**A Profound Mystery**

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**Spiritual Matchmaking**

**Book One**

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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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**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my sisters in Christ who faithfully sit at the feet of Jesus with me and feast on His Words of life. Without your help and encouragement, this study would never have come to fruition.

Cathy, there is no one who has had their hands on this project as much as you have. From the start, not only have you been my writing instructor and editor, but you have been my encourager. May God credit all of this to your account. Without you, this study would never have become a reality.

And lastly, I dedicate this book to Art, my beloved husband. After three decades together, who would have thought that marriage could be sweeter and stronger with every passing year? Thank you for letting me be transparent and share parts of our story of amazing grace… to God alone be the glory! I love you.

**Foreword**

He was in prison, facing the possibility of his death by execution. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit what would be his final epistle, Paul challenges his disciple Timothy, who is encountering great opposition as the pastor of the church of Ephesus, with these powerful words in **2 Timothy 2:2 NASB95:**  ***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.*** This was not a new strategy, it was the same one that was modeled by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry with His disciples, and mandated by Him to His disciples and the church in the Great Commission. Interestingly, the command in this verse, ***entrust****,*is a banking term which means to *deposit.* This deposit of truth is to be made into ***faithful*** followers of Christ. Truth investors must be ***faithful*** so that they can accurately invest the truth in others. Note there are four disciples or disciple groups listed here: Paul, Timothy, faithful men and others.The word ***others*** receives major emphasis in the Greek text. It doesn’t stop with four generations. This emphasis indicates that the building of each disciple is to be done with such excellence that the potential of multiplying disciples continues. This was Jesus’ plan in His day, Paul’s day, our day and will not be complete until the Great Commission is fulfilled to the ends of the earth. Multiplying disciples is not new. It has been Jesus’ strategy from the beginning of His church. Disciple making is not a program, it is a lifestyle.

One person who has caught the vision of making world-impacting, reproducing disciples is the author of this book, Ginny Porter. It has been my joy and privilege to serve as pastor to Ginny, Art and their family for over twelve years. Ginny is a diligent student and an anointed teacher of God’s word. I remember when Ginny caught the disciple-making vision and began running with it. She is sold out to making disciples of women who can make and multiply disciples starting right where they are. She not only makes multiplying disciples here in our church, community and city, but she is making and multiplying disciples around the world. I am continuously challenged by her love for Christ, His word, and her commitment to obey the Great Commission to make and multiply disciples locally and globally.

In this first disciple-making manual using Ephesians as the basis, Ginny starts with the essential for being a disciple, a relationship with Jesus Christ. Ginny shares personally out of her own life story how Christ brought her to Himself. She shares vital Biblical truths which will help believers grow in their relationship with Christ so that they can be a growing disciple in order to become a multiplying disciple maker.

I wholeheartedly commend this book to you. I am excited about its potential as a tool to help faithful women reach their full potential in Christ for making and multiplying disciples.

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**Introduction**



**Ephesians 5:32 (NET)**

***This mystery is great – but I am actuallyspeaking with reference to Christ and the church.***

The Bible is full of word pictures, parables of earthly things used to communicate spiritual realities, and such is the case in the book of Ephesians. The apostle Paul uses words as a paintbrush, and with each stroke, we see a portrait emerge. Yet, this is no ordinary caricature, but a priceless and indescribable masterpiece. In radiant beauty, we see the Glory of God in the face of a Bridegroom—the Lord Jesus Christ. And like a portrait within a portrait, hidden“*IN* *HIM*” is someone else. Part of the mystery is this: as we draw near and focus our attention on the Bridegroom, then we see her—the object of His affections - *His* *Bride, the Church.* In this study, we will attempt to comprehend this divine mystery and find ourselves within this love story.



**Colossians 3:3-4 (NET)**

***For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ (who is yourlife) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him.***

Like every book of the Bible, the book of Ephesians is a rich reservoir of life-transforming truth. Yet, what makes this epistle so special is that it affords us a rare opportunity to see the big picture of the Bible, not only from Genesis to Revelation, but eternity past and eternity future!

In this study, we will be mining the gospel message from the first two chapters of Paul’s letter to the saints at Ephesus. Perhaps you will meet the Lord Jesus for the first time, and this will be a formal introduction to the One your soul has longed for. On the other hand, you may know Him very well, and this study will enlarge your vision of His greatness and serve to rekindle a flame of love for Him. Either way, as we discover the magnitude of the love of God in Christ, we will be forever changed.

**Week #1**

**History of the Church at Ephesus**



**Introduction**

The motif of a wedding runs throughout the Word of God like a golden thread. Using small vignettes, woven within the pages, there is a love story—one of love lost and ultimately found again. This divine narrative is part of the mystery found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In keeping with our theme, throughout this study, we will be using some wedding metaphors. This comes quite naturally for me because, as a newlywed, I was in the wedding business. It was around this time that I met the Lord Jesus and became *His bride*. Therefore, this section of scripture bears a special significance for me, in more ways than one.

Perhaps these concepts of love and marriage seem foreign to you. If this is so, you can be assured that it is by no coincidence that you have picked up this book. Every relationship begins with an introduction. My heart’s desire is that the Lord will use this, the first booklet in a four-phase study, to properly *introduce you* to the God of the Bible. You see, in addition to dressing brides for their weddings, I’ve also been a matchmaker (I promise to expound on this later).

If you are a person who is a little obsessive-compulsive, I want to be upfront with you. We will not be studying the book of Ephesians chronologically. However, if you’re like me - a bit attention deficit - you will have no problem whatsoever as we skip around. There is a method to my madness, and although we may not be following the verses in sequence, you will find we have hardly left a stone uncovered as we mine the truth from the book of Ephesians. Yet, there is so much to unearth that we can’t possibly cover it all in one book. So this is only the first book in a four-phase series.

Before we commence, you should know that this is not your ordinary Bible study. It is much more than that. No matter if you are a novice or a lifelong teacher of God’s Word, you probably have some preconceived ideas. So, to clarify, here are the primary goals for our time together.

First, we want to grow in grace and knowledge of God. Yet, what we’re after is intimacy with Him—not just head knowledge.

Second, we want to cultivate transparent relationships with other women. Therefore, this study is meant to be done in community. Jesus chose a group of twelve. Then He divided the twelve into three groups of four. Even a community of two with the Holy Spirit joining you can make a perfect number. The discussion questions at the end of each week are meant to foster deeper understanding and application of the truths we are learning together.

Lastly, together we want to take this ancient Holy Text and learn to make personal, relevant life applications. If all this works as intended, God’s unchangeable Truth will bring hope, help, direction and purpose into each one of our lives. Wouldn’t that be worth every moment invested? Now, if you are ready, let’s dive right in.

**A City of Idols**

To correctly interpret any passage of Scripture, you must put the passage into its proper context. The fact that an enormous amount of the New Testament is directly, or indirectly, tied to Ephesus makes the study of this book even much more appealing. So, we will begin our study of Ephesians with some historical facts about the city. If you were to visit the ancient city of Ephesus today, you would find its ruins on the western coast of Turkey next to the modern city of Selcuk. It would hardly resemble the glory of the city believed to be thousands of years old. Yet, in its heyday, it was the most important city in western Asia Minor. Because its inland harbor emptied into the Aegean Sea, it was also a major intersection for trade routes making it very important to the economy of the entire region. In addition to having an enormous coliseum, Ephesus was the site of one of the Seven Wonders of the World: a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana or in Greek, Artemis. Their belief was that Diana’s image had fallen from Jupiter.

Now if you know anything about Biblical history, you may be aware that the devil himself was cast out of heaven in just such a way, and then he became the *god* of this world (Isaiah 14:12-14; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:13). Not content to go it alone, the devil led a host of fallen angels with him in his rebellion. Satan has always wanted to be worshiped, and he was very much at home in Ephesus. Because of this, the city became a hub for evil spirits, witchcraft, and idolatry. In fact, it was their main industry, and a lucrative industry at that.

I wonder if you can relate to being raised in a home or a place that could be described as a habitat for evil incarnate. Because of our ignorance of the spiritual battle that rages around us, we may think of the supernatural wicked world in terms of Halloween, dress-up costumes, and candy. But this was not a game for the church at Ephesus, and it is no game for us either. The kingdom of darkness had such a stronghold in this place and the surrounding cities that Paul ends this letter describing the cosmic battles with a chapter on spiritual warfare.

* Can you think of a place that is notorious for wickednesss and idolitry? If so, list the place here and what makes this place evil. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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In Acts 19, we find the account of a real turning point in this city that culminated with a large bonfire in the city square. Many people had turned to God from idols and brought their books on sorcery to burn. The value of the items amounted to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

**Acts 19:17-20 (NET)**

***This became known to all who lived in Ephesus,******both Jews and Greeks; fear came over******them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised.******Many of those who had believed came forward,******confessing and making their deeds known.******Large numbers******of those who had practiced magic******collected their books******and burned them up in the presence of everyone.******When******the value of the books was added up, it was found to total fifty thousand silver coins.******In this way the word of the Lord******continued to grow in power******and to prevail.***

**Spiritual Matchmakers**

The beautiful feet that first carried the good news to the city of Ephesus belonged to a husband and wife team from Corinth, Greece—another pagan culture. Their names were Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-26). They were tentmakers by trade, but their vocation was fishing for men and women. From their example, we learn that God does not have professional clergy and lay people in His church. In fact, the term “layperson” is not even found in the Bible because no division exists between the secular and the spiritual life in God’s economy (Romans 16:3-5).

**Galatians 3:28 (NET)**

***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slavenor free, there is neither male nor female– for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.***



***Jesus said, “Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”***

**Matthew 4:19**



Every individual who is part of the bride of Christ has a vital role in God’s redemptive plan. Likewise, every follower of Christ should be a fisher of men. John the Baptist is the perfect example. He was a disciple maker, and yet he called himself "***a*** ***friend of the Bridegroom.***” His whole life was all about pointing people to Jesus. And then there is John the apostle, a fisherman by trade, who left his nets to follow Jesus as a fisher of men (Matthew 4:18-22). If we are friends of Jesus like John, Priscilla and Aquila, we will do the same.

You might be surprised to know that the apostle John spent his last years evangelizing in the region of Ephesus. If you remember, when He was on the cross, the Lord Jesus tasked this beloved disciple with the care of His mother. It’s not surprising, that she was also with John, and they both spent their last days in Ephesus. John was in Ephesus when he wrote the gospel of John as well as the books 1st, 2nd and 3rd John sometime between A.D. 80-95. In fact, he was arrested while in Ephesus and taken to Patmos, an island located in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus. This is where he received the book of Revelation sometime between in A.D. 94-96. Ephesus is the first of the seven churches that the Lord Jesus addressed in the book of Revelation. If you were to take a tour of the ruins of this city, the Basilica of Saint John and the House of Virgin Mary would no doubt be on your “must see” list. At the conclusion of our study, in book number four, we will learn more about the apostle John and his connection to the church of Ephesus. But that will have to wait until the grand finale.

**Paul’s First Prison Epistle**

**Acts 19:1 and 10 (NET)**

***1 WhileApollos was in Corinth, Paul went through the inlandregions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples there.***

***10 This went on for two years, so that all who lived in the province of Asia,both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.***

Of course, you cannot tell the story of the church at Ephesus without talking about the apostle Paul. He wrote the book of Ephesians while he was in Rome under house arrest because of preaching the gospel (Acts 28:16-31). It is believed that this letter was intended as a circular letter to be hand copied and read to all the saints who were scattered throughout Asia Minor.

For example, the book of Ephesians was the first of the four prison epistles. The other three were to the church at Colossae, the church at Philippi, and a personal letter to a man named Philemon, who was part of the church in Colossae. Apparently, Philemon was in Ephesus when Paul led him to Christ. The subject of Paul’s letter to this brother was Philemon’s runaway slave Onesimus. In God’s providence, Onesimus and Paul met in Rome, and as a result of the meeting, Onesimus was born again. He was no longer a slave to sin. He was a new creation, and he needed to be reconciled to his previous owner, Philemon.

Now, here is where the story gets even more interesting. The mail carrier who hand-delivered the prison letters, including this one to the Ephesians, was Tychicus, a man Paul called a beloved brother and faithful minister. Guess who accompanied Tychicus with the letters? It was Onesimus—Philemon’s runaway slave. But now in Christ, Onesimus and Philemon were brothers.

During his ministry, Paul spent more time in Ephesus than he did in any other place—roughly three years. This was about the same length of time that Jesus spent with His twelve. It is important to note that Luke and Timothy were also in Ephesus with Paul. We know this because in Acts 16:1 and then in veres 10 Luke indicates that He joined the team when he used the words “us” and “we”. Additionally, Paul also wrote 1 Corinthians while in Ephesus. Always exemplifying the lifestyle of Jesus, Paul cared deeply about those in whom he had invested so much of his life. These specific saints were entrusted with several divine mysteries, not the least of which is that the Church is the bride of Christ, hence, the wedding theme of this study.

Paul, too, was a “*spiritual matchmaker,*” otherwise known as an evangelist. But that is not all he was. He was a true **“*friend of the Bride* *of Christ*,” …** ***a disciple maker.*** What I’m trying to say is this: just as a bridesmaid or close friend would attend and assist the bride in preparation for the wedding day, a disciple maker does the same thing for the church–the bride of Christ. Now, you may have some preconceived ideas about what it means to make disciples, and so we’ll spend a fair amount of time throughout this study exploring this concept in depth.

