraced sound doctrine. That’s a good thing. Yet Paul closed his letter to the church with this statement: “Grace with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.” You see, 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.***

***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.***

In a world that is continually changing, stability is illusive. God changes not… He is immovable… The same, yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever. He does not move. We do. In passages like the following, we find the eternal security and stability: Psalms 33:11, Isaiah 14:24; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:17-19, 10:23, 13:8.

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.

“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:** 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.***

**Week #**

**Stand Firm in The Lord**

**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 6:10-12 (NET)**

***Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power.Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.***

**Introduction**

What little girl doesn’t dream of a knight who comes to her rescue ridding on a white horse? Would you like to know where this fanciful romantic image came from? It is not from a fable, but straight out of the greatest love story ever told in the pages of the Bible. Right there at the end of God’s story we see Him… King Jesus…. the Prince of Peace, returns for His bride. And yes, He is riding in on a white horse. Our heart’s cry is… even so Lord Jesus come!

But as you well 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?

# The Powerlessness of the Excluded Middle Worldview September 15, 2017 by [Wade Trimmer](http://tridm.org/v1/author/wade/)

If the people of God are to recover their effectiveness in setting captives free and pulling down demonic strongholds, then we must reinstate the middle level into our worldview and realize that there is an invisible, but real world engaged in an invisible, but very real war. All persons since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden have been born into a battle zone and into a battle – the Conflict of the Ages – the Battle of the Two Seeds. To become a Christian isn’t to quit fighting, but to change sides! It’s to discover whom the real enemy is and that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God. We become royal soldiers of the Kingdom of God – Kings Kids in Training for Reigning, with no conscientious objections or retirement allowed. And all enemies of the kingdom of God and all deserters from it, will eventually be arrested by the long arm of death, transported by holy angels to the final court martial, and then locked in an eternal brig called hell!

Spiritual warfare is not a new thing. It’s not a fair thing either. The enemies of the Lord of Hosts have already lost the war and all our battling today is from victory in Christ and not for victory. Spiritual warfare isn’t the latest church fad, or a momentary gust of emotion to try and bolster our flagging faith and frighten the devil away. Quite the opposite! Real spiritual warfare is a mental and spiritual condition – a seeing with the eyes of faith the invisible, but real warfare in the heavenlies – and this demands a life-long allegiance to King Jesus.

As we will discuss in another book, marriage, and family were God’s idea. God is pro - family and pro – life. 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!

When Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote these words of warning describing the last days.

**2 Timothy 3:1-7 (NET)**

***But understand this, that in the last days difficulttimes will come. For people will be lovers of themselves,lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, opposed to what is good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, loving pleasure rather than loving God.  They will maintain the outward appearanceof religion but will have repudiated its power. So, avoid people like these. For some of these insinuate themselves into households and captivate weak womenwho are overwhelmed with sins and led along by various passions.***

I’d say that we have arrived, wouldn’t you?

**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? For the most part, 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.

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

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

***You are from God, little children, and have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world’s perspective and the world listens to them. We are from God; the person who knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.***

**Jesus- The Commander of the Host of Heaven**

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

***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! So then, dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.***

Before we delve into the specifics of spiritual warfare, let’s focus of the One who has gone before us… Jesus our victorious King. He is the One who rescued from sin and death and transferred into His kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). He is the source of our strength. Even if we feel powerless in the battle, that is ok. His strength is sufficient to make us overcomers (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In the laws of warfare, found in Deuteronomy 20:1-18, Moses gives these words of encouragement. “Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” Therefore, we can face our foes with courage and confidence. Our God is with us (Psalm 23:4). David, in Psalm 18 paints a vivid mental picture of God doing battle on his behalf.

* Take a moment and read Psalm 18:1-49 and make note of every title that David gives to the Lord who delivered him from the hands of his enemies. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What actions did David take that we should emulate when we are during spiritual warfare? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What can we learn from the following passages about our weakness verses God’s strength. Romans 8:26; Philippians 4:13; Exodus 15:2; Psalm 24:8, 28:7, 37:39, 46:1; Isaiah 40:21-41 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Who Are We Fighting?**

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

***Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering.***

***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.***

He has a few names that also define him but in Greek the devil is diablolos. It sounds like diabolical, doesn’t it? It’s quite fitting as it is also defined as false accuser or slanderer. “The goal of every Christian,” said Doctor David Jeremiah, “should be to learn the identity, plans and purposes of the devil and to stand firm against him!” I agree with Doctor Jeremiah but first we need to know our God through the study of His Word. When we know our identity in Christ, we’ll become well-equipped soldiers who can take our stand and win the daily battles. Let’s learn the tactics that are used against us. In the methodology of warfare, Satan’s schemes, or wiles in Greek, is methodeia. It is defined as trickery or to lie in wait (Ephesians 6:11).

**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.”***

Hence, 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:** Acts 17:11, 20:20; 2 Corinthians 2:11, 4:2-6, 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; 2 Peter 3:14-18; Deuteronomy 4:2-6; Prov. 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-20

**Identify His Methods**

**2 Corinthians 2:10-11, 14 (NET)**

***If you forgive anyone for anything, I also forgive him—for indeed what I have forgiven (if I have forgiven anything) I did so for you in the presence of Christ, 11so that we may not be exploited by Satan (for we are not ignorant of his schemes). 14But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and who makes known through us the fragrance that consists of the knowledge of him in every place.***

Schemes or devices in Greek means thoughts or even intelligence. So, the there is a well thought out plan to kill steal and destroy life and peace on earth -one soul at a time. The enemy is crafty enough to study our weakness and plan how to trip us up. The battlefield is in our minds, specifically, our carnal minds. Here are just a few things 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 (NET)**

***But I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus different from the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough!For I consider myself not at all inferior to those “super-apostles.”***

**Digging Deeper:** 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**

People are sometimes used as the devil’s instruments, but we are not fighting people. Although it certainly seems that way, it’s the devil using them as his pawns. Think about the last time someone hurt you. What happens in your thought life? That is where you begin to battle wanting revenge or justice. We don’t want to forgive them, we want revenge. We can become obsessed thinking about what they did to us.

My pastor, David Lawrence, in his message on forgiveness, clarifies what *forgiveness* is not. He said: 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.”* When we refuse to forgive, we give the enemy legal right to come in to the open door. If we want to take back ground that we have surrendered to him, we must repent of unforgiveness, then, we must take every thought captive and bow to God’s instructions in His Word. How are we to overcome in these situations? The Bible is clear: we overcome evil with good.

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

***For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards,for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.***

* Stop and read through theses passages and see if you can make application to a situation you are facing: Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14-21; Matthew 5:43-44. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

These truths contradict what the world and our flesh would tell us. Yet, obeying God is the only way to gain the upper hand in this battle.