* What do you think it means to make disciples?

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* Can you give an example of a person who is a disciple maker? Spicificly, how did this person make disciples? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

One product of Paul’s disciple making endeavors in this city was a man named Epaphras. When Epaphras had been well-equipped, he took the gospel message 100 miles away and founded the church at Colossae. And so, we see the multiplication of disciple making.

**An Emotional Departure**

By the end of Paul’s three-year tenure at Ephesus, the ties of love that had been forged between him and the saints were apparent. After all, he was their spiritual parent. Acts 20 gives the account of his moving departure from these beloved saints.

**Acts 20:36-38 (NET)**

***When he had said these things, he knelt downwith them all and prayed. They all began to weep loudly,and hugged Paul and kissed him, especially saddenedby what he had said, that they were not going to see him again. Then they accompaniedhim to the ship.***

I can relate to Paul's experience. I was at the airport in Nicaragua about to return home from my sixth trip where I visited the women who are part of Catalyst Missions Women’s Training. They are my spiritual family, and I love them dearly. Each departure is sad for me because I don’t know if I will get to see them again—at least on this earth. That’s how it is when you form true spiritual relationships within God’s eternal family.

* Do you have any relationships within the body of Christ that transcend cultures? If so, describe them here. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

At the airport, I stood next to a young woman who was leaving her country and family for the first time in her life. As her mother unashamedly prayed over her twenty-year-old baby, the tears were flowing freely. While we waited to board the plane, I asked the young woman where she was going, and she replied, “To Europe to attend a university.” It would be two long years before her mama would see her face again. I’m a mama too, and I felt the raw emotions of this painful departure. It had been one year, almost to the day, that I put my youngest son on a plane bound for the Czech Republic to attend a university for five months. The reality is, once we part company, we never know for sure if we will see the face of those we love again. This is true unless we have been born again into God’s eternal family. For us, there will be no sad farewells. Eternity will be a forever joyful reunion.

After Paul’s departure, the saints in Ephesus were left in the capable hands of Timothy, Paul’s primary disciple. In fact, 1 and 2 Timothy are the personal letters of encouragement that Paul wrote to his “spiritual son” while Timothy was the pastor of the church of Ephesus. These were written during Paul’s first and last imprisonment in Rome between A.D.62-67. (Throughout this study, we will be referencing these letters often.) Continuing the work that Paul had begun, Timothy led this flock for about one and a half years.

I dare say, there has never been, nor ever will be, a group of believers who were as privileged as this church. After all, think of the sermons they heard and who they heard them from! When you consider just the time Paul and Timothy spent with them, it was at least five full years. But, would they be faithful to reinvest all that truth? Think of the implications of this. When we spend our lives going to church week after week hearing God’s Word but never passing it on to others, we become like the Red Sea. Rivers, streams and countless tributaries flow into the Red sea, but nothing flows out. It stops and it dies. Today, according to the website Operation World.org (2016), modern Turkey, where Ephesus was located, is 96.64% Muslim and Christians represent only 0.21 percent of the population.

**This group of believers were privileged to be taught by Paul, the apostle John, Mary the mother of Jesus, and many others. They were perhaps the first to hear approximately half of the New Testament. Yet, only 30 years later, Jesus said they “Left their first love.” Revelation 2:1-4**

The truth is the world we live in is not that much different than it was 2000 years ago. We have many luxuries that they did not have, but the spiritual environment is the same. And as it is written in the book of Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. The only difference is we have exchanged their false gods for our own gods. We worship created things and not the Creator (Romans 1:1-32).

* In your opinion, what do you think occoured that caused the inilation of Christinaty in Ephesus and that part of the world in general?

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* Do you see any similarities in our day that should cause concern or proves that we are living in a post-christian society? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

1. How well do you know the God of the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If you know Him, who introduced you, and how long have you been a believer?

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1. After you heard and responded to the gospel, did you have a mature believer who came along beside you to help you grow and apply the truth of God’s Word to your life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. If so, what amount of time did she spend with you, and what did you learn from her?

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1. Are you interested in learning more about Biblical discipleship or beginning a discipling relationship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. As was mentioned, Paul spent the same amount of time in Ephesus that Jesus spent with His twelve disciples. (Read Acts 19:1-10, 20:31.) How long was that? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Mark 3:13-14 and state two things we can learn from the Lord Jesus and Paul about making disciples. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. The Greek word for “spent time” is *dietribo*. It means to “wear through with time” or to rub off on. Read passages John 3:22 and Acts 4:13-20. What were the results of the disciples spending time with Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Give an example of someone who has influenced your life in a positive way. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Are your closest friends people who encourage you to love God and pursue personal holiness? (1 Corinthians 15:32-34; Psalm 1:1-4) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. When you are around people who are negative, or gossip or criticize others, how does this affect you? Read Ephesians 4:29-31; 2 Timothy 2:14-26. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. In what ways do you think the spiritual climate of our generation is like that of Ephesus? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

**Revelation 2:1 (KJV)**

***Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write;***

***These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right and,who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.***

## Time Line

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Who & When?  \* Dates are approximate | Where? | What & Why? | How  do we know? |
| Pricilla and Aquila A.D. 52-53  Paul’s 2nd mission trip | Ephesus  Paul was in Corinth- Athens | Evangelized and discipled Apollos | Acts 18:18-28  Romans 16:3-5  1 Corinthians 16:19-20 |
| Paul, Luke, Timothy,  Titus, Epaphras  A.D. 55-56  3rd mission trip | Ephesus | Evangelized and discipled \*Paul wrote 1 Corinthians -Timothy delivered it. And then he wrote 2 Corinthians -Titus delivered it. | Acts 16-20  1 Corinthians 16:8-12  2 Corinthians 7:5-7 |
| Paul, Timothy, Luke A.D. 60-63 | Rome in prison | Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians | Philemon, Acts 28 (Luke wrote Luke and Acts) |
| Tychicus A.D. 60-62 | Went to Rome | Carried letters to the saints  Brought Onesimus back to Philemon | Eph.6:21-22; Col.4:7-9;  Acts 20:4; Philemon 1:1-25 |
| Paul A.D. 62-63 | Released from Rome and went to Macedonia |  | Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus |
| Timothy A.D. 62-64 | Ephesus | Pastor of the church at Ephesus | 1 Timothy |
| Paul & Luke A.D. 66-67 | Imprisoned in Rome |  | Paul wrote 2 Timothy (Paul, Barnabas or Apollos) possible writers of Hebrews A.D. 67-70) |
| John & Mary, the mother of Jesus A.D. 80-95 (about 30 years after Paul left Ephesus) | Ephesus | John wrote the gospel of John & 1,2,3 John |  |
| John A.D. 94-96 | Taken from Ephesus to Patmos | The 1st church Jesus addressed was Ephesus. They had left their first love. | Received the Revelation  Revelation 1:1-11 |

**Week #2**

**The Address of the Saints**



**Key Passage**

**Ephesians 1:1-2 (NET)**

***From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus],the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to youfrom God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!***

**Introduction**

The first fourteen verses of chapter one in Ephesians have sometimes been called a doxology. Even though the translators of the Bible have added punctuation, in the original Greek language it is just one long run-on sentence (202 Greek words) composed to praise God for all that He has done. (You may want to read and familiarize yourself with these verses.)

As we begin to uncover the treasures found just below the surface of this long sentence, let’s employ some basic literary tools in our study. In a poem from his book, *Just So Stories,* Rudyard Kipling said, “I keep six honest serving-men: (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Where and When and How and Why and Who” (2008). The “six editorial friends” of Kipling will be of great assistance in unpacking the life-transforming truth that is contained within the first few verses of the book of Ephesians. So, the first questions we will want to answer in the proper interpretation of this book are as follows: Who wrote the letter? Who were the recepients? What was their address? It has already been established in lesson one that it was Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, who wrote the letter while he was imprisoned in Rome around A.D. 60 (2 Peter 1:21; Ephesians 1:1). But for whom was the letter intended, and what was their address? The truth contained within these seemingly simple questions might very well change our concept of God and bring us face-to-face with our own identity. Before we get to know the recipients of this letter, we will focus our attention on their location. (See the timeline on page 17.)

**What’s Your Address?**

Do you like to meet people and hear their life stories? Have you ever sat next to a stranger and tried to strike up a conversation? It usually begins something like this: “I am… and you are?” This is typically followed by, “Where are you from?” By gathering information, we can learn so much about the person. Although Ephesians was addressed to the saints who lived in Ephesus, there were readers in many different locations. It is thought to have been a circular letter that was hand copied and delivered to the saints who lived throughout Asia Minor. However, as this passage indicates, the most important - although less obvious - location of the saints was **“*in Christ*.”** With fifteen references to this location within the first fourteen verses of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, we can know that this is significant. Paul was so overwhelmed by the fact that the saints live *in Christ*, and perhaps to grasp the fact himself, he used the phrase *in* *Christ* 73 times in his letters. But when you add every inference in his letters to the saints being “in Christ” or “Christ is in us,” it totals around 164 references. No doubt Paul had long conversations with the apostles about the day Jesus unveiled this truth to His first disciples. The apostle John recorded Jesus’ words in his gospel—the book of John.

* Read Romans 16:3-13 and make note of how many times Paul refrences the address of this group of people. Do you see any names of People who are connected to the church at Ephesus? If so, who are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Have you lived in different cities, states or countries? If so, list them here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Are there any unique landmarks or traditions practiced in the areas that you have lived? If so, list them here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Now read Acts 17:24-28. God determined where you would live. Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Knowing that some of these truths would be hard for our finite minds to understand, and since we learn by repetition, the Holy Spirit repeats Himself. Case in point, in John 15, you will find the words “Remain *in Me*” eight times within the first seven verses.

**John 15:5-8 (NET)**

***I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remainsin me – and I in him – bearsmuch fruit, because apart from me you can accomplishnothing. If anyone does not remainin me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; and such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and are burned up. If you remainin me and my words remainin you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. My Father is honoredby this, thatyou bearmuch fruit and show that you aremy disciples.***

As incredible as it may seem, the abode of the saints (those who are part of the bride of Christ) is *in* the Bridegroom. That means that the saints live in dual locations. Our feet walk the sod of earth, but, because we are ***in Christ,*** our true dwelling place is in the Father's House***,*** both now and forever (John 14:2-20). Now *that* is a mystery difficult to wrap the mind around.

**Ephesians 2:6-7 (NET)**

***And he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming agesthe surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***

What an extraordinary place to live. You might even say, “*Out of this world!”*Later, we will discover, how they arrived in this place. Yet, what makes this news so amazing is the fact that we once lived at another address, a place far away from God, a place the Bible describes as hopeless. And furthermore, we were *all* confined to this “*Godless* zip code.” Yet, thankfully, because of God’s boundless love and mercy, He was not content to leave us there.



**We are born in a Godless zip code - separated from God.**

**How did we get there?**



**Our Former Address**

**Ephesians 2:11-13 (NET)**

***Therefore, remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh – who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands – that you were at that time without the Messiah,alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise,having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

How did we all end up in a hopeless place? To find the answer to this question, we need to look no further than the first family God established (Gen. 1:27-4:25). The story begins in the Garden of Eden where God Himself performed the wedding of Adam and Eve. Everything was perfect; in fact, it was paradise because Adam and Eve had intimacy with God. He was there with them, and He blessed this first couple and commanded them to, “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). For the bride of Christ, the command to *multiply* has not changed (Matthew 28:16-20).

     Haven’t we all thought, “If only this was right,” or "if I had this or that," or "if they would just leave me alone, then I’d be happy?" Yet, even when you have acquired these things, you discovered that they can’t bring you lasting peace. However, you would think, surely in an unadulterated environment like Eden, everything would be perfect–right? Not so, because even in paradise, things went terribly wrong. Adam and Eve broke the one and only command given by their Creator, and from that moment on, their curse became ours. With the curse came hatred, jealousy, selfishness, fits of rage, blame, guilt, shame, fear and ultimately death. Instead of intimacy and fellowship with God, Adam and Eve hid from the Holy One. Consequently, from that moment on, the union between the Creator and the first couple was severed by sin. Sin defiles everything it touches, and so it was in the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve.

**God knows our thoughts - our *contemplations.* He knows the things that cause us to be anxious - our *preoccupations*.**

**He knows our words -our *conversations.* He knows - where we live - our location.**

**He made us- so He knows our *complexities*. He knows - the day of our birth and the day we will die. And He also knows our *final destination*.**

God knew exactly where Adam and Eve were and what they had done. So, why did he ask them, “Where are you?” He wanted them to realize that their address had changed. I can relate. Sometimes, when I know I am not where I should be in relation to God, I try to hide from Him—as if that were even possible. Within my spirit, I have heard that same rhetorical question, “Where are you, Ginny?”

For the first twenty-six years of my life, I was wandering around lost, empty and separated from God. The problem was that I did not know it. Although I was clueless about who God was and my proximity to Him, He knew me. After all, He is the creator God, the Beginning and the End. Furthermore, before He created any of us from dust, He knew that we would become dirty with sin.

**Psalm 139:1-17 (NET)**

***O Lord, you examine meand know. You know when I sit down and when I get up; even from far away you understand my motives.***

***You carefully observe me when I travel or when I lie down to rest; you are aware of everything I do. Certainly,my tongue does not frame a word without you, O Lord, being thoroughly aware of it. You squeeze me in from behind and in front; you place your hand on me. Your knowledge is beyond my comprehension; it is so far beyond me, I am unable to fathom it. Where can I go to escape your spirit? Where can I flee to escape your presence? If I were to ascendto heaven, you would be there. If I were to sprawl out in Sheol, there you would be.******If I were to fly away on the wings of the dawn,***

***and settle down on the other sideof the sea, even there your hand would guide me, your right hand would grab hold of me. If I were to say, “Certainly the darkness will cover me,and the light will turn to night all around me,” even the darkness is not too dark for you to see,and the night is as bright asday; darkness and light are the same to you. Certainlyyou made my mind and heart;you wove me togetherin my mother’s womb. I will give you thanks because your deeds are awesome and amazing.You knew me thoroughly;my bones were not hidden from you, whenI was made in secret and sewed together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was inside the womb.All the days ordained for me were recorded in your scroll before one of them came into existence. How difficult it is for me to fathom your thoughts about me, O God!How vast is their sum total!***

No one really knows us the way God does for He has walked the recesses of our hearts and minds. Therefore, He understands our idiosyncrasies, silly ways and our propensities to fear or sin. He knows what we do, and He knows why we do these things. He gets us. Not only is He is intimately acquainted with all our ways, He knows what’s in us.

Now, depending on your current spiritual address, you may be uncomfortable with the thought that God knows you this intimately and, therefore, view this as a bad thing. But is it? Think through this with me. Who doesn’t want to be truly known and completely understood? Yet, in our heart of hearts, if we are completely honest, most of us try to hide behind masks for fear that if we are “found out,” we will be rejected. Fear of rejection is very powerful. Perhaps, it was the fear of being rejected by God that caused Adam and Eve to hide. But what they didn’t understand about God is that His love is much greater than sin. He had a plan all along to reverse the curse.

**John 2:24-25 (NET)**

***But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. He did not need anyone to testify about man, for he knew what was in man.***

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

1. What are the six editorial friends of Rudyard Kipling that are useful in Bible study?

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1. How often do you read the Bible? Do you set aside time each day to dialogue with God through prayer? Do you use a journal? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. How much of what you hear do you think you actually understand or retain? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Is it possible to hide from God? Read Psalms 11:4, 139:7-15. Why or why not?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Ephesians 2:11-13 and fill in the blanks. Our address at birth is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Our address at second birth is\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. What are some words used in Ephesians 2:11-13 that best describes our first address? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. After reading Ephesians 1:1-8 and Ephesians 2:1-4, 11-13, which passages best charicterise your life at this moment? For example: Are you hopeful, peaceful, do you feel close to God or distant? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. What separates us from God? Read Isaiah 59:1-8; Colossians 1:21. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. What apostle, other than Paul, lived in Ephesus and recorded the account where Jesus told His disciples to, “Abide in Me?” ­­­­­ ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. Why is it impossible to live the Christian life without abiding in a love relationship with Christ (John 1:1-14, 14:6)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. Can you think of four practical ways to abide in Christ? If so, list them here.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read John 15:15-16 and discuss this question: Does a tree bear fruit to eat the fruit itself? If not, why does a tree bear fruit? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. How many times did Paul use the phrase “in Christ” in his letters? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Peter 1:13-18 says that we are to live our life here as strangers. Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Think on These Things**

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

## Memory Verse

**Philippians 3:20 (NET)**

***But******our******citizenship******is******in******heaven******– and******we******also await******a savior******from******there, the Lord Jesus******Christ.***

**Week #3**

**A Rotten Family Tree**



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 2:1-3 (NET)**

***And although you weredeadin your transgressions and sins, in whichyou formerly livedaccording to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the kingdomof the air, the ruler ofthe spiritthat is now energizingthe sons of disobedience, among whomall of usalsoformerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wratheven as the rest….***

**Introduction**

All of us began life in some family context. The home is where ideas are formed and where we learn who we are and who God is. For good or for evil, this is the place where discipling begins. Yet, regardless of what kind of home we were raised in, no one had to teach us to sin.

Herein lies the root problem of humanity, and it all stems from a rotten family tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You see, the apple, as they say, does not fall far from the tree. The effects of sin are evident by the fact that Cain, the first child born, was a murderer. Who did he kill? He killed the second born--his own brother (Genesis 4). And we think *our* family is dysfunctional!

Sin is what we do because of who we are. By nature and by choice, we are sinners. We dislike being confronted with our true condition, and by comparing ourselves to others, we can delude ourselves into thinking, “I’m not so bad.” But the truth is, we are not so good—we are rotten to the core of our being. To illustrate the point, I hope you don’t mind if I share a personal story from my childhood that demonstrates that I am no better than Cain. I, too, am a murderer at heart.

**Rotten To The Core**

As a little girl, I loved to play with dolls. Whereas my sister, Sybil, was just the opposite. She was a tomboy, but that never stopped my parents from buying her dolls. One of those dolls was a Raggedy-Ann doll. Printed on its chest, was a heart with I LOVE YOU written across it.

I don’t recall why, but one day I was very mad at my sister. I was so mad that, in a murderous rage, I took her Raggedy-Ann and used it like a voodoo doll. With pen in hand and hate in my heart, I scribbled on the heart of that doll till it was covered in black ink. I guess I was not old enough to replace the words I love you with I hate you. But it did not matter, I was killing my sister! I don’t remember our ages when the infamous murder took place-- so I’m just guessing here-- but I want to say Sybil was perhaps 8, I was around 6 and our little brother, Thomas (who was nicknamed Belo), was about 3 or 4 years-old. Regardless, I was certainly old enough to know better!

If stealing my sister’s doll and murdering her with hate were not enough, when Sybil found her mutilated doll, she took it to Mamma and said, “Look what *Belo* did!” Poor little guy he began to protest in earnest, “I didn’t do it! I didn’t do it!” What do you think this six-year-old doll assassin did? Rather than confess, I stood there shifting the blame on Belo. Without saying a word, I lied to my mother. Oh, I didn’t stop there either. In one ugly swoop, I broke at least four of the Ten Commandments. Then came the coup de grace—the worst sin of all. I watched in silence as my innocent little brother took the spanking that should have been mine.

I wasn’t such a “good little girl” after all—if there is such a thing. Almost fifty years have passed, and I still feel ashamed of the hate, lies and guilt of these sins. Although, in case you are wondering, I have asked my sister and brother to forgive me.

One could argue that I was just being a kid, and that’s how kids behave. So, what’s the big deal? The big deal is that God defines what is right and what is wrong; therefore, my sins are against Him (Psalm 41:4). True, I hurt my family. But I broke God’s Laws, and as the apostle John wrote, “All sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

* My guess is that you have a story or two that resembles mine. If so, would you share it here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Holy Spirit does not mince words in describing who and what we are before conversion. Contrary to what we might like to think, this is how the Bible describes us: we are alienated and hostile in our minds towards God and engaged in evil deeds. In fact, we are enemies of God. We are full of envy, murder and strife. We are slanderers, disobedient to our parents, unloving, ungrateful, unmerciful, ungodly, unholy and slaves to sin. We use our bodies as “instruments of unrighteousness.” The Bible paints a poignant picture that illustrates why we are separated from a holy God. It is not a pretty picture, is it?

**What is wrong with people!? How in the world can people lie and cheat and steal and kill? How can people be so inhumane?**

God told Adam and Eve that if they ate from this one and only forbidden tree, they would die. And as sure as God’s Word is true, they died spiritually. Consequently, we will all die physically, and we will all come face to face with this fact every time we attend a funeral. The mortality rate of human beings is 100%. Wise King Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes that we all share a common destiny. No matter how we live, we all have an appointment with death. As I write this, I have just attended the funeral of a precious sister in Christ who went home to be with the Lord. She was forty-six years old. Also, we are in the middle of another painful crisis caring for my 94-year-old mother-in-law who we lose a little more each day. Watching her suffer physically and mentally is gut-wrenching for all of us, especially my husband and sister-in-law. We pray that the Lord will have mercy and give her relief from this agony. We know, and I believe she does too, that her only way of out of this situation is death. She begs me, “Please let me go home!” I ask her, “What home?” “Home with Jesus,” she replies. There are many things she does not remember, but there are two things of which she is sure.  She knows that she is in Christ and that physical death is the portal to her real home.

Who could blame her? For those who are in Christ, this worldly address is all the torment and sorrow we will ever know. We are going home to a place where there will be no more dementia, crippling arthritis, blinding macular degeneration and no cancer. The curse of sickness and death will be removed. Once we finally arrive at our Father’s house, our tears will be wiped away by a set of nail-scarred hands—the battle wounds of the victor who conquered sin and death.

* When was the last time you contemplated your own mortality? Explain the circumstances. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

But, in the meantime, we walk, and sometimes crawl, through the valley of the shadow of death. The stark reality of the curse of the original sin hangs heavy. It dawns on us just how catastrophic that one moment of disobedience was in the garden. Adam and Eve could not possibly have known the sorrows, pain and suffering that would grow from the insidious seeds of the fruit they ate. Every ounce of human suffering and sorrow can be traced back to that moment.



“**Jesus did not come into the world to make bad men good. He came to make dead men live!”**

**Leonard Ravenhill (gospelaustralia 2014)**



The ramifications of Adam and Eve being expelled from the garden to live in a godless world remain today. From this first family to yours and mine, we are under the same curse of sin, and because of this, we are born confined to the same zip code. We are all born spiritually dead and separated from God. Because of these horrific facts, we are under God’s wrath and condemnation. And tragically, if we remain dead in our sins, we will be confined to a Christ-less eternity in a place the Bible calls hell (Revelation 20:10). In this place, sin reigns supreme, and God is absent (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

**Ephesians 5:1-11 (NET)**

***Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live in love, just as Christ also loved usand gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind,or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. Neither should there be vulgar speech, foolish talk, or coarse jesting – all of which are out of character – but rather thanksgiving. For you can be confident of this one thing:that no person who is immoral, impure, or greedy (such a person is an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let nobody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God’s wrath comes on the sons of disobedience.***

***Therefore, do not be partakers with them,for you were at one time darkness, but now you arelight in the Lord. Walk as children of the light – for the fruit of the lightconsists inall goodness, righteousness, and truth – trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but ratherexpose them.***

* From this passage, make a list of charistics that identify those who are still in a state of separation from God. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**None Are Righteous, Not Even One!**

**Romans 3:9-19 (NET)**

***What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin, just as it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, not even one.”***

***“Their throats are open graves, they deceive with their tongues; the poison of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouths arefull of cursing and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are underthe law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God.***

* We are still suffering from the consequences of the fall. From the list of curses found in Romans 3:9-19 and Ephesians 2:1-3, which ones are most evident in your life and the lives of those around you at this moment? Such as hurtful words or actions etc. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I hope you don’t mind if I ask you a personal question. Do you consider yourself to be a good person? Well, that is a subjective question, isn’t it? When you get right down to it, doesn’t it depend upon the standard by which you measure what good is? Unless your measuring stick differs from most, when you gauge your goodness, it is always in reference to other human beings. For most of us, we think of ourselves in terms of being innocent of committing the so-called “big sins" like murder. Yet, how does Jesus gauge sin? He defines sin more in terms of the heart because out of the heart our actions will flow. So, by His standard, if we are completely honest, we are all guilty: as guilty as sin (1 John 3:15; 1 John 4:19-20; Matthew 5:27-30). This sounds harsh, doesn’t it?

I have another question. Have you ever wondered why people do such evil things? Even in your own family, have you thought to yourself, “Why can’t we all just get along?” Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that, at the very heart of every relational conflict, is the problem of our selfish sin nature? Furthermore, it’s a principle that cannot be refuted, we never sin in a vacume. That is to say, our sins, not only cause us pain and suffering, our sins will hurt others. I’ve been pondering this a lot lately, and when you think about it, it explains a lot.

Even though we may try to cover ourselves with the fig leaves of religion and good works, we are either hiding *from* God in our sinful nakedness like Adam and Eve, *or we are* hidden *with* God ***in*** ***Christ*** and clothed in His righteousness. God hates prideful self-righteousness; He is repulsed by it. Look at Isaiah 64:6: “All of our righteousness is as filthy rags.” The words “filthy rags” mentioned in this passage are referring to a woman’s soiled menstrual cloths, and a woman who was on her period was considered unclean. How putrid must our *self-righteousness* be to God who is holy? Regardless of our pretense, we are not fooling God. He knows precisely where we are and the dastardly things we have done. And, furthermore, He also knows the unspeakable things that others have done to us. And yet, isn’t it amazing that despite this God loves us still?

**Romans 5:6-8 (NET)**

Jesus did not come to save righteous people … because there aren’t any. He came into this world to save sinners from their sins. To the self-righteous – that is bad news. But, to the poor soul, bound and wearied by his sins – it’s the best news of all.