**1 John 3:7-13 (NET)**

***Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil. Everyone who has been fathered by God does not practice sin, because God’s seed resides in him, and thus he is not able to sin, because he has been fathered by God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: Everyone who does not practice righteousness—the one who does not love his fellow Christian—is not of God.***

**Digging Deeper**: 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

**Preparation and Determination**

**Ephesians 6:13-20 (NET)**

***For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness,by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, and in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints. Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak—that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel,for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may be able to speak boldly as I ought to speak***.

No one who is going into war, waits till the enemy attacks to get prepare, do they? Of course not. In this spiritual warfare, we must be prepared in advance. And Paul tells us what how we are to dress. First there is the belt of truth, that represents God’s Word. Then there is the breastplate of righteousness. What is that? It is Christ’s imparted righteousness. He will help us do what is right when the enemy comes against us.

**Digging Deeper:** Acts 17:11; 2 Peter 3:14-18; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6; Deuteronomy 4:2-6; Proverbs 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) 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. If our ways are pleasing to the Lord, our commander, then He will make our enemy be at peace with us. *Do you have beautiful feet? Who prepared you with the gospel?*

**Digging Deeper**: Romans 1:1-10, 8:5-11, 10:15-18; John 17:9-21; 2 Timothy 2: 1-4; Proverbs 16:7; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

**Defensive Armor**



**Verse 16 Shield of faith.** Who is teaching you the Word of God?

**Digging Deeper:** Romans 8:11, 10:17; John 6:63; 1 Timothy 6:12

**Verse 18 Helmet of salvation** guards your mind-the battlefield. If we are going to We must know the Word of God well in order to identify the twisted lies of the enemy.

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.

In her book, Fiery Darts, Janet Lane gives three R’s of fighting fiery darts and they are:

1. Recognize the fiery dart.

2. Reject the fiery dart.

3. Replace the fiery dart (with a Truth thought).

<http://fierydarts.wordpress.com>

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

***And do this because we know the time, that it is already the hour for us to awake from sleep, for our salvation is now nearer than when we became believers. The night has advanced toward dawn; the day is near. So then we must lay aside the works of darkness, and put on the weapons of light. Let us live decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in discord and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires***.

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

**Offensive Weapons: Word of God and Prayer**

**John 6:63 (NET)**

***The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.***

“The pen,” it’s been said, “is mightier than the sword!” Well, when it comes to Spiritual battles, the book that was “penned” by the Holy Spirit, is the Sword, and our only offensive weapon! (Ephesians 5:1-18). Unless we are in Christ and His righteousness, we are powerless to wield this weapon. Furthermore, we must be yielded to the Spirit. In other words, under the control of the Holy Spirit. When we are under His control, we can have full assurance and confidence in the battle.

**2 Corinthians 6:1-7 (NET)**

***Now because we are fellow workers, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “I heard you at the acceptable time, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! We do not give anyone an occasion for taking an offense in anything, so that no fault may be found with our ministry. 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.***

We must use the same strategy Jesus employed 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 below, to define the difference in the two words translated in Greek for *Word* of God.) To be right with God, we must be living out His word in obedience. If I turn my face away from hearing God’s Word, He will turn his face away from me when I pray.

**Digging Deeper:** 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

As a personal example, once my family experienced a terrifying ordeal. We encountered a psychotic woman who threatening to kill my son (Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14-21; Matthew 5:43-44). The door was open through anger and unforgiveness toward my husband, we were fighting. I was deceived by the devil. I was not wearing all my armor (Eph. 4:17-32; James 1:19-25; Matthew 6:16-22).

To take back surrendered ground, you must confess and repent. Confession is my response to His Righteousness and my own sinfulness. I need to come clean when I see my sin in the mirror of His Word. (James 4:6-10, 1 John 1:9) He loves to keep his work in the dark. 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:**

* **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-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
* **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)

**The Power of Prayer**

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

***And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

***With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints. Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak—that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may be able to speak boldly as I ought to speak.***

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

***So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well. 3Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4No one in military service gets entangled in matters of everyday life; otherwise he will not please the one who recruited him.***

Do you know the song “Onward Christian Soldier”? A disciple is a soldier in a battle. The world in which we now are in, “but not of,” is a *battle ground*, not a *playground*. How can those who are infants in the faith protect themselves from evil? We must be taught to fight and to learn to stand our ground in the daily attacks. Timothy was the pastor of the church of Ephesus when Paul, his spiritual parent and disciple maker, wrote the two letters to him. Paul repeatedly admonished his dear son to *fight the good fight of the faith*.“*We cannot obey a multitude of God’s commands without being in regular, close fellowship with other believers. He has designed this world so that many of our needs get met ONLY through mutual interdependence.”* --- Charles Stanley

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

***Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor. For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm, but how can one person keep warm by himself? Although an assailant may overpower one person, two can withstand him. Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.***

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

***...”you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, so you can spend it on your passions. Adulterers, do you not know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever decides to be the world’s friend makes himself God’s enemy.***

***Or do you think the scripture means nothing when it says, “The spirit that God caused to live within us has an envious yearning”? But he gives greater grace.***

***Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.” So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure, you double-minded.***

***Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into despair. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.”***

There's a direct correlation to my humbling myself in prayer and my awareness of His presence in the midst of spiritual battle. “Prayer is the greatest power on earth if it is practiced in the true fear of the LORD.” --- A. W. Tozer. When we pray, we not only come near to God, but He comes near to us!

**Deuteronomy 4:7 (NET)**

***In fact, what other great nation has a god so near to them like the Lord our God whenever we call on 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!

**Psalms145:18 (NET)**

***“The Lord is near all who cry out to him, all who cry out to him sincerely.”***

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

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

***Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praises.  Is anyone among you ill? He should summon the elders of the church, and they should pray for him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.  And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up – and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.***

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

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

One of the clearest gospel songs written in our day is “In Christ Alone.” It ends with these words: “No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hands, till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I stand.”

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

***Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36As it is written, “For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

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.”

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:** 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:** 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

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

1. 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. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Think about times of defeat. What weapons or armor were missing? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Who prepared you for this daily battle? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Is this person missing in your walk of faith? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you been taught to pray? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Read: Luke 11:1-3 and Matthew 6:16-22. Who teaches others to pray? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you preparing someone else to stand? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you ever lived under the oppression of crippling fear? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. If so, can you identify the root cause of this fear?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. Read Hebrews 2:12-18. In this passage, what did Jesus do to free us from the fear of death? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. Read Hebrew 1:1-3. What specifically does the Word of His power do? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Cross references:**

**Week #**

**Betrothed to One Husband**

**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 4:12-14 (NET)**

***To equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining tothe measure of Christ’s full stature. Sowe are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.***

**Introduction**

I was in the process of doing some revisions on this lesson when I heard a knock on my door. Two very friendly men had come to invite me to their church. I knew right away who they were, and I was familiar with the “false gospel” that they had come to preach. It was just such a visit several years ago that drove me to invest seven months into an in-depth study and the writing of the first version of this lesson.