***For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (For rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person perhaps someone might possibly dare to die.)***

***But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

What do these ancient Bible passages have to do with my life here in the twenty-first century? Absolutely everything! **W**hen I read the Bible, I find a thousand ways the scriptures relate to me personally. It answers so many questions. For instance, from the very beginning of God’s story *where everything fell apart*, I see a mirror reflection of my life. Not only do these Bible stories mirror my life, they explain it. C.S. Lewis articulated best what I’m trying to say when he said: “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen…not only because I can see it, but because by it… I can see everything else” (2014). This brief statement summarizing his faith is inscribed upon the memorial stone of his grave. By the way, C.S. Lewis walked through the valley of death to enter his real home. He is alive with Christ, and so shall he, along with every saint, be with the Lord forever (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Considering all we have just learned, I would like to ask you a question. Do you know where you live? What is your spiritual address? I ask this question because, I think that at times even as believers we live as if we are experiencing spiritual amnesia. Or, perhaps we have never been made aware of our address in the first place.

Now, if on the other hand, you are not sure what we are even talking about, then you may feel as if you are reading a letter that was addressed to someone else. If you aren’t sure of your spiritual address*,* please keep reading. I’ve got some ***very good news,*** and it’s addressed personally to you! God loves you. He did not send Jesus into this world to condemn you. He came to save you from your sins and give you a new address (John 3:1-18).

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

1. What kind of spiritual climate did you grow up in? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Thinking of your background, did the people in your family point you to God or away from God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever thought to yourself that only your family was broken, and perhaps every-one else had perfect families? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. After getting to know the dinamics of other families, have you ever found a family that was not marred in some way by sin?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. As previously mentioned, our sins will always hurt others. Can you give two examples of this principle? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. According to Matthew 1:21, what did Jesus come to save us from? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Read the following passages and then answer this question: In addition to our sin, what else or *who else* did Jesus come to save us from? Hint: there could be more than one answer. (See John 3:36; Romans 1:18-32, 2:4-6, 5:6-10; Colossians 1:13-14) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. What scale do most people use to measure their own “goodness?” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. Fill in the blank: Every saint was born into the world a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
10. Based on these verses Ephesians 2:1-7, what are the two conditions of every soul?

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1. Adam and Eve used fig leafs to hide their sins. What kind of fig leaves do people hide behind today? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. How does God view “self-righteousness?” See Isaiah 64:6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Romans 1:1-32, 3:9-15 (on page 33) and think of a current situation that proves God’s Word is as relevant now as it was 2000 years ago. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. How does Ephesians 2:1-3 and Titus 3:3-5 debunk the theory that people are inherently good?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. From the following verses, when does a person’s heart become sinful? Genesis 8:21; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

## Memory Verses

**1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (NET)**

***For since death came through a man,the resurrection of the dead also came through a man.For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.***

**Week # 4**

**The Blood of a Spotless Lamb**



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 1:7-10 (NET)**

***In himwe have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. He did this when he revealedto us the secretof his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forthin Christ,toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head upall things in Christ – the things in heavenand the things on earth.***

**Introduction**

From the very start, God had a plan, and it has never changed. He has always intended to have *His* *people*, living in *His* *place*, under *His* *rule—on earth as it is in heaven.* That, in a nutshell, defines the Kingdom of God. His plan was working perfectly at first in the Garden of Eden; then came the fall, and it seemed like all would be lost. Thank goodness, the story did not end there. In fact, before the world began, He designed a plan that no one could thwart. He was going to redeem us from the curse of sin. The first glimmer of hope is found in the middle of the bleakness. Right there in the account of the fall, God Himself preached the first gospel message that is recorded in the Bible (Genesis 3:15). The unlikely recipient of the gospel was the ancient serpent–the devil. Amid this seemingly hopeless situation, a promise was made. When the time had fully come, a woman (a virgin named Mary) would give birth to a Son, and He—the God/Man—would ultimately destroy the devil’s work (Galatians 4:4-5).

**God Provides**

As seen in the previous passages, the plan was set in motion before the Lord Jesus ever spoke the world into existence. What was God’s plan? The answer lies, in part, in God’s provision to cover Adam and Eve’s shame and guilt through the death of an animal. Before the fall, they were naked, but there was no shame. However, when their eyes were opened, they tried to cover themselves. Leaves were not sufficient. So, God killed the first animal and took its skin to make them clothes. I believe that animal was a lamb (Genesis 3:21). Elsewhere we find another account that foreshadowed the plan. In Genesis 22:2-8 we see the word “love” used for the very first time in the Bible (see John 3:14-18, 1 John 4:9-10). God told Abraham to take his “only son Isaac, whom he loved” and sacrifice him on an altar. Yet, all the while, God intended on providing a ram as a substitute for Abraham’s son. Here is another typology--part of the curse in the garden was that the ground produced thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17-19). It is no coincidence that the substitutionary ram God provided for Abraham was caught in just such a thicket by the horns on its head. Around four thousand years later, remnants of the ancient curse remained. Thorns were gathered and twisted together to make a crown to adorn the head of another Lamb (John 19:1-42).

**Revelation 13:7-8 (NET)**

***The beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them. He was given ruling authorityover every tribe, people,language, and nation, and all those who live on the earth will worship the beast,everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was killed.***

* According to the passage above and Ephesians 1:4, when were the saints names written in the Lambs book of life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What is implied by the faact that the Lamb was killed before the foundation of the world? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

One more noteworthy narrative took place in Exodus 12:5-27. When God was about to redeem His people out of slavery in Egypt, He told them to slaughter a lamb and place the blood over the doorposts of their homes. When the death angel saw the blood, he would pass over the house. Every one of these blood sacrifices prefigured the One who would come as our substitute--Jesus, the Lamb of God. Through the shedding of His precious blood, God would redeem His people from their sins.

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

***You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed – not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ. He was foreknownbefore the foundation of the world butwas manifested in these last timesfor your sake.***

There is another, not so apparent, illustration from the Garden of Eden that we do not want to miss. If you’ll remember, there were two trees in the middle of the garden. We have looked at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, now let’s consider the other one appropriately called the Tree of Life.

**Genesis 3:21-24 (NET)**

***The Lord God made garments from skinfor Adam and his wife, and clothed them.***

***And the Lord God said, “Nowthat the man has become like one of us, knowinggood and evil, he must not be allowedto stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord God expelled himfrom the orchard in Eden to cultivate the ground from which he had been taken. When he drovethe man out, he placed on the eastern sideof the orchard in Eden angelic sentrieswho used the flame of a whirling swordto guard the way to the tree of life.***

Look closely at the above text. The cherubim and a flaming sword blocked the way to the Tree of Life. Why? Because, if they could get to that tree and eat of its fruit, they would live forever! Now fast forward approximately four thousand years to another tree. A tree that was cut down to make a cross. And what kind of “fruit” hung upon that tree (Deut. 21:23)? On a hill called Golgotha, suspended between heaven and earth, was the naked, mutilated and blood-soaked body of God’s One and Only Son.

**Galatians 3:13 (NET)**

***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).***

The curse of sin was absorbed by the “fruit” that hung on a cut-down tree when Christ, who knew no sin, became sin for us (1 Peter 2:24). Now looking back to the Garden, what would happen if Adam and Eve could eat from the Tree of Life? They would live forever! By allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, the mystery becomes quite clear, and this is it: The Tree of Life symbolizes the cross, and the fruit that hung upon that tree is the Lord Jesus Christ! Keeping all of this in mind, listen closely to the controversial words of Jesus in the following passages.

**John 6:47-58 (NET)**

***I tell you the solemn truth, the one who believeshas eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestorsate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. Thisis the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a personmay eat from it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The breadthat I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesusbegan to argue with one another, “How can this mangive us his flesh to eat?”***

***Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no lifein yourselves. The one who eatsmy flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is truefood, and my blood is truedrink. The one who eatsmy flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him.***

***Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who consumesme will live because of me. Thisis the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread your ancestorsate, but then later died. The one who eatsthis bread will live forever.***

The Lord Jesus is the Living Bread (symbolized by the fruit). And everyone who eats of Him will live forever. Henceforth, the cross of Christ became the ***Tree of Life***! By the way, this tree brings us from the garden all the way to the end of the story of the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7).

* Read each of the following passages and make a note of the provision or foreshadowing of God’s ultimate plan to deal with what took place in the Garden of Eden. What do these passages have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:14-15; Exodus 16:13-20; Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:20-22,28, 10:19-22; Revelation 1:5, 5:9, 7:10, 22:1-5; 1 John 3:8; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 1:13-14,19-20 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I would like to use the story I shared in the last chapter to make some applications here. When I lied about my crimes and subsequently allowed my little brother to be punished, He did not suffer in silence. He screamed, “I did not do it! I did not do it!” And furthermore, to state the obvious, it wasn’t *his choice* to take my beating.

But, now, let’s look at the Lord Jesus. When He was falsely accused and arrested, He could have screamed the truth like my little brother did-- “I did not do it!” Instead, He was led like a lamb to the slaughter; He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:2-12). Then, He said, “Father forgive them.” In sinless perfection, the Lamb of God willingly submitted to His Father and took our punishment, thereby absorbing the wrath of God. And as He was dying, Jesus cried out, “Father, why have you forsaken me.” Now, why would the Father in heaven abandon His Precious Son at such a time of need? Habakkuk 1:13 says that “God’s eyes are too holy to look upon sin.”

As Jesus was dying upon the cross, He became intimately acquainted with our sins. Think about that. Every vile thought and deed conceived in the darkness of our unredeemed hearts was placed upon Him. It’s hard for the mind to fathom how repugnant sin truly is to One so holy. That was the true horror of the crucifixion, and these very sins were in the cup He pleaded with the Father to take from Him. No wonder He agonized to the point of sweating drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46).

When our sins were laid upon Jesus, the Father turned His back on His Beloved. At that moment, for the very first time, the Lord Jesus experienced our alienation from the Father. Yet, His separation purchased our reconciliation.

**Revelation 21:22-27 (Net)**

***Now****I* ***saw******no******temple******in******the city,******because******the Lord******God******– the All-Powerful******–******and******the Lamb******are******its******temple. The city******does******not******need******the sun******or******the moon******to******shine******on it,******because******the glory******of God******lights******it******up,******and******its******lamp******is the Lamb.******The nations******will walk******by******its******light******and******the kings******of the earth******will bring******their******grandeurinto it.******Its gates******will******never******be closed******during the day****(****and******there will be******no******night******there).***

***They will bring the grandeur and the wealthof the nationsinto it, butnothing ritually uncleanwill ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestableor practices falsehood,but only those whose namesare written in the Lamb’s book of life.***

Why did it have to happen this way? You see, although God is love, He is also holy. He is so holy that He must keep His Word and punish sin. His holiness demands it. Furthermore, because we are made in God’s image, it’s intrinsic in our nature to want justice and fairness. How many times have you heard this statement, “It’s not fair.”? And, when we are wronged, we say, “Someone is going to pay for this!” Well, the wages of sin is death, and someone will pay—either you or Jesus.

Has anyone ever taken your punishment? Or, have you ever willingly suffered for someone else? If so, it is highly improbable that such a selfless act would be performed on behalf of an enemy. Yet, that is how God’s Word describes us…we are God’s enemies (Romans 5:6-12).

Some two-thousand years ago, on a hill called Golgotha, a tree was cut down and made into a cross. That day split history in two. God’s justice and wrath collided with His loving kindness and mercy. There is no greater love than that (John 15:13)!

**1 Peter 3:18 (NET)**

***Because Christ also sufferedonce for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God,***

***by being put to death in the flesh butby being made alive in the spirit.***

Most people will readily embrace a God of love, but they willfully ignore the fact of His holiness. Those who fall into this category refuse to believe in the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. And consequently, they never see their sins or the need for repentance. Yet, even though many will reject Him, this cannot diminish the magnitude of the love of God on display as Christ Jesus laid down His life.

* Look up Isaiah 53:1-12 and Psalm 22:1-19 and find the specific prophecies that describe the death of the Lamb of God. Make a list. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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* There is a scarlet thread that runs throughout the Bible. Read Genesis 38:28; Exodus 25:4; Joshua 2:18-21. What is it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



**God always had a plan to reverse the curse**



God’s divine ingenuity is as magnificent as it is mysterious. For instance, a careful study of Romans 1:18-3:20 reveals the terminal diagnosis of our sin problem. Then, when you read Romans 3:21-5:21, you will see that God prescribes the remedy.

Another example comes to light when you consider the paradox found in the Latin word for cross—the word is c*rux.* It’s quite fascinating. The crux, or cross, represents many parallel truths that point us to Christ. For starters, just picture a crossroad with a guidepost pointing you in the right direction. (Jesus said, “I am the way.”) Here is another connection to Christ. Crux is also associated with red, like the cardinal bird or like blood. The author of the book of Hebrews said, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22). In fact, even the word excruciating means ex (out of) crux (the cross). The Greek word cardio (which means heart) also comes from the word. So, when we get to the heart of the matter—we have reached the crux.

The word crux could also mean a hinge of a door, an axis or a turning point. (Jesus said, “I am the Door.”) But, we are not done yet. From the word crux, comes the general meaning of the word crucial. As you can see, the symbolisms found in the word crux or cross are numerous, but one stands out above all the others. Here it is, and it’s ingenious: At the very heart or *crux* of all our problems is sin. The cross or ***crux of Christ*** was the pivotal hinge that opened the door to the kingdom of God. Now do you see how God provided the cure for our problem by the blood that Jesus shed for us on the cross?

**When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride… see from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did e’er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown? --- When I Survey the Wondrous Cross --Isaac Watts, published 1707**

This beautifully brings into focus the central turning point to humanity’s problems. The axis on which all else depends is the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus, His burial and then His subsequent resurrection on the third day. And even His resurrection from the dead was another picture of our resurrection from spiritual death to life. Notice the irony. The darkest day in history, the very epitome of all evil, is called “Good Friday.” Three days later, He rose again, defeating sin and death forever!