After acknowledging my confidence in the sincerity of their beliefs and quoting John 1:1-3, I informed them that they worshiped a different Jesus than I do; the one I worship *is* God. I politely encouraged them to do some research on the foundations of their religion. As they hurried off, I prayed for them. The last time a group from this persuasion visited my home, I prayed for them out loud in Jesus name, and they literally ran. Because they deny the Trinity, they refuse to pray in the name of Jesus. Usually, when they discover that I know the Bible, they can’t leave quick enough. Perhaps John was dealing the same kind of heretical teaching in Ephesus when he wrote the gospel of John.

**John 1:1-5 (KJV)**

***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.***

Most of us, myself included, would be hard-pressed to articulate what we believe and why we believe it. Even those who have some knowledge of the Bible can easily be led astray. Our churches seem to be a mile wide, but an inch deep in doctrine. The word doctrine simply means teaching. In a post-Christian culture, we can no longer afford live in ignorance about sound doctrine. With that being said, I feel a little bit like Jude must have felt when he wrote the book of Jude. He begins by stating that he really wanted to write about “Our common salvation.” Instead, there was a more urgent subject to address (Jude 1-25). The subject at hand was false teachers and false doctrines.

**Jude 3-4 (NET)**

***Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourageyou to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men have secretly slipped in among you – men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe – ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Masterand Lord,Jesus Christ.***

Honestly, I would prefer to write about salvation, the love of God, or almost any other subject than this. But, this problem is just as pertinent now as it was in the first century. The Church is the pillar and foundation of Truth, so why then is the world around us crumbling under the weight of satanic deception (1 Timothy 3:15)? Churches that once held hundreds, could now easily fit their members into a classroom. Furthermore, it seems that the only “buildings” that are packed full are the ones where a Scripture is seldom quoted and a Bible is seldom opened. Could it be that the church is experiencing the great falling away from the true doctrines of the faith that Jesus forewarned us about (Matthew 24)? And so, the aim of this lesson is to equip believers with the essential doctrines (teachings) of the faith and help them learn to identify false teachers, prophets and heretics.

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

***Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.***

**Why does Doctrine Matter?**

**1 Timothy 1:18-20 (NET)**

***I put this chargebefore you, Timothy my child, in keeping with the prophecies once spoken about you, in order that with such encouragementyou may fight the good fight.  To do thisyou must hold firmly to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck in regard to the faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over to Satanto be taught not to blaspheme.***

I would venture to say that, either directly or indirectly, approximately one-fourth of the New Testament addresses this subject. When the Holy Spirit deems a subject so crucial that He designates this amount of Holy Writ to addressing it, we can be sure it is significant. Paul is perhaps the staunchest defender of the faith of all the New Testament writers. With the heart of a spiritual father, Paul was deeply concerned about their devotional, as well as, doctrinal purity.

**Acts 20:7-31 (NET)**

***For I did not hold back from announcingto you the whole purposeof God. Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I am gone fierce wolveswill come in among you, not sparing the flock.  Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truthto draw the disciples away after them.  Therefore be alert,remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warningeach one of you with tears.***

Not knowing if he would ever see them again this side of heaven, imagine how Paul must have felt as he bid farewell to the saints at Ephesus. The emotions in his departing remarks are unmistakable—he loved them. And because he did, Paul prophetically warned the saints to be on guard against “savage wolves” who would infiltrate the church after he left. 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 1:3-11 (NET)**

***As I urged you when I was leaving for Macedonia, stay on in Ephesusto instructcertain people not to spread false teachings, nor to occupy themselves with myths and interminable genealogies. Such things promote useless speculations rather than God’s redemptive planthat operates by faith. But the aim of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.Some have strayed from these and turned away to empty discussion. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not understand what they are saying or the things they insist on so confidently. But we know that the law is good if someone uses it legitimately, realizing that lawis not intended for a righteous person, but for lawless and rebellious people, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, sexually immoral people, practicing homosexuals,kidnappers, liars, perjurers – in fact, for any who live contrary to sound teaching.  This accords with the glorious gospel of the blessed Godthat was entrusted to me.***

Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as the Husband of His people—it is one of His self-descriptions (Hosea 2:14-3:2; Isaiah 54:5). As we know, Paul unveiled a divine mystery that the church is, if fact, the bride of Christ. Therefore, it’s no surprise that he would choose this analogy in his rebuke of the saints in Corinth.

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

***For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a purevirgin to Christ. But I am afraid thatjust as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astrayfrom a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus different from the one we proclaimed,or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received,or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough!***

Unlike the Corinthian Church, the saints at Ephesus were so rooted in sound doctrine, they were the only Church that Paul did not rebuke for heresy. To underscore this fact, thirty years later, this church was still holding on to this teaching and is commended by the Lord Jesus for their stand upon the truth. But unfortunately, they had left their first love (Revelation 2:1-7). One day, Jesus will return for His bride; she will be pure, both in her doctrine, as well as her devotion to Jesus. Doctrine matters. Not only because wrong doctrine will be reflected in a lack of devotion, but wrong doctrine will determine our eternal destination.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Ephesians 4:11-16, 5:22-32; Isaiah 54:5-10; Acts 2:42-46; 1 John 2:18-29; Jude; Psalm 78:1-7, 145:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 2 Timothy 2:2, 3:16; Titus 1: 9-16; 2:1-10; 2 John 9-10

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**Heresies Throughout Church History**

**Jude 17-25 (NET)**

***But you, dear friends – recall the predictions foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. For they said to you, “In the end time there will come scoffers, propelled by their own ungodly desires.” These people are divisive,worldly,devoid of the Spirit. But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Spirit, maintainyourselves in the love of God, while anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings eternal life. And have mercy on those who waver; save others by snatching them out of the fire; have mercyon others, coupled with a fear of God,hating even the clothes stained by the flesh.***

***Now to the one who is able to keep you from falling, and to cause you to stand, rejoicing,without blemish before his glorious presence,to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time, and now, and for all eternity.***

To understand the roots of false doctrine and apostasy, we are going to examine some historical heresies, and in doing so, we can learn from the perspective of what happens when we choose to ignore sound doctrine. We live in a world of knock-offs – products that are copies, but sold as genuine. Often, it’s hard to tell the difference. Not only is testing doctrine Biblical, it is commanded (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1-6).

Were you aware that every historical Christian creed was written by the early church fathers in response to false doctrines and heretics? False teachers and preachers are nothing more than pawns of Satin. While these phonies (a nicer name than God calls them) may seem harmless, and their teaching sincere, nothing could be farther from the truth. Here are just a few names God’s Word uses to describe them: ravenous wolves; dogs; deceitful workers – masquerading as angels of light; wolves in sheep’s clothing; savage wolves; godless; evil; rebellious men; they teach the doctrines of demons; foolish; sons of the Devil; empty talkers; unreasoning animals; blemishes; clouds without rain; antichrist; liars; scoffers; trees without fruit; brute beasts and twice dead! After reading this list, how do you think God feels about these people?