* Read the following passages, and state why Jesus died. 1 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:9; Matthew 26:26-29; Hebrews 10:19-22 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read 1 Corinthians 1:17. Why is Jesus’ resurrection is so signifigant? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Why is His resurrection so crucial to the saints? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Romans 3:21-26 (NET)**

***But nowapart from the law the righteousness of God***

***(which is attested by the law and the prophets)has been disclosed – namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.***

***For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

***But they are justifiedfreely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayedhimat his deathas the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstratehis righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This wasalso to demonstratehis righteousness in the present time, so that he would be justand the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness.***

## 

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

1. Who preached the first gospel message, and to whom was it preached? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read John 8:34-36. Are there any sins that you continually struggle to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you comfortable with confessing your sins to God and other trusted believers? \_\_\_\_
4. If you are in Christ and He is holy, how should this change how you look at sin (1 Peter 1:15-20)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read 1 Peter 1:18-20. In your family, do you see unhealthy patterns in relationships such as passing blame, manipulation, co-dependency, control, or enabling? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Take Isaiah 53:5 and personalize it. “He was pierced for \_\_\_\_\_\_... “The punishment that brought \_\_\_\_\_ peace was upon Him.” … “By His stripes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_am healed.”
7. Read Revelation 1:5; Romans 1:18; 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How do we know that God hates sin? Hint: there could be more than one answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Paul’s departing words to the Ephesians in Acts 20:25-28 and answer this question: What was the purchase price of the church—the bride of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

## Memory Verse

**John 1:29 (NET)**

***On the next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of Godwho takes away the sin of the world!”***

**Week #5**

**“But God” …Makes All the Difference**



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 2:4-5 (NET)**

***But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved!***

**Introduction**

 Thus far in our study, we have discovered that we are born into this world with a seemingly insurmountable problem.  The problem is this:  because of sin, we are separated from a Holy God. But what is insurmountable for us is not for Him. Even before time began, God had an overarching plan of redemption and hope.  As we saw in our last lesson, the plan was written in blood. In fact, if you were to take a red pen and mark the references or the allusions to the blood atonement in your Bible, you would discover that it spans the length of the God-breathed text. Like a large red arrow or a neon sign, the red line points us to the antidote for our problem. It’s the blood of a spotless Sacrificial Lamb—the Lord Jesus Christ.

So now, we are going to probe even deeper into the depths of God’s love and consider how He has bridged the chasm between us and Himself through grace and mercy. For here, the helpless sinner may pass over from despair and death to salvation and life.

**When God Intervenes**

When we look at our key passage from Ephesians 2, we might be tempted to skip over the two little words at the beginning of the sentence.  The words “But God” seem less important than the huge concepts embodied in the words “saved by grace” and “through faith.”  I promise that we will drink deeply from both these life-giving fountains shortly. Yet, before we do, let’s think for a moment on what happens when you take the simple word *but* and combine it with the word *God*. Here are a few examples: We were dead... “But God” made us alive. Or, we were still powerless, ungodly sinners and God’s enemies… “But God” demonstrated His love by this—Christ died for us. We were separated from God and without hope in this world… “But God” has reconciled us to Himself through the blood of Christ. Do you see how powerful and weighty these two words are? They can alter a life, a family, a nation and even the whole wide world. When we find this word combination in the Bible, we should stop and take a closer look because it speaks volumes. The words “But God” mark a special place—a transition point from one state to another, the place where God intervenes in history. In our key passage, it marks the point that we pass from spiritual death to eternal life.

There are other short word combinations like this that we should pay close attention to when we are reading scripture. The word combination “for God,” is an example. Grammarians tell us that using the word “for” as a conjunction (especially at the beginning of a sentence) is an old pattern of writing that is rarely used anymore. When it is used, it adds formality and weight to what is being said. So, although it is rare in other modern documents, we still see this construction in many (but not all) of the most modern translation of the Bible. For instance, you will find this usage in one of the most quoted passages in the Bible—John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (K.J.V.). Here’s one more… “For God made His light shine in our hearts.” Why would this old way of writing still be used in modern translations of the Bible? Why don’t they say “Because God” or “Since God,” or just say “God”? Like a highlighter, using “For God” retains the weightiness and formality of the statement.

This is all just to say that small words can mean a lot when we are referring to the Scriptures. Because, as Jesus asserted in Matthew 5:18, every jot and tittle is significant. Now let us return to our original subject. Those “But God” moments do make all the difference in the world. From the hour they brought us from spiritual death to life, to the thousand other faith-building moments when God has mercifully intervened in the situations of our lives, these moments changed the trajectory of our lives forever.

As you read the following stories, consider how the Lord, in His unfathomable love, interrupts our hopeless, helpless, godless lives with these glorious words: “But God.” For when He does, we can never be the same.

* From the above list of passages, pick out three and state how situations were altered by the words *but* or *for* God. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Once Blind but Now I See**

In 1725, a son of a sailor was born. His name was John Newton, and his is an interesting story. His father owned a slave ship. Like father, like son they say. And so, John Newton joined in the deplorable trade and earned his wages through the blood, sweat, and tears of the humans he trafficked. God only knows the unspeakable sins committed on that ship. By virtue of his first birth, John was no different than you or I. He was lost, sinful, spiritually blind and separated from God. But then, one fateful night at sea, by grace, God provided a ferocious storm to teach this hardened sinner what it means to fear Him. That’s when John Newton had a divine encounter with the living God. He cried out, “Lord—have mercy on my soul!” And God, who is rich in mercy, saved him, and the change was obvious. He was no longer a sinner. He was a forgiven saint. His personal testimony is depicted in the beloved hymn he wrote…*Amazing Grace.*

The first line of his song offers a window into the soul of a man who had been twice born. Newton’s song begins with these words, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see.” What was he talking about? Was he physically blind or lost at sea? No. He was blind to the glory of God in Christ, and he was blinded by sin to his wretched condition.

The apostle Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote an explanation of spiritual blindness to the church at Corinth. After all, Paul was once blind until he was blinded by the Light of the world, and then he received his spiritual sight.

**2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NET)**

***But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaimourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slavesfor Jesus’ sake. For God, who said “Let light shine out of darkness,”is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ.***

Toward the end of Newton’s life, his physical eyesight was failing, but with the eyes of his heart, he had perfect vision (Ephesians 1:17-18). The following words sum-up his statement of faith: “Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior” (Newton 2016). Today Newton’s faith has become sight, and no doubt, as he gazes upon the beauty of the Lord, he is singing that eternal song of praise to his Savior—the Lord Jesus Christ.

* What are your thoughts about God offering grace and mercy to murderers and rapists? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Along those lines, what was so amazing about God having grace upon John Newton?

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* Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 and then fill in the blanks: “But for the grace of God\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

There is an oft repeated saying that goes something like this, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” The person who has taken a long hard look at her own soul’s propensity towards depravity can’t forget the restraints that God’s grace has put on her actions. She understands that it took just as much amazing grace to forgive her sins as it did the vilest murderer who ever lived.

**A Road That Makes All the Difference**

If you have a story in you, or, like Newton, a song of praise, you’ve got to get it out. It simply can’t be contained. We may not all have a song in us, but every saint has a story of God’s grace. Because our testimonies are so intertwined, I’ll share a portion of my husband’s story of grace before I tell my own.

Although Art and I both grew up in families that were actively involved in church, neither of us were saved until we were adults. Art was forty years old when he was saved. This fact, alone, explains the root cause of our problems. But, I don’t think our story is that different from most. It is my opinion that churches of all denominations are full of broken people living lives in sin and deception. Seasons come and seasons go, yet nothing changes because even though these people attend Church, they are not saved. By the way, people are the Church, not buildings.

**Matthew 7:13-27 (NET)**



**Have you ever been on a road that you thought was taking you to a certain destination, only to realize too late that you were going in the wrong direction the whole time?**



***Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it.***

***“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 bad tree 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. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast***

***out demons and do many powerful deeds? Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’Everyonewho hears these words of mine and does them is likea wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!***

So, my husband and I knew Bible stories, but we did not know the One all these stories pointed to. We were lost, religious church members on the wide road to destruction, and we were completely blind to the fact. We were *perishing in the pew* (a title of one of the lessons you will find on the Catalyst website). As Jesus so fittingly described the Church of Laodicea, we were naked, miserable, poor and blind (Revelation 3:17). I will expound on my testimony in just a bit. But first, I want to give an example of spiritual blindness. I had been saved for a few years when I wrote my first Bible study. It was based on Matthew 7:13-27 (printed above). I borrowed the title from a poem by Robert Frost titled “The Road Not Taken.” This poem was the one I selected for the senior quote in my high school yearbook. Although, at the time of my graduation, the poem had an entirely different meaning for me. The reality was I was traveling my own path of destruction and going my own way on the wide road. However, it certainly was not the road less traveled.

**Isaiah 53:6 (NET)**

***All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the***

***Lord caused the sin of all of us to attack him.***

**A Picture Worth a Thousand Words**

My husband, Art, is not only intelligent but also quite artistic. His most famous work, in my opinion, was done in his senior year of high school. He won an award for his portrait of the king—Elvis that is. Art had not come to know the real *KING* yet. Nevertheless, I thought the painting was so good that I took it to Graceland and entered it in the annual Elvis art contest. I was sure we would win thousands of dollars. I had hoped Elvis would pay for my daughter’s wedding. Well, that did not happen. However, Art’s painting did make our local nightly news. When the contest was over, we picked up the painting and drove Elvis home. On the way home, we sang part of this old hymn: “Coming home, coming home, never more to roam, open wide thine arms of love, Lord I'm coming home." When we got home, Elvis returned to the closet.

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As the adage goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. So now I want to tell you about a more important work of “Art.” When I began to write the study of the wide and narrow roads, I asked Art if he would do a painting for me to give us a visual for our study. And so, he did. You can see it above. As our three young children watched the painting unfold, they appropriately named the wide road “Death Road” - A fitting title.

Art painted a beautiful gold mirrored gate at the entrance to hell. The gate was to reflect the people on the wide road. Have you ever been to Las Vegas, Nevada? If so, you have an idea of the facade of the gate to hell which stands at the end of death road in Art’s painting. All that the world offers us may look good on the outside, but just like the shiny facades on the casinos, it’s all a grand illusion.

There was one thing I never liked about the painting. Jesus’ face looked nothing like the one I saw when His light shone in my heart. But you see, Art was blind to the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. And consequently, he was blind to the true condition of his own heart.

Art’s painting was never completed. He stopped short of painting the people on the wide road, although we talked in detail about what they would look like. Have you ever read the short tale by Hans Christian Andersen titled “The Emperor’s New Clothes”? If you have, then you will remember the Emperor’s new clothes were no clothes at all. If Art ever completes his painting, the people on “Death Road” will be dressed like the Emperor. They are naked, but they don’t know it because the reflection in the gates of hell shows them wearing their Sunday best. But they are as naked as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They are not dressed in the blood of Christ and His righteousness.

Suppose, if you will, an artist is at his easel painting a portrait of a man who survived the atrocities of the concentration camps in Poland. Have you seen the images of the emaciated, naked, half-dead human beings? Now picture the artist standing next to a mirrored wall in his studio. As he paints, he glances at himself in the mirror, and he sees a well-fed, well-dressed man. Here’s the irony: the artist is painting a self-portrait. That was my husband! Perhaps Art was beginning to see himself on the wide road, and that’s why he stopped painting. Like the man who looks into the mirror of the Word of God and yet walks away, he quickly forgets what he looked like (James 1:21-25). Aren’t we all guilty of this? This is precisely what happens when we attend church, week after week, hearing the Word of God in vain. It doesn’t penetrate our heart; in fact, it hardens it. This is the exact condition of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3.

The longer I live, the more I realize the Bible is true—every single word of it. We reap what we sow, we reap later than we sow and we reap much more than we sow. The devil never gives you a true picture of what is at the end of his road. Unless the Lord intervenes with a “but God” kind of roadblock, we will stay on the wide road, separated from God, in the domain of the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. This road abruptly ends, and then we will live our worst nightmares for all eternity.

Now, back to Art’s story. Recounting the day of his salvation, He said, “When the Lord saved me, He introduced me to two people. First, I was introduced to Jesus in all His holiness. And second, God showed me who I was, a sinner, lost and separated from the God who loved me. This is when I understood for the first time that sin was not what I did; it was who I was. The devil worked on me for a few days telling me that God was too holy to save someone who was so sinful. Then, in desperation, I pleaded with Jesus to save me, and by His amazing grace, He did.”

Shortly thereafter, he asked me, “How could I have been so blind? How could I have missed salvation all these years in the church?” Well, now the answers are clear—he was blind, *but God* opened his eyes. Until God leads us to the cross, and we see the Lord Jesus dying in our place, we are blind to the fact that we are lost. Furthermore, this revelation is a work of God and a *gift* of amazing grace.