The following list is merely a small sampling from church history. In Acts 8 we find a man by the name of Simon Magus who dabbled in the occult and witchcraft. When Philip came to Samaria preaching the gospel of Jesus and performing great signs and miracles, Simon wanted in on the action. Although he professed to believe in Christ and was even baptized, he did not possess the Holy Spirit. This became obvious when he observed Peter and John laying their hands on true believers and seeing them receive the Holy Spirit; he approached the two apostles trying to buy this power. But they saw right through him. Confronting him with the true condition of his heart, they essentially told him, you have no part of this ministry (Acts 8:9-24).

Obviously, Simon did not repent, instead he decided to start his own religion. Borrowing biblical terminology and mixing it with myths, he claimed to have secret knowledge and said that enlightenment was the way to salvation. Some scholars believe that he was the founder of the what is called Gnosticism. Some relics of the early Gnostics are the false gospels like “The Gospel of Thomas” and “The Gospel of Judas.” These are the origins of false teaching like the book *The Da Vinci Code.*

**1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NET)**

***O Timothy, protect what has been entrusted to you. Avoidthe profane chatter and absurditiesof so-called “knowledge.” By professing it, some have strayed from the faith. Grace be with you all.***

Then, in Acts 15, we read about another form of false teaching. This is the doctrine that requires the keeping of Jewish laws, like circumcision, to earn salvation. It is, basically, adding works to grace. Here we find the first official church council in Jerusalem called specifically to resolve this matter, at least for a time. But unfortunately, it did not end there. Paul vehemently opposed this false doctrine (Galatians 2:15-21, 3:1-14; Romans 3:5,20-22). As you can see in the next passage, Paul reiterates that those who preach this should be condemned to hell!

**Galatians 1:6-9 (NET)**

***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the onewho called you by the grace of Christand are followinga differentgospel – not that there really is another gospel, butthere are some who are disturbing you and wantingto distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!***

When Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, He commended their tenacious stand against false apostles. He even names one sect in particular that He hated: the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:1-2, 6, 14-15). Nicolaitans, contradicting Peter’s admonition in 1 Peter 5:1-3, asserted the rights of the “hierarchy” in the church to rule over and conquer the laity. It is also thought that they were perhaps connected with a man named Nicolas who compromised with the godless society around him and taught that grace was a license to sin and immorality (Revelations 2:20; 1 John 2:15-16).

**Revelation 2:6 (KJV)**

***But you do have this going for you:You hate what the Nicolaitans practice – practices I also hate.***

In 325 AD., the emperor Constantine organized the first world council of bishops and Biblical scholars (318 of them) in Nicaea, a city located in modern-day Turkey. The primary goal was to clearly define the concept of the Trinity. Arius of Alexandria, Egypt, not only denied the doctrine of the Trinity, but was spreading his heresies throughout Asia Minor, leading many believers into confusion. Additionally, he taught that Jesus was created and not Creator God—that Jesus was a good leader, but not God. To reaffirm the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, the bishops drew up what is known as the Nicene Creed. And consequently, Arius was then excommunicated for his heretical teaching.

**Nicene 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.”***

Every time one satanic messenger was subjugated by the Truth, another one stepped in to take his place. One example is a monk named Nestorius (385-450 AD). What was his false doctrine? He, like Arius, denied the deity of Christ Jesus, stating that Jesus was created (John 1:1-10, 10:28-30). And this lead to the First Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. There the bishops gathered again to reaffirm the Nicene creed. To this day, as an affirmation of these beliefs, these creeds are read, and or taught in some denominations.

**Apostles Creed**

**“*I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and Jesus Christ his only Son our LORD; who was conceived by the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the father almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of Sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.***

**Two Examples**

**Matthew 7:15-20 (NET)**

***“Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves.You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gatheredfrom thorns or figs from thistles, are they?In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the badtree bears bad fruit.  A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize them by their fruit.***

The following examples represent a long family tree, originating in the Garden of Eden with the fall. Each demonic distortion propagated by these satanic missionaries has been recycled and repackaged from previous heretics. But, as a caveat, let me clarify: I do not bring any of this history to light to bash anyone or to equip you to argue with those who are ignorant of the truth of the Scriptures. Nor, am I trying to justify prejudice or pride in knowledge—which the Bible condemns. The point here is that God loves all people. He is not willing that anyone perish but that all come to the knowledge of the Truth and be saved! Therefore, as we learn to speak the Truth in love, we will be snatching people from the darkness of hell and saving their precious souls (Jude 19-23).

In 1830 Joseph Smith, an illiterate treasure-hunter who dabbled in the occult, founded the Mormon religion (otherwise known as the Latter-day Saints). Rooted in adultery, he practiced polygamy and married 28 women. Some of these “wives” were as young as 14 years old. He was accused of sexual assault by nine women in four states. (See accounts published in 1994 by a man who was in Smith’s inner circle. His name is William Law.) Joseph Smith’s disciple and successor, Brigham Young, also had fifty-five wives.

**1 Timothy 3:16-4:2 (NET)**

***And we all agree,our religion contains amazing revelation:Hewas revealed in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit,seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselveswith deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, influenced by the hypocrisy of liarswhose consciences are seared.***

Since Smith claimed to have been visited by an angel, and we know demons are fallen angels, this group would fall under the category of teaching mentioned above: the doctrines of demons. The Book of Mormon is a plagiarism of an edition of the King James Bible printed in 1765. We know this because this edition of the Bible contained several specific typos and was latter reprinted to correct them. Smith’s Book of Mormon, however, plagiarized from this edition, failed to make these corrections. Once again, like the Gnostics before them, they borrowed Biblical terminology and mixed it with lies. To illustrate, they assert the unbiblical notion that Jesus was procreated by God and a goddess mother. If that was not bad enough, they say that Jesus was the spirt brother of Lucifer. What! It’s no surprise then that the secret writings of their “bible” have never been seen or validated. Furthermore, they claim a person has the potential to become a god and populate their own planet. This is reminiscent of other lies told by the father of all liars, “You will be like God” (Genesis 3:1-4).

**Jude 1:10-13 (NET)**

***But these men do not understand the things they slander, and they are being destroyed by the very things that, like irrational animals, they instinctively comprehend. Woe to them! For they have traveled down Cain’s path,and because of greed have abandoned themselvesto Balaam’s error; hence, they will certainly perish in Korah’s rebellion. These men aredangerous reefs at your love feasts,feasting without reverence,feeding only themselves. They are waterless clouds, carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit – twice dead,uprooted; wild sea waves,spewing out the foam of their shame; wayward stars for whom the utter depths of eternal darkness have been reserved.***

**Proverbs 30:5-6 (NET)**

***Every word of God is purified; he is like a shield for those who take refuge in him.***

***Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you, and prove you to be a liar.***

Charles Taze Russell, who in 1876 founded what is today known as Jehovah’s Witnesses or The Watchtower Society, was raised in a devout Presbyterian home. He later abandoned his up-bringing and after experimenting with other doctrines and even eastern religions, he began to write his own interpretation of the Bible. Like Arius, he clung to the heresy that Jesus was a created being and claimed that Jesus was Michael the Archangel. The main fruit that identifies them as antichrists is this: they do not believe Jesus is God. So, they, in direct violation God’s Word, changed their “bible.” One example is this: in John 1:1-2 they took out “He was God” and inserted “he was *a* god.” Do you see the difference?