**The devil does not care if he takes you to hell from a brothel, a bar stool or a church pew. It’s all the same to him, just so he can keep you blinded from coming into the light and the Way of Truth.**



* Read the following passages: Job 42:5-6; Isaiah 6:5; Luke 5:5-8. In each of these stories, someone had an encounter with God. What do all these stories have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Do you have a “But for the Grace of God….” interruption in your life story? If so, would you be willing to write it here and share it with someone? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**My Line in the Song of Grace**

When I contemplate my life before Christ and how undeserving I truly am, I’m astonished by God’s long-suffering, tenacious love. And just to think that before the foundation of the world, He knew me and yet still loved me. There are some things too great to understand, and this is one of them. Admittedly, I am ashamed of the woman I was without Him, but I’m not ashamed of the Lord Jesus—the author and finisher of my faith (Hebrews 2:5-18, 5:9). So now, I would like to add my line to the eternal song of praise for God’s amazing grace.

**Isaiah 61:10-11 (NET)**

***Iwill greatly rejoicein the Lord; I will be overjoyed because of my God. For he clothes me in garments of deliverance; he puts on me a robe symbolizing vindication. I look like a bridegroom when he wears a turban as a priest would; I look like a bride when she puts on her jewelry. For just as the ground produces its crops and a garden yields its produce, so the sovereign Lord will cause deliveranceto grow, and give his people reason to praise him in the sight of all the nations.***

The verb “to grace” is sometimes defined as to adorn, decorate or embellish (See Revelation 21:1-2). This reminds me of my story of grace. Looking back, there seems to be a wedding theme woven throughout my life. From the very first year of my marriage, my career was preparing brides for their weddings. I had a business named Memphis Bridal Gallery, and as the owner, one of my jobs was to write a detailed description of the wedding dress for the mother of the bride. Most descriptions included seed pearls because pearls are the most often used adornment for wedding gowns along with crystals, sequins, rhinestones, silver and gold thread, and lace.

My Pastor, David Lawrence, has a message titled: “Turning Problems into Pearls” (2012). In that message, he says, “God never wastes your past.” Indeed, the Lord has taken an abundance of problems and used them as instruments to write my story of grace.

**Jeremiah 8:20-22 (NET)**

***They cry, ‘Harvest time has come and gone, and the summer is over,***

***and still we have not been delivered.’ My heart is crushed because my dear people are being crushed.I go about crying and grieving. I am overwhelmed with dismay.There is still medicinal ointmentavailable in Gilead! There is still a physician there! Why then have my dear people not been restored to health?***

As I have previously mentioned, something was missing in my life. I was broken, and so was Art. That’s how our marriage began in 1986. It’s strange to me now, thinking about dressing all those brides in their ornate white wedding gowns, while my wedding dress was not white and not embellished with a single bead or pearl. Figuratively speaking, this dress mirrored the condition of my spiritually dead heart and what it means to try to cover my sins in my own self-righteousness and religious rituals. No wonder I felt like anything but a beautiful bride on my wedding day. Have you heard of these old wedding traditions: “Something old, something new, something borrowed something blue”? The item I chose as “something borrowed” was a very common wedding accessory, a single strand of pearls.

I was 26 years old when the Heavenly Father led me to the foot of the cross of Christ. After an entire lifetime of church attendance, I saw for the very first time the horror of my sins hanging on the love of my life. When I saw how pure and holy He is, I saw what a dirty mess I truly was.  In His boundless grace and lovingkindness, God led me to see specific sins. But, the most heinous of all my sins was my religious self-righteousness. What amazed me the most was that He knew all I had ever done, and yet He loved me. That day, for the first time, I understood that He knew me; He knew me. He was not blind to what I was. But He also showed me His enormous heart of love and compassion toward me. I thought, “How could it be that He still wanted me for His bride?” The only explanation is grace.

God did not waste the years I spent in the bridal business. It was in those years that I became His Bride! He is still working to remove the spots and wrinkles from my wedding gown. He is not done with me yet. Preparation for this wedding is a lifelong task. Part of this process has been refining me through fiery trials. (I will be addressing some of these trials in book number two. The lesson is called “The Doctrine of Storms, Sorrows and Suffering.”)

God is a God of redemption, and when we give him our testimonies, no matter how shameful or painful they may be, He can turn the ashes into something beautiful and useful for our good and His glory. These years were preparation for the eternal work God has chosen for me—to introduce others to King Jesus and dress the King’s daughters for the wedding by making disciples. From beginning to the end, this is a story of grace upon grace (John 1:14-16).

**Psalm 34:8 (NET)**

***Tasteand see that the Lord is good! How blessed is the onewho takes shelter in him!***

Someone once said, “Grace is God satisfying our souls with His Son so that we are forever ruined for everyone else.” To put it another way: the best advertisement for a product is a satisfied customer. There is no one else who ever filled my empty soul like Jesus. Is He that good? Is His grace so completely satisfying that everyone and everything else pales in comparison? Yes, He is, and, yes, He does. He absolutely satisfies; I am ruined forever. And that’s a very, very good thing.

**Psalm 40:2-3 (NET)**

***He lifted me out of the watery pit, out of the slimy mud. He placed my feet on a rock***

***and gave me secure footing. He gave me reason to sing a new song, praising our God.***

***May many see what God has done, so that they might swear allegiance to him and trust in the Lord!***

**God's Love Is Not Blind**

In an age of social media, where people can easily hide behind a smokescreen of photoshopped images of themselves, it is easy to put your best face forward. We can have a thousand “friends” who “like” our photos, yet never have a true relationship with anyone. Any “so called” relationship that is absent of transparency and acceptance is no relationship at all. If we must wear a mask to gain acceptance, then we will never be at ease when we are around that person.

This reminds me of a woman I knew who always looked like she stepped out of a magazine. Her makeup was flawless, her hair perfectly coiffured and she always dressed to the tee. She once confessed to me, “When I was engaged to be married, I never once let my fiancé see me without makeup—until our honeymoon. He was shocked!” Not surprisingly, the marriage didn’t last that long. As someone wisely said, “What you catch them with you must keep them with.” Perhaps you have tried to look good, be good or do good to gain love. If so, then you know that is not only exhausting, but it is pointless. And furthermore, where did all this effort get you? Nowhere! I’ve just described much of my life. Then I met Jesus. To know the fullness of His love this way was like finally coming home to a place I have never been. At long last - it was rest for my weary soul.

My friend, if you have ever felt invisible, insignificant or marginalized, then you are in good company with those who were forever touched by the freedom of the love of God in Christ. As we previously discussed in another week’s lesson, only Jesus truly knows us, and yet, loves us unconditionally. Do you know this Jesus? If not, then I hope you will accept His invitation.

**Matthew 11:28-29 (Net)**

***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yokeon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.***

* Is there anyone in your life with whom you feel completely at ease being yourself? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Do you think those closest to you feel comfortable being themselves around you? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What do you think it would take to foster this kind of relationship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Hound of Heaven**

**Hosea 2:14-17 (NET)**

***However, in the future I will allure her;I will lead******her back into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give back her vineyards to her, and turn the “Valley of Trouble”into an “Opportunity for Hope.” There she will sing as she did when she was young,when she came up from the land of Egypt. “At that time,”declares the Lord,***

***“you will call,‘My husband’;you will never again call me,‘My master.’***

***For I will remove the names of the Baal idols******from your lips,***

***so that you will never again utter their names!”***

In his poem, “The Hound of Heaven,” the English poet Francis Thompson wrote of a God who woos and pursues His bride. Like an unfaithful wife, we run after other lovers. Even so, He searches us out. He paid the highest price for our ransom, and He has too much at stake to let us go (Romans 5: 6-12; John 3:14-19; Ephesians 2:1-15). It comes as no surprise that the word *rescue* is found in the definition of the Greek words *forgive, grace, and save*.

In a previous lesson, we read Acts 17:24-28. It says that God has determined the exact time and place that we will live. Kiki Carson, a beautiful addition to our disciple group, tells us of how the Lord sought her when she was an exchange student in Morocco. Kiki said, “He was pursuing me like a Bridegroom pursues His bride.” Don’t you just love that? If you are in Christ, although you may have been unaware of it, He did the same for you. The instrument God uses to draw us may seem like a contradiction to His love when it involves suffering. For John Newton, God sought him amid a tumultuous sea. For my husband and me, it was a turbulent marriage. For Saul, who became the apostle Paul, it was God’s grace that stopped him in his tracks in the middle of a murderous rampage against Christians. For others, it could be a thousand other forms of grace.

**It matters not the place, nor the circumstances we are in, God knows who we are and where we are. Oh, we may run, but we cannot hide from the Hound of Heaven!**

**Jeremiah 23:24 (NET)**

***“Do you really think anyone can hide himself where I cannot see him?” the LORD ask. “Do you not know that I am everywhere?” the LORD asks.***

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

1. What do you think it means to be spiritually blind? (2 Corinthians 4:3-6) How does one get spiritual sight? (Psalm 119:130) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. From all that we have learned, describe what kinds of people Christ died to save. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Ephesians 2:1-9 clearly states how God feels about those who are dead spiritually. What does the text say? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. When a person is the recipient of God’s amazing grace, what are some of the effects that this will have upon her life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read the following passages Psalm 103:1-14; Isaiah 38:17, 43:25; Hebrews 9:26. Make a list of what God’s grace has done for every sinner who repents: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. See if you can find any passages that have the transitional phrases “But God” or “For God” and list them here.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. What kind of circumstances did the Lord bring into your life as He wooed you to Himself? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Read Ephesians 1:4-5; Acts 2:38-39; John 6:44-45,65. What do these passages tell us about how God woos and pursues us? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

**Luke 19:10 (NET)**

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

**Week #6**

**The Riches of God’s Mercy and Grace**



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 2:4-9 (NET)**

***But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved!***

***and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming agesthe surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not fromworks, so that no one can boast.***

**Introduction**

For much of my life, even as a believer, I have misunderstood the concepts of God’s grace and mercy. Although, having spent a considerable amount of my life attending an evangelical church, I was certainly acquainted with these doctrines. The fallacy of this mindset is not inconsequential. As I have previously mentioned, my lack of understanding of grace and mercy resulted in an unhealthy pattern of trying to earn love, even God’s love. Until recently, I didn’t even realize just how detrimental this faulty thinking was to my relationship with the Lord. It has caused me to live as a beggar—even though in Christ I am rich. Furthermore, without having a firm grip on the doctrine of grace, it left a crack in the foundation of my faith. Left unattended, the crack becomes a crater that drains the joy right out of my salvation. And if I am being honest, I still struggle with a mindset that somehow God loves me when I am good, but when I am bad—not so much.

It all goes back to the fact that fairness and justice are ingrained in our DNA. These deep-seated beliefs are not wrong. It is just that apart from God, they are non-existent. Whether I am behaving good or bad, I don’t deserve God’s love. I never have, and I never will. Rather, by the very nature of my first birth, I have merited death. That’s why it is so important that we move past a surface, sterile view of God’s grace and mercy. Until we do, we are living as paupers, even though we are daughters of the King. Writing this study, especially this lesson, is helping me to retrieve my joy. I sincerely hope it will do the same for you.

And so, we are going to revisit the same passage as in the previous lesson. Only this time, we are going to hone in on the two bedrocks of the Christian faith—grace and mercy. We are going to mull them over, look at them from different perspectives and try to define them.

**A Reformed Pharisee**

It is difficult to speak with any authority on a subject that you are unfamiliar with. Whereas, experience can afford you the credentials of an expert. As one who had experienced God’s mercy and grace firsthand, the apostle Paul was well qualified to speak on the matter.

Reading Paul’s testimony, it’s apparent that he had experienced a radical paradigm shift. When he encountered the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, not only was his theology reformed, but his life was transformed. In his “B.C.” days as Saul, he was a law-abiding, rule- keeping, legalistic Pharisee (Acts 25:5-18). But all that changed when God captivated his heart with grace. At last, he was set free from the futility of striving to earn salvation by keeping the Law. And what a relief it is to be unfettered from the vain attempts to earn God’s love or appease Him with empty, burdensome rituals. Paul knew for a fact that God “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5). And He never got over it. With a heart full of gratitude and awe, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus at the time, and he said:

**1 Timothy 1:13-16 (NET)**

***Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I was treated with mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and our Lord’s grace was abundant, bringing faith and love in Christ Jesus. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” – and I am the worst of them!  But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life.***

* Make a list of some of the burdensome rituals that religions put upon people? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

It is traditionally believed that the book of Galatians, a tutorial on grace, was written while Paul was at Ephesus. Ephesians 2:4-9 is a condensed version of the entire book of Galatians. The crucial theme of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone became the hallmark of the reformation. We have just celebrated the 500-year anniversary of this historical event. In fact, Galatians has been called “Luther’s book” because Luther took his stand on the words of Paul’s apologetic letter on this subject. That’s how vital the doctrine of grace is.



**“The delusive doctrine of works blinds the Christian’s eyes, perverts a right understanding of faith, and forces him from the way of truth and salvation.”**

**Martin Luther (2000)**



Paul spoke more about God’s grace than any other writer in the Bible, and if he penned the book of Hebrews, that is over 100 times. When Paul finally embraced grace, it became the anthem and theme of his life—his emancipation declaration. If we are in Christ, it is ours too.