**Revelation 22:18-19 (NET)**

***I testify to the one who hears the words of the prophecy contained in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues describedin this book.  And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.***

All this just illustrates, that false teaching has a common origin, the Devil. He twisted God’s Word, causing Eve to doubt: “Did God really say…”, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:1-4). The Devil’s alternative to the truth is to take some of what God says out of context, dilute it, and blend it all kinds of perversions. Smith, like Simon Magus, was void of the Holy Spirit; therefore, he could not understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Being led by their father, the Devil, they change the Bible to fit their lies. The frightening thing is that all of these false teachers had some knowledge of the Bible. When a person is exposed to the Truth, but does not receive nor love Jesus, who is the Truth, they can easily become Satan’s servants spreading his lies.

**Digging Deeper:** Mark 9:42-47; John 8:31-46; Jude 3-11; 1 John 2:18-26; 2 John 7-11; 2 Thess. 2:1-15; 2 Timothy 3:1-4; Hebrew 13:4; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Peter 1:16-21, 2:1-22, 3:15-18; 1 Corinthians 2:10-15, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Romans 1:18-32, 6:16; Galatians 1:6-9, 5:19-21; Revelation 2:6, 14-16, 20-24, 21:8, 22:14-15; Jeremiah 23:9-40; Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32

**Common Confessions of The Christian Faith**

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

***So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnessesto faithful peoplewho will be competentto teach others as well.  Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.  No one in military service gets entangled in matters of everyday life; otherwise he will not please the one who recruited him.***

If you were raised in church, you may remember singing an old hymn titled “Onward Christian Soldiers.” As far back as I can remember, we sang this song. But honestly, I was clueless about what a Christian Soldier was, much less what or who he would be fighting against. Now, based upon Paul’s words to Timothy in the above passage, I know that a soldier is a description of an apologist. What is a Christian apologist? In a nutshell, an apologist is one who defends the common confessions of the faith like the ones that were birthed out of the above creeds.

Along with the inspired writers of the Bible, here are some very important historical Christian apologists: Justin Martyr, Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Saint Nicolas. Throughout the ages, God has supplied gifted men and women to equip His church. C.S. Lewis may be the most famous and prolific apologist of the twentieth century. But, today there are many highly respected Christians Apologist like, Tim Keller, Hank Hanegraaff, Lee Strobel, Norm Geisler, Mary Jo Sharp and Ravi Zacharias. In addition to these, here is a resource from to add to your study: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/homestudycourses.aspx>.

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. Throughout the ages, though men have tried to deny it and destroy it, God has preserved His Holy Book, and because of this, we can hold in our hands the very *Word 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:** 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, 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 Nickolas” 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.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 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, explaining this great mystery that, in Christ Jesus, God was manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). The scriptures are clear, 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. Thereby, His virgin birth filled what the scripture prophesied, that He is the Son of Man, and yet, He is 100 percent God (Isaiah 7:14; Daniel 7:13-14). The same 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:** 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:**

Just as it was foretold throughout the Old Testament, Christ died for our sins, and He was buried and rose again on the third day. This is exactly as He predicted He would.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 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:**

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:** 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:**

In the account of the fall in Genesis 3, we find 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:** 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 have approximately 8000 years of recorded history by which we can measure the accuracy of the Bible. Because of that, we can bank on the fact that the prophetic utterances written in the Bible that have not yet been fulfilled will come to fruition. Therefore, one day, we know not when, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the world in righteousness, and He will ultimately reign as Lord over all (James 4:12; Matthew 10:28, 24:29-51; Luke 21:25-38; John 5:21-23, 27, 9:39). And the hearts cry of the bride of Christ is… Come Lord Jesus!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** 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; 2 Peter 1:16-21, 3:13-18, 1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 John 2:21-27, 5:9-21

In conclusion, while we will not all agree on every Biblical issue, the only hills we must live and die upon are the historical doctrines of our faith. Everything else, all our crooked theology, will be dealt with at the judgment seat of Christ. Having said that, we must not major on the minor issues while forsaking the Law of Love. To do so would be to lose our eternal rewards (Roman 13:10).

When people are learning to distinguish between counterfeit money and true currency, they do not study the counterfeit—they study the real thing. The only way to be equipped to protect yourself and those you love is to know the Truth. Examine your beliefs in light of Scripture, and don’t check your mind at the door when you sit under preaching and teaching. Study what you are being taught. Make certain the Bible is not being distorted because correct doctrine is a matter of life and death—eternal souls are at stake.

Because we live in the information age, all of these historical facts are readily available from numerous sources on the internet. Here are some of the sources that I used to amass all this information: John MacArthur’s book *The Truth War*, Walter Martin’s book *Kingdom of the Cults*, Doug Powell’s *Holman Quick Source Guide To Christian Apologetics.* Another trusted source is: www.gotquestions.org. I implore you to do some research. Better yet, look up all the passages in this lesson (This might take some time.). Then, “You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

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

1. Do you believe in the inerrancy of the Bible? If not, on what basis do you form your beliefs? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the following passages, why does correct doctrine matter? (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:20-21; 2 Corinthians. 11:1-15) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. 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) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are some teachings that you once believed that you now know were untrue? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read 1 John 4:1-21 and make a list of the things that can help us identify a false prophet. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Explain this statement: I will live what I believe even if what I believe is a lie. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Why does correct doctrine matter? Read: (1 Timothy 4:1-16; 6:20-21; 2 Corinthians. 11:1-15) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week #**

**The Doctrine of Suffering**

**Key Passage**

**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.***

**Introduction**

When I first got the idea that I should open a bridal business, I didn’t have the luxury of lots of cash, nor did I have a clue about what opening a business would entail. Art and I were newlyweds at the time, living in a tiny, old duplex. It was so old, in fact, there was a hole under the kitchen sink so large I could see all the way to the dirt under the little house. I had to nail a board over it to cover the opening and keep the critters out. It was the best we could afford.

All this just to say, I am sure folks thought we were crazy to even attempt to open a business. And, they were right. All I had going for me was a determination to do whatever it took to be successful. So, one of the very first things I did was to sit down and calculate the cost (both financial and personal) of making this business a reality. We quickly learned that if you have money, banks are happy to loan you money. Since we had none, the bank was not going to help us without someone putting up money as collateral. Thankfully, my grandfather was willing to take a chance on us, and rest is history. After seven year of giving my all to build a profitable business and giving birth to three babies in six years, I knew that raising my children was by far the most important work of my life. Something had to give, and so, I prayed that the Lord would sell the business and let me stay home with my babies. This prayer was granted when my youngest son Robbie was only one month old.

Art and I decided to take the proceeds from the sale and use it to build a home. Once again, we sat down with the builder (who was my daddy) and calculated the cost to make sure we had enough to complete the home. These two projects were not to be taken lightly or haphazardly. They required due diligence to assess the costs before we ever started. Not to do so, was to risk an embarrassing failure. This Biblical concept, is found in Jesus’ sermons also.

**Luke 14:28-30 (NET)**

***Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t sit downfirst and compute the costto see if he has enough money to complete it?  Otherwise,when he has laida foundation and is not able to finish the tower, all who see it will begin to make fun of him. They will say,‘This manbegan to build and was not able to finish!’***

No one could accuse Jesus of minimizing the cost of discipleship. Although Jesus never did this, we, in our overzealous attempt to win people to Christ, sometimes give the impression that following Christ will make your life easier. Christ follower, is this the truth?

We can liken becoming a Christ follower to getting married. How many of us ever really considered that suffering was ahead of us on the road to marital bliss? Furthermore, if we could see into the future and knew that marriage involved suffering, how many people would ever take the plunge? Yet, in truth, every marriage involves suffering in one form or the other. It is the price we pay for love’s sake. It is no different when we are following our Heavenly Bridegroom… the One who loved us enough to literally die to make us His bride.

In this lesson, we are going to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the cost of being a true follower of Christ. So, one of the first questions we will address is this: if we are following Jesus—where exactly are we going? It is not the easy road, and Jesus never promised it would be (Mark 8:31-38, 10:28-30). But it’s the only road that will lead us home to a place of eternal happiness and bliss. Our aim in this lesson is to offer encouragement and help us remember that pure joy awaits us on the other side of suffering. Because Jesus is worth it!

**The Cost of Discipleship**

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. 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)? And yet, I suppose a chasm exists between the knowledge of such things and reality.

Experience, so they say, is the best teacher. After following the Lord Jesus for almost thirty -years now, suffice it to say, I know better! And while my trials, troubles and sufferings don’t even come close to the Lord Jesus’, Paul’s, or the heroes of the faith, they are, nonetheless, personal and painful to me. (As I am sure yours are to you). I will share some personal examples in our next lesson, but here, we are talking about suffering for Christ.

Leading up to Luke 9 and Luke 12, we learn that large crowds were flocking to Jesus. 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. However, 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—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? The crowds chose comfort instead of Christ (John 6:60-69).

In John 6:66, we see a mass exodus as the crowds departed and no longer followed Christ, leaving Him alone with just His few faithful men. What would you have done if you were in that crowd? It’s a tough question. On several 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.

**John 12:24-26 (NET)**

***I tell you the solemn truth,unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it producesmuch grain. The one who loves his lifedestroysit, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must followme, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.***

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. In the following passage, Paul describes it as the crucified life.

**Galatians 2:20 (KJV)**

***I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.***

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.” Bonhoeffer practiced what he preached. His talk matched up with his walk—he followed Christ and was executed for his faith. 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! Indeed, the road is *narrow* and only a *few* follow Him. Here is the million-dollar question: Are you one of the few?

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.

Seven-hundred and fifty years before the Lord Jesus came to earth, God showed the prophet Isaiah the real “passion of the Christ” and the excruciating pain of a Suffering Servant. For this reason, 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. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and so He is intimately acquainted with our sufferings. Thus, Jesus has become our faithful and merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:10-18, 4:15-16).

**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 of their salvation perfect through sufferings.***

Take a moment to look over the following word search and make a note of the descriptive words used here. As you do, see if any of these words are applicable to your current station of life.

**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)

How does Jesus’ teaching compare 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 are the same word in Greek. The word is martus, and you will find this word in the following passages: Acts 1:8, 22:20; Revelation 17:6.

* Take a moment to read John 11:25, 15:18-21; Luke 10:4-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Revelation 6:9-11, 14:13, 20:4, 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 myself. My problems seem trite. (This is Biblical, read Isaiah chapter 58).

For the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. In reality, for them, living in this sin cursed world is all the heaven they will ever experience. Satan gives the best at first and saves the worst for last. Now, on the other hand, 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. Therefore, suffering cures us of being enamored with the world, and it is an instrument God uses for our sanctification (1 Peter 4:1-6).

**Paul Earned His PHD in 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, you might say, he was enrolled in the school of suffering. So, now we will follow Paul throughout the course of His education and see what we can glean from his experiences. Right off the bat, Jesus signed Paul up for this class. What goes around, they say, comes around, and we mustn’t forget that Paul had formally been used as an instrument of the devil to inflict great suffering on the church.

Sure enough, suffering, for the sake of the gospel, was a hallmark throughout Paul’s ministry. He neither bragged nor whined about it -he just stated it as fact. The reason he suffered was so that the gentiles would hear the gospel. Although, he never lost his love or zeal for the souls of his own people - the Jews (Romans 9:1-3).

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.***

Around 56 A.D., Paul had just concluded his 3-year ministry in Ephesus when he wrote the following synopsis listing some of the things he had endured for the sake of the gospel. To simply say his life was hard would be a colossal understatement.

**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 scourgedand yet not executed; as sorrowful, but always rejoicing, as poor, but making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.***

Then, 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 9:1-19). Here is the point – suffering humbles us. It reminds us of our dependence on God and our 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.***

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.***

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. Timothy, his spiritual son, was the pastor of the church at Ephesus at the time. 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. What was on Paul’s mind? He wants Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel.

Paul counted the cost. 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.

**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.***

There are several things we can learn from observing Paul’s life. The first is that the gospel must be preached, regardless of the cost. Second, is the reality that life, even the Christian life, is full of difficulties. This should come as no surprise because the Lord Jesus promised us that in this world we would have troubles (John 16:33). And although we may sorrow now, our sorrows will be turned into endless joy when we get home (John 6:20-22). For Jesus is the prize that awaits those who endure until the end, and that is all that really matters.

And so, the question that begs to be asked is this: is it worth it to live the crucified life as a follower of Christ? 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!

One of five missionaries martyred while bringing the gospel to the Waodani Indians in Ecuador, was Jim Elliot. His following journal entry, is perhaps the most quoted call to missions in our day. He wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

As we wrap up this lesson, I want to share a personal story for application. Once, while preparing to take a training trip with Catalyst Missions to Bolivia, my spiritual mother and ministry partner, Joney Caudill, and I had a real conundrum. Because of her age and my auto-immune disease, neither of us could take the necessary yellow fever shot. Traveling to the border of Bolivia and Brazil and being close to the tributaries of the Amazon river, was a risk. After much prayer, and the purchase of every mosquito repellent we could get our hands on, we got the green light from the Lord. Some might say we were being foolish: it was too risky an expedition for grandmothers who were seventy and fifty-four-years of age. But at the end of the day, we choose to follow Jesus, fishing for men and women and making disciples of the nations. The Great Commission is the command and we both know by experience and by His promises, that He will never leave nor forsake us. We are no fools to take a risk. We don’t own our lives… Jesus does! So, we Keep our eyes on the prize of gaining that which we cannot lose.