**Galatians 2:16-21 (NET)**

***Yet we knowthat no one is justified by the works of the lawbut by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christand not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no onewill be justified. But if while seeking to be justified in Christ we ourselves have also been found to be sinners, is Christ then one who encourages sin? Absolutely not! But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God’s law. For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God. I have been crucified with Christ,*** ***and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. Sothe life I now live in the body,I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God,who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside God’s grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!***

**The Lord Abounds in Mercy**

**Psalm 145:8-9 (NET)**

***The Lord is merciful and compassionate; he is patientand demonstrates great loyal love.***

***The Lord is good to all, and has compassion on all he has made.***

Outside of the Bible, I can’t even think of a context in which the word mercy is used today. There is one exception, and it just so happens to be a great platform for illustration. Let’s think in terms of a court of law, where a judge has “mercy” upon the accused sparing his life from the death penalty. Or here is another, less noble, example. For instance, you say flippantly, “Lord, have mercy." I'm ashamed to admit—but I’m guilty. However, the Lord has been readjusting my thinking lately on this subject.

To bring this lesson closer to home, I would like to tell you a story. Well, a few stories to be exact. Not too long ago, our family had a frightening experience when my sister-in-law was in a terrible car wreck. Not only did the Lord spare her life, he also protected her newly donated kidney—double miracles! Being the visual learner that I am, the Holy Spirit (my teacher) seized the moment as an opportunity to give me an object lesson on mercy.

We spent two full days in our local Regional Medical Center. As we took turns sitting by her side in the bowels of the trauma center, we got a firsthand look at many gut-wrenching crisis situations. We were totally out of our element.

With only a curtain separating us and other critically injured people, we could not help but hear the conversations and wailing cries of the wounded. An injured young man who had been involved in a shoot-out was placed beside my sister-in-law. This young man had apparently shot some of the other victims in the trauma center. Along with several police officers who came to pay the criminal a visit was his aunt. I overheard her plead with her nephew. She said: “You need to get down on your knees and thank the good Lord for having mercy on you and sparing your life!” Although he appeared oblivious to the fact that God had spared his life, his aunt knew better. Her words, it seemed, fell on deaf ears and a hardened heart. His calloused response to her pleas exposed his lack of fear of the Lord and disregard for the mercy that had been shown him.

There’s little doubt that she left there praying God would have mercy on her nephew’s soul and grant him repentance. I silently interceded for her, her nephew and the others in the trauma center. My heart was tendered to the woman’s plight because, just recently, I lost my nephew, Billy. His short life was replete with trials and sorrows. Granted, there were many times he tried to reform his life, but to no avail. When he couldn’t walk the “straight and narrow,” he would give up and run from the Lord (I understand, I’ve been there, too). Many a pleading prayer had been offered up on Billy’s behalf. The last couple of years of his life, the Lord answered our prayers by placing Billy into the care of a local ministry for men named *Warriors Center* ([www.warriorscenter.org](http://www.warriorscenter.org)). Once he entered their program, they loved Billy to Christ and then discipled him. Then, when he was finally ready, the Lord took Billy home. At the time of this writing, he would be celebrating his thirty–fourth birthday.

**Romans 11:32-36 (NET)**

***For God has consigned all people to disobedience so that he may show mercy to them all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways!***

***For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that Godneeds to repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all*** ***things. To him be glory forever! Amen.***

Now only a fool would claim to fully understand the plans and ways of God. They are far above our pay scale. But of this I am sure, Billy’s life ultimately brought glory to God. How is that so, you may ask? His life displayed the enormous heart of God—His patience, His mercy, His longsuffering and the greatest of all of God’s attributes – His unfailing love.

Is there someone in your life who desperately needs the Lord? After years of praying, are you wondering if he or she is a lost cause? To persist in this kind of intercessory prayer takes faith—the kind that moves mountains! Where are you going to find that? Jesus said in Matthew 17:20-21 that even if our faith is as tiny as a mustard seed we can move mountains. He’s speaking hypothetically here, not so much about physical but spiritual obstacles - such as blinded eyes being opened, or those held captive to sin being set free or the spiritually dead being raised to life. Here is a list of passages that you can use as “seeds” to grow your faith. As you prayerfully mull them over, ask yourself these questions: Is there anything God can’t do? Is there anyone who is beyond the reach of God’s amazing grace? Read the following passages to find out.

Here are some passages to pray for others: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Matthew 18:18-20; Matthew 21:21-22; Mark 10:21-27; Luke 11:5-13; Luke 13:6-9; Luke 18:1-8; John 6:44 -65; Isaiah 65:8; Job 22:21-30; Daniel 9:4-19; Revelation 7:10

* After prayerfully reading over this list, share your insights from these passages. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Compassion -- Mercy’s Companion**

**Isaiah 54:10 (NET)**

***Even if the mountains are removed and the hills displaced, my devotion will not be removed from you, nor will my covenant of friendshipbe displaced,” says the Lord, the one who has compassion on you.***

Now, let’s turn our attention to a few Biblical examples of people who are prime examples of God’s compassion and mercy. There are so many to choose from. For the sake of time, we will just have to settle for one Old Testament and one New Testament story.

To begin with, there is King David. Now, here is a man who knew a thing or two about God’s mercy and compassion. Even though he was a man after God’s own heart, he committed adultery with Bathsheba, lied about it and, subsequently, murdered her husband. He broke at least four out of the ten commandments—and some big ones at that! The point here is this: *none of us* are beyond returning to the pig pen of sin. However, in David’s case, he didn’t stay there for too long (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12). Finally, after the prophet Nathan confronted Him, David owned up to his sins. After this humbling fall, in brokenness and repentance, he was forgiven and restored to fellowship with the Lord. You can read about his repentance in Psalms chapters 32:1-5, 38:1-8, 51:1-19 and 145:3. David never stopped counting the many ways God had been merciful to him. With a humble and grateful heart, David wrote the following Psalm.

**Psalm 103:8-17 (NET)**

***The Lord is compassionate and merciful; he is patient and demonstrates great loyal love. He does not always accuse, and does not stay angry. He does not deal with us as our sins deserve;he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve. For as the skies are high above the earth, so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers. As far as the eastern horizonis from the west,so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actionsfrom us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers. For he knows what we are made of;he realizeswe are made of clay. A person’s life is like grass.Like a flower in the field it flourishes, but when the hot windblows by, it disappears, and one can no longer even spot the place where it once grew. But the Lord continually shows loyal love to his faithful followers,and is faithful to their descendants.***

Now let’s see what we can learn from a New Testament illustration. You might want to take a moment to read the story yourself. It’s found in John 8:1-11. Here, Saint John tells of one occasion where Jesus was teaching in the temple court. (We might compare that to the foyer of a church.) His teaching session was interrupted by a bunch of self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees. With murder in their eyes and stones in their hands, they had the audacity to bring a half-naked woman and threw her down right in the center of everyone! And how convenient, to have just “caught” her in the very act of adultery. It sounds to me like this was all premeditated, and she was set up as the “bait” they planned to use to trap Jesus. Curiously enough, someone was missing from this humiliating scene. Where was the man she was caught in bed with?

Amid the accusations of the self-righteous throng, Jesus read them like a book, exposing the motives of their (pardon the pun) *stony* hearts. Jesus is no respecter of men. He treats everyone equally—the ones who know they are sinners and those who *think* they’re not. In this instance, Jesus addressed the latter first. Setting the bar as high as the Ten Commandments, which they loved to quote, but none of them had kept, He stooped down to write in the dirt. We can only speculate what He wrote, but perhaps it was the specific commands they had broken that day. Or maybe, it flashed through their minds all the times they coveted their neighbor’s wife or even worse—committed adultery with their eyes! Pointing out their sins, He said, “Whoever among you is guiltlessmay be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). If they were tallying up how many commandments were broken here, the judicial scale would not fall in their favor. Sometimes, wisdom *does* come with age. The first to drop their stones and walk away were the older ones.

There are several good takeaways in these two narratives. But, what stands out the most is the stark contrast between the self-righteous lawbreakers and the compassion and mercy of the Lord Jesus. I might be tempted to look down on them until it hits me, “Am I really any better than they?” Who am I to cast my judgmental stones?

God the Father could have sent Jesus to condemn us all, and justifiably so (John 3:14-18). Yet rather than giving us what we deserve, He delights in giving us mercy—He is rich in it. And, although God is Holy, He is also compassionate towards us, remembering that He made us from the dust. We still get dirty with sin. That’s why we need a Savior, a defender and someone who is perfect to stand in the gap. There is only One who fits the bill (1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 4:12; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

I have already lived beyond half of a century, and I'm certain that if God treated me, even for one millisecond, as my sins deserve, I would have died a long time ago. More often than I care to admit, I sin aganst Him grievously. The good news is that my Judge sits upon a mercy-seat.

Incidentally, the Greek word that is translated as *mercy seat*, is halasterion. It is defined as the means or the place where sins are forgiven. By no means is God obligated to exonerate us. However, when we confess our sins, because of the blood of Jesus, He is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:5-10). Because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, we can receive mercy. Isn’t He wonderful?

* What are the wages of sin? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Honestly, where would you be if you had to pay the penalties for your sins? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

This seems like a fitting place to stop for a moment and think about all of this. When we opened our eyes this morning, God’s mercies were new. He has granted us one more day of life, and at this very moment, we are living in the brief dash between the day of our birth and the day of our death. In fact, David wrote in Psalm 23:6, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (K.J.V.). Did you catch that? God’s goodness and mercy follow us. They cover our past (what is behind us) and are sufficient for all the days that lay before us. Because of His mercy, one glorious day, believers will dwell in His house forever. Therefore, to say that mercy is simply “not being treated as our sins deserve,” would be a colossal understatement; it’s so much more than that.

If you are a recipient of God’s mercy, then He put a song in your heart. But it wasn’t meant to stay there. Don’t you think the Lord loves it when we sing praises to Him? Isn’t He worthy of it? Besides that, if we don’t sing, the rocks will cry out (Luke 19:40). We don’t want that to happen, do we? Are you grateful for God’s mercy? If so, when was the last time others have heard you sing about it?

**Psalm 89:1-2 (KJV)**

***I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth, will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shall thou establish in the very heavens.***

Before we turn our attention to focus on God’s grace, we will have a brief lesson in Hebrew. The words grace, mercy, love and compassion abound throughout the Bible. It is difficult for us to appreciate and appropriate these words unless Hebrew and Greek are our native tongues. But one Hebrew word stands out above them all and epitomizes the very heart of God’s mercy and love. In Hebrew, the word is *checed*. It’s most often translated as lovingkindness or mercy. What’s so special about this word?

It appears that, when trying to translate how massive God’s lovingkindness and mercy are, the writers of the Old Testament couldn’t articulate them in one or two words. The Hebrew word *checed* seems to explode into many other words, such as: *kindness, merciful, mercy, pity, lovingkindness, goodness, favor* (Blue Letter Bible 2017). I could go on and on and not capture them all. This explains why there are so many renderings of the word in different translations of the Bible. God’s love is just that massive! In short, this Hebrew word finds it’s equivalent in the Greek word translated in the New Testament as grace or forgiveness. The central message of the Bible is that God is a God of love and mercy. It is who He is; therefore, it is what He does. It would be well worth your time to search out these words found in the long list of passages below.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Exodus 25:17-22; Leviticus 16:2; Nehemiah 11:5; Hosea 2:16-20; Psalm 33:3; Lamentations 3:19-25; Matthew 12:7; Romans 3:25, 8:1-34; Hebrews 9:5-12; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 1:5-10; John 8:1-11; Ephesians 1:2-10; Colossians 1:14

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You may be saying: “I thought you said that this would be a brief lesson on Greek and Hebrew!” If you are not used to Bible study, your mind may hurt or you may have fallen asleep from exhaustion. Perhaps you don’t love to dissect words the way I do. Remember, though, every jot and tittle are important. I hope that you have gained a fresh appreciation for the riches of God’s love, mercy and grace.

**God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense**

**Romans 6:23 (NET)**

***For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Every man-made religion in the world has this in common. In one twisted way or another, they say: “If you do your best, you can work your way back to God.” Christianity is just the opposite. The Bible says that we can’t get back to God. We can’t fix our sin problem. Our sins have *earned* us a death sentence. We owe an astronomical debt. That’s why we need a Savior. We need God to come down to us because we can’t get back to Him, and grace is the bridge between sinners and God. To say otherwise is to make a mockery of grace.

However, just for the sake of the argument, what if we could work our way to God. How much work would we have to do? How would we ever know if we have done enough? I have a loaded question for you: If you work a forty or sixty-hour work week and your employer hands you your payroll check, do you consider that a gift? I think not. That would be ludicrous. You labored to *earn* a pay check. People don’t work to receive a gift—do they? So why in the world do we think we can earn the gift of salvation through works?

* What are some ways that you have tried to earn grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**2 Corinthians 9:15 (NET)**

***Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!***

There is a story or an analogy of Grace at every turn of the page in Scripture. Moreover, numerous examples could be used in an endeavor to define it. Maybe you have heard some such as, *Grace is—God giving sinners what they need the most, but deserve the least*. The truth is that any attempt to explain grace and mercy will fall woefully short. Nevertheless, as inadequate as it may be, I would like to take a stab at it by using the story of the criminal as an allegory. (See the section “The Lord Abounds in Mercy.”)

As we have just discovered, mercy could be defined as *not getting what we deserve*. A case in point is the man whose crimes landed him in the hospital and ultimately in jail. He had been shot while shooting someone else. By our estimation, justice would have been served if his actions landed him in the morgue instead of the hospital. Yet God spared his life. Now *that* is mercy.