If I had to choses between an entire life time of health, wealth and problem-free living without Jesus and a life of storms, sorrows and suffering as His follower, the chose is simple. There is no rival. Just give me Jesus…. He is my life, and yes, He is worth it!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Acts 2:42, 9:15-16, 14:19-22, 19:23-41, 20:22-27; 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

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

1. After reading the following list of passages, make a list of everything God’s Word tells us about the cost of being a true follower of Christ.

Luke 9:22-26, 57-59, 14:25-34, 16:9-13, 17:33, 18:28-33; John 6:60-66; Matthew 8:19-20, 10:16-39, 19:29; John 15:18-21, 16:1-4; 1 John 4:1-6; Mark 8:31-38, 10:28-30; 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 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you find two different categories of followers? If not, what is inferred here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. In John 16:33, Jesus makes two promises. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Read Jesus’ sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12. Make a list of the kinds of people Jesus called “Blessed.” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. 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 for the sake of the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. 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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1. Read Philippians 2:20-22. How did Paul describe Timothy? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. After reading the following passages, state why Paul endured all this suffering. Ephesians 3:13; Romans 1:16-18; 2 Timothy 2:3-12 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. In light of the reality that everyone but Luke abandoned Paul, now read about Onesiphorus in Acts 19; 2 Timothy 1:15-18, 2 Timothy 4:19. What can we learn from Onesiphorus that we should emulate? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. 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? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Why is it so important to have close spiritual relationships in our life for times like these? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week #**

**The Seasons of**

**Storms, Sorrows and Suffering**

**Key Passage**

**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.***

**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, because no one gets a pass from heartaches, pains, sufferings and sorrows. With that being said, I really hope you will see this through to the end because this could possibly be the most personally applicable lesson yet. To the extent that we grasp this, will greatly affect how we weather the inevitable storms and sorrows of life.

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

***After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystr, 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.”***

**The Rude Awakening**

**Romans 8:17-18 (KJV)**

***And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.***

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.***

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

**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, intoan 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.

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.

**Psalm 30:11 (NET)**

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

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 (NET)**

***The everlasting God is a refuge, and underneath you are his eternal arms; he has driven out enemies before you, and has said, “Destroy!”.***

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 46:1-11 (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!”***  ***The Lord who commands armies is on our side!The God of Jacob is our protector!***

**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, our 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 12:10-15 and Galatians 6:2, 9-10 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. That is why I have written the following lesson entitled The Health of My Countenance. 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.)

**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:** 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. 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 9:35-36; 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.

**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.***

## **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?

**Week #**

**"She Who Has Ears, Let Her Hear!”**

**Key Passage**

**Revelation 2:7 (KJV)**

***He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.***

**Introduction**

Throughout the Bible there is a great emphasis placed on the necessity of hearing what God says. In Hebrew the word is S*hama* and it has special significance to the Jewish people. A prayer known as *Shama Israel* begins with these words, “***Hear, O Israel.***” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41) The word Shama means to ***listen or to hear obediently,*** and it’s also translated as obey. But the most important aspect of the word was this: they were to listen carefully and transfer exactly what they heard to the next generation. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Psalms 78:1-8, 145:4-13)

When the prophet Isaiah received his commission, he *heard* the voice of the Lord saying: “Who shall I send; who will go for Us?” Isaiah replied, “Here I am. Send me.” The message he was told to preach would fall on deaf ears (Isaiah 6:8-10). The people refused to hear the message God sent through His prophet, and so approximately seven hundred and fifty years later, God spoke through His one and only Son the same message. (Hebrew 1:1-10; John 1:1-14) Jesus cited Isaiah as He described the people who had ears and eyes, but they remained deaf and blind because of the hardness of their hearts. They failed repeatedly to listen or obey God’s Word. Reading the full message in context will clarify exactly who had ears to hear the Word of God and who didn’t. (Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 8:1-21) When Jesus spoke in parables, He was not merely saying words. He was depositing His truth into the fertile soil of the hearts of His disciples. Now, if you have ears… then hear the parable of the sower.

**The Soil, The Seed and The Sower**

In this parable, ***the soil*** represents the human heart, ***the Seed*** is the Word of God and ***the Sower*** is the Lord Jesus. In his message, “At What Level Do You Listen,” Herb Hodges said there were four types of people who followed Jesus around. The first three categories of listeners he named the curious crowds, the casual listeners and the convinced listeners. This group represents about ***seventy-five percent*** of people whose hearts are exposed to God's Word. Those who fall into this category hear God’s Word, but do not act upon them. Although they may call *Jesus Lord*, they don’t do what He says. The Macarthur’s Study Bible is more specific in the assessment of those who fit this description. The commentary on Luke 6:46-47 says, “*It is not sufficient to give lip service to Christ’s Lordship. Genuine faith produces obedience. A tree is known by its fruits.*” (Matthew 7:21-23)

**Luke 8:18-21 (NET)**

***So listen carefully,for whoever has will be given more, butwhoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”***

***Now Jesus’mother and his brotherscame to him, butthey could not get near him because of the crowd. Sohe was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.” But he replied to them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”***

* **Soil #1** (**Matthew 13:1-4)**  **The Crowd:** The ones along the roadside were curious listeners. The seed lay on top of the soil, but it had no reception into their hearts. (Matthew 7:18-27) Crowds are often fickle, and they will only follow the leader as long as it benefits them.
* **Soil #2 (Matthew 13:5-6)**  **The Casual Listener:** These were the ones whose hearts wererocky. The seed fell on the soil, and got down in it, but there was no root because they were confused in their loyalty. They were shallow listeners, and they soon fell away.
* **Soil #3 (Matthew 13:7, 13-15) The Convinced Listener:** This type of soil represents those whose hearts are full of thorns. The seed fell on the soil and penetrated it. Yet, the thorns kept that seed from sprouting upwards, and therefore it produced no crop. There was too much competing for their attention**.**

Just because we are exposed to God’s Word, does not mean that we receive it. When the Jesus sows His Eternal Seed (the Word), He expects to receive a harvest. For all His labor only about twenty-five percent of the soil will produce a crop. Jesus “weeded” out the uncommitted majority by telling them some hard truths about the cost of being His disciples. (Luke 9:18-27, 14:25-34)

**John 8:43-47 (NET)**

***Why don’t you understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot acceptmy teaching. You peopleare fromyour father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. Hewas a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature,because he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I am telling you the truth, you do not believe me.***

***Who among you can prove me guiltyof any sin? If I am telling you the truth, why don’t you believe me? The one who belongs toGod listens and responds to God’s words. You don’t listen and respond,because you don’t belong to God.”***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 12:46-50, 13:1-43; Luke 8:1-21, 6:46; Mark 4:1-34; Romans 10:13-18; James 1:21-25; John 5:24-47, 6:32-69; Revelation 3:14-20

**A Receptive Heart is a Good Heart**

**Luke 8:1-15 (NET)**

***Sometime afterwardhe went on through townsand villages, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits anddisabilities: Mary (called Magdalene), from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Cuza(Herod’shousehold manager), Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their own resources. While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesusfrom one town after another,he spoke to themin a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled on, and the wild birds devoured it.  Other seed fell on rock,and when it came up, it withered because it had no moisture.  Other seed fell among the thorns, and they grew up with it and chokedit. Butother seed fell on good soil and grew,and it produced a hundred times as much grain.” As he said this, he called out, “The one who has ears to hear had better listen!”Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, “You have been giventhe opportunity to knowthe secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that although they see they may not see, and although they hear they may not understand.“Now the parable means this: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who have heard; then the devilcomes and takes away the wordfrom their hearts, so that they may not believeand be saved. Thoseon the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while,butin a time of testingfall away.As for the seed thatfell among thorns, these are the ones who hear, butas they go on their way they are chokedby the worries and riches and pleasures of life,and their fruit does not mature.But as for the seed that landed on good soil, these are the ones who, after hearingthe word, cling to it with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with steadfast endurance.***

* **Soil #4 (Matthew 13:8-12, 16, 23-24, 30-43) The** **Committed Listener:** This last group represents only ***twenty–five percent*** of Jesus’ followers; they are the ***spiritually reproductive listeners.*** The Good Seed fell upon the good soil of their hearts. These are careful listeners, true Christians and Disciples of Christ. Although they are*few in number, they’re faithful* *and fruitful investments for the Sower*. Jesus calls them Sons and Daughters of the Kingdom. And He further identified them as ***Good Seeds, and sowers of His Word.***

The following are notes from the Macarthur Study Bible on Luke 8:15, specifically the words…heard…hold and bear fruit. “*This constitutes evidence of true salvation. ‘Heard’ is a reference to understanding and believing (John 8:31, 47). ‘Hold’ refers to ongoing obedience (Luke 11:28, John 14:21-24). ‘Fruit’ is good works” (Matthew 7:16-20 and James 2:14-26).*

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

* **Follow** in Greek Strong’s #190 *akoloutheo: as union; to be in the same way with, accompany,* ***specifically as a disciple;*** *- to follow, reach.* (Luke 6:40 and John 12:26)
* **Hear/listen** in GreekStrong’s #191 *akouo: to hear-give in the audience of, come into the ears, hear or harken-****understand****.*

(John 6:45) "*It is written in the Prophets: They will all be taught by God." (Isaiah 54:13) "Everyone who* ***listens*** *to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me." (Luke 9:35) "This is My SON, My chosen ONE;* ***listen*** *to Him!" (John 10:27) "My sheep* ***hear*** *My voice and follow Me."*

* **Told/put forth/ or presented** in GreekStrong’s #3098 and #*5087 paratithemi: to place alongside, present, to deposit-as a trust for protection, commit to the keeping of.* (Matthew 13:24,31)

**Digging Deeper:** Matthew 13:36-43; Psalm 78:1-8; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Isaiah 6:8-10

Those without spiritual ears will not hear Jesus. Consequently, they cannot understand what He says, and they certainly don’t follow Him. Those who don’t follow Jesus, do not fish for men and women, and there is no return on the Word that was planted within them. They are not “Good seeds,” and they don’t become sowers of the Eternal Word. As a result, they don’t plant, and there is no harvest. The Sower - the Lord Jesus - receives no return on His investment in them. In the end they will receive no reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. But, on the other hand, when anyone has ears to hear the Word of God, they understand what Jesus says and acts on what he has heard; these are true disciples of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

**Psalms 78:1-7 (NET)**

***Pay attention, my people, to my instruction! Listen to the words I speak! I will sing a song that imparts wisdom; I will make insightful observations about the past.  What we have heard and learned – that which our ancestorshave told us – we will not hide from theirdescendants. We will tell the next generation about the Lord’s praiseworthy acts,about his strength and the amazing things he has done.***

***He established a rule in Jacob; he set up a law in Israel. He commanded our ancestors to make his deeds known to their descendants,so that the next generation, children yet to be born, might know about them. They will grow up and tell their descendants about them. Then they will place their confidence in God. They will not forget the works of God, and they will obeyhis commands.***

If you have ears to hear, you will understand the will of your Father in heaven. You will obey what He says because He is *your Lord!* As you go through your life, you will sow the Word of God and obey His last command by making disciples. Through investing His Word into the fertile soil of the hearts of His sons and daughters, He will receive a bountiful harvest. The plan has not changed. If you are truly a daughter of the King, then through you He will reap a large harvest, and one day you will hear these words: “Well done my good and faithful servant, you were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's joy!" (Matthew 25:22)

**Digging Deeper:** John 14:23-24, 15:14-16, 16:1-16; Matthew 4:9, 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 2:6-15, 5:11-20; Isaiah 60:1-5

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

1. Would you describe yourself as a good seed or a weed? (Matthew 13:36-37)
2. Read Matthew 13:37-42 and answer the following question: What will ultimately happen to the weeds?
3. When you hear the Word of God, is it an investment for the sower, or is it expenditure? (Matthew 13:23-24; John 15:16)
4. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven would be given to His disciples and not to the others?
5. Read the context of Matthew 12:46-50 and Luke 8:1-21. Who was Jesus pointing to when He said, “Here are my mother, sisters and brothers”?
6. In light of the fact that the writer of the book of James was Jesus’ half-brother, what is the significance of his words in James 1:21-25? (Clue is found in Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:1-21)
7. Estimate the amount of time you have spent in church “hearing” the Bible taught. How much of the Word of God have you been ***entrusted*** with? (Matthew 13:8-12)
8. What are you doing with all the Truth you have been given? (Luke 12:48)
9. In Matthew 13:34-36, Jesus referenced Psalms 78:1-8. What are the first words of the Psalm? What are God’s people supposed to do with what they have *heard*?
10. Do you think you have the same responsibility?
11. Jesus ended the parable of the Sower with these words: “The righteous will shine like the sun…,” read Matthew 13:43 and compare to Daniel 12:3 and Isaiah 60:1-5. Who are the “shiny ones” in the Kingdom?
12. Do you ***hear Jesus***? Will you ***follow*** His strategy and obey His command to ***make disciples***?

**Matthew 13:43 (NET)**

***Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The one who has ears had better listen!***

**Week #**

**He Saved 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. 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*

***Cross references:***

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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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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:** 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!

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

**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.***

**Afterthoughts**