But, to get a better understanding of grace, let’s suppose hypothetically that one of the shooting victims in the that story was the only son of a judge. We’ll call him the Honorable Judge Grace. Imagine that it just so happened that Judge Grace was the one who presided over the trial of his son’s killer. While the evidence proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the accused had killed his son, Judge Grace chose to have mercy on the man. He spared his life from the penalty of a death sentence. That would be an incredible act of mercy, would it not? But grace is even more extravagant than that.

Let’s imagine that the man has served his time in jail, and now he stands before the parole board. Who will speak on his behalf? Judge Grace is the only one who showed up as his advocate. The board grants his release, but he is homeless because his family had long since abandoned him. (This is where grace comes into focus, and it’s truly hard to fathom.) Then, to the amazement of everyone, especially the criminal, the judge does a preposterous thing. The judge, who had been bereaved of his only son and had suffered so much because of this sinner’s folly, welcomes his son’s killer into his own home. But that’s not all. He gives this hopeless, helpless, sinful man everything that had belonged to his own dearly loved son. And then he bestows on him the great honor of making him the heir to his wealth. Judge Grace loved the unlovable man with the same boundless, limitless love that he had for his own son. Can you even imagine? Can you see who the characters are in this little analogy? God the Father is Judge Grace; His only Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. The unworthy criminal represents you and me. That is why it,s called appropriately—amazing grace.

**When God, the ultimate judge, liberates you from the due penalty of your sin… *that is mercy*. But, when He takes you into His home and heart and loves you as His very own Son, now that’s another thing all together. *That is grace*! Amazing, isn’t it?**

**Colossians 1:12-14 (NET)**

***… giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to sharein the saints’inheritance in the light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption,the forgiveness of sins.***

When God, the ultimate judge, liberates you from the due penalty of your sins, *that is mercy*. But, when He takes you into His home and heart and loves you as His very own Son, now that’s another thing altogether. *That is grace*!

**Romans 8:15-17 (NET)**

***For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we 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 fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.***

As we wrap up this lesson, let’s glance back to the beginning of the Bible where Moses had an encounter with God. Speaking to Moses, “As a friend…face-to-face,” God described Himself. What would you suppose He would say? “I am a consuming fire.” After all, He had spoken to him from a burning bush. Or He could have said, “I am the LORD God the Almighty” (Genesis 17:1). Or, “I am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:1-5). He could have described Himself in many other ways that would have left Moses trembling in his sandals or, bare feet, as it were. But no, the Lord God made all His goodness pass in front of Moses, and then He said:

**Exodus 34:5-6 (NET)**

***The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the Lord by name. The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed:“The Lord, the Lord,the compassionate and graciousGod, slow to anger,and abounding in loyal love and faithfulness.***

So, what exactly is grace? Well, for starters, it’s a gift. Therefore, it can’t be earned. It can’t be bought, and its value is beyond measure. We certainly don’t deserve it, and we can’t be saved without it. Grace is a person—a Savior. He’s the God who put on flesh and dwelt among us personifying forgiveness, mercy, lovingkindness and compassion. This is how the apostle John described Him: “full of grace.” What is grace? Grace, my friend, is Jesus.

**John 1:14; 16-18 (NET)**

***Nowthe Word became fleshand took up residenceamong us. Wesaw his glory – the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father. For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another.***

***For the law was given through Moses, butgrace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only one,himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made Godknown.***

To our finite minds, the concepts of grace and mercy are foreign. They simply defy the limits of our understanding. It all sounds too good to be true, like a fairy tale or fable. But it’s not.

This is the gift of salvation that God offers. Incredible, isn’t it? Would you like to know how to receive it? Then please keep reading.

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

1. In the following passages, what two words are added to mercy and grace that are used as a common greeting for the saints? (Ephesians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:4; Galatians 1:3, etc.) Why do you think these words are connected? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you love someone who has become the constant subject of your intercessory prayers? Or did you have someone who loved you and labored in prayer on your behalf? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you think of ways religion can distort or corrupt grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. The doctrine of Grace was solidified out of what movement in history? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever been affiliated with a religion that insisted that works would earn you an entrance to heaven or favor with God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Outside of receiving the gifts of grace and mercy from God, have you ever received these precious gifts from someone else? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. If so, do you think this person had themselves been the recipient of God’s grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Luke 6:35-36 and state how God treats His enemies. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. If we have been placed in Christ, and He is Grace, then is it possible to “fall from Grace”?

­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

**Micah 7:18 (NET)**

***There is no other God like you! You forgive sin and pardon the rebellion of those who remain among your people. You do not remain angry forever, but delight in showing loyal love.***

**Week #7**

**What Must I Do To Be Saved?”**

# 

**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 2:6-9 (NET)**

***And he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness towardus in Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith,and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not fromworks, so that no one can boast.***

**Introduction**

We have arrived at the place in our study where we are on the cusp of one of those “But God” kind of moments. Answer the crucial question: How exactly does a person receive the gift of salvation? Well, if you sincerely desire to know, then let me assure you that this thought did not simply *dawn on you*. The Bridegroom is in a relentless pursuit to win your heart. He is the One who seeks to save the lost. Know then, my friend, that God is calling you to Himself (John 5:24; Romans 11:6; Hebrew 4:7). For Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws them” (John 6:44). This stirring or quickening in your spirit is most definitely a step in the right direction, but it’s not the only step.

Before we take the next step towards salvation, we need to get a few things straight. We do not come to God on our terms; we must come on His. Sometimes, the Scriptures seem to be silent on an issue, but that is not the case with salvation. To eliminate any further speculation, we will allow the Word of God to clarify these terms for us, and these terms will constitute the focal point for this lesson.

**God’s Terms of Salvation**

As a segue to our study, let’s take a brief look at the Old Testament story of Jonah, the reluctant evangelist. We will bypass the parts where Jonah gets swallowed by the great fish and finally repents. And we will skip the part where God commands the fish to vomit him on the shores of Nineveh (a city on par with Ephesus in terms of hedonism, only more barbaric). After Jonah had wiped the seaweed off his stubborn head, he decided it might behoove him to keep his vows to the Lord. He went through the wicked city with his proclamation. The message was short, but not so sweet. “In forty days,” he said, “Nineveh will be overthrown.” I will paraphrase this: “Turn or burn!” Despite Jonah, the whole city believed God and repented, thus averting the annihilation of 120,000 souls and many animals (Jonah 1-4). We will not take the time to expound upon all of this short, but rich, book; however, there are two pertinent details that we do not want to miss.

First, God asked Jonah this question: “Should Inot be even moreconcernedabout Nineveh, this enormous city? There are more than one hundred twenty thousand people in it who do not know right from wrong, as well as many animals” (Jonah 4:11). The main point is this: God not only had compassion and mercy on this wicked city but also upon His disobedient and prideful servant Jonah! Once again, we see God exactly as He described Himself to Moses.

**Exodus 34:5-6 (NET)**

***The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the Lord by name. The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and graciousGod, slow to anger, and abounding in loyal love and faithfulness.***

The second noteworthy fact is this: God’s mercy and grace were contingent upon their belief in His Word and the people of Nineveh turning from their wicked ways in repentance (Jonah 3:5). Hence, we finally arrive at God’s terms of salvation. The two prerequisites and non-negotiables to receiving the gift of salvation are faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance from sin. Like the chicken and the egg, these terms are so interconnected that when they come together at the moment of new birth, it’s hard to know which comes first. Furthermore, we could chase passages around the Bible and argue both points, but you will be happy to know we are not going to do that.

**What Did Paul Preach Everywhere?**

**Acts 20:17-21 (NET)**

***From Miletushe sent a message to Ephesus, telling the elders of the church to come to him. When they arrived, he said to them, “You yourselves know how I livedthe whole time I was with you, from the first day I set footin the province of Asia, serving the Lord with all humilityand with tears, and with the trials that happened to me because of the plots of the Jews. You know that I did not hold back from proclaimingto you anything that would be helpful, and from teaching you publiclyand from house to house, testifying to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.***

Departing words carry a lot of weight since they convey those crucial issues that are of the utmost importance. For example, when Paul was preparing to leave Ephesus, he called the elders together to commit to their memory some serious doctrinal truths which he had publicly and privately proclaimed. Repentance and faith were on the top of that list. Paul was just following the lead of John the Baptist who emphatically declared, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” John was paving the way for the One who came after him. The One “whose sandals he was not even worthy to untie” (Matthew 3:1-12).

**Mark 1:14-15 (NET)**

***Now after John was imprisoned; Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospelof God. Hesaid, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of Godis near. Repent and believe the gospel!”***

After John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus began His three-year public ministry. The above passage records Jesus’ first gospel presentation: “Repent and believe the gospel,” was his message (Mark 1:14-15). Now, let’s connect some dots. Both Matthew and Luke include an instance where Jesus refers to Jonah and the people of Nineveh (Matthew 12:38-41).

**Luke 11:32 (NET)**

***The people******of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented when Jonah preached to them******– and now,something greater than Jonah is here!***

What is implied here was that the people in Nineveh, as wicked as they were, repented when they heard the message. Now, the Lord God, Himself, is preaching, but because they refuse to repent, they will be held even more culpable at the time of judgment. These accounts, where Jesus preached repentance, were not isolated, incidental messages either. To further build the case, look at the next passage.

**Luke 13:1-9 (NET)**

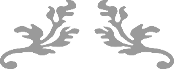
***Nowthere were some present on that occasion who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He answered them, “Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered these things? No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! Or those eighteen who were killedwhen the tower in Siloam fell on them,do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repentyou will all perish as well!”***

***Then******Jesus******told this parable: “A man had a fig tree******planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.******So******he said to the worker who tended the vineyard, ‘For******three years******now, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and each time I inspect it******I find none. Cut******it down! Why******should it continue to deplete******the soil?’******But the worker******answered him, ‘Sir, leave it alone this year too, until I dig around it and put fertilizer******on it.******Then if******it bears fruit next year,******very well,but if******not, you can cut it down.’***

Context is everything in Bible interpretation. So, let us compare scripture to scripture. What is not so obvious is the connection between Jesus’ assertion about repentance in the first verses and the parable of the fig tree that follows it. Is it not a little strange that Jesus starts talking about fruit on a fig tree? Interesting parable and placement, don’t you think? And what about the worker who asked for more time to do some cultivating on the fig tree before it’s cut down. To give you an opportunity to discover the hidden message in this parable, it is your turn to do some digging.

* Carefully read Luke 13:1-9 and Matthew 3:1-12, and then answer the following questions. What is the fruit in this parable? What is the tree? What is going to happen if the man returns and there is still no fruit? What do you think is the symbolism of the worker asking for a little more time? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Hebrew word for repent is also important. The word is *shuwb*. I love the visual metaphors found in this definition from Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon. The definition is long, but here are excerpts: “to turn back (hence, away) transitively or intransitively, literally or figuratively;” to “fetch home again;” to “requite, rescue, restore, retrieve, (cause to, make to) return;” and finally “bring (again, back, home again)” (Blue Letter Bible 2016).



**Acts 3:19-20 (NET)**

***Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,and so that he may send the Messiahappointedfor you – that is, Jesus.***



Have you ever been curious about Heaven or wondered what goes on there? Well, in the Parables of the Lost Things, we get a rare glimpse. Peeking through the window of God’s Word we see a party. What are they celebrating? In each of the allegories, Jesus told us that a joyful party begins every time a sinner repents. Now, look back at that Hebrew word. Do you see the words “fetch home again?” “Repentance,” someone has said, “is turning away from sin, and when you do, you will find Jesus—the one who pursues lost sinners.” Compare those descriptions with this parable.

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

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

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

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

Remember, last words are weighty. Just prior to His ascension, Jesus reminded His disciples that, “...repentancefor the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimedin His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”(Luke 24:47). Every time a sinner repents, we are one step closer to the culmination of all things when King Jesus comes to get His bride. If the celebration that happens in heaven when one sinner repents is something wonderful, can you imagine what the Wedding Supper of the Lamb will be like?

All of this just underscores the necessity of repentance, as well as faith, for salvation. If repentance is this important, I wonder why the word repentance is often omitted from gospel presentations. This is perplexing when you look at the endless list of passages that address the subject. Here are just a few: Acts 2:36-38; Acts 26:20; Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 24:47; 2 Peter 3:7-10; Revelation 2:1-5; Ezekiel 33:1-11

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**What Is Repentance?**

**2 Corinthians 7:9-11 (NET)**

***Now I rejoice, not because you were made sad,but because you were made sad to the point of repentance.***

***For you were made sad as God intendedso that you were not harmed******in any way by us.******For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death.******For see what this very thing, this sadness******as God intended, has produced in you: what eagerness, what defense of yourselves,******what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what deep concern, what punishment!******In everything you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.***

So now that we know how crucial repentance is, let’s try to define it. But first let’s identify what repentance is not. Repentance is not feeling bad for doing something wrong, or just saying casually or sarcastically, “I’m sorry.” (Usually in this case, “I’m sorry” will be followed by “But…”) Likewise, if you have ever been caught breaking the law, for example, going over the speed limit, and you were sorry you got a ticket but *not* sorry you broke the law, you were *not* repentant. This is especially true if you continue to break the law by speeding. If you tell someone you have hurt and lied to, “I am sorry,” but then you continue to lie and deceive her, that is notrepentance. My guess is that a person or situation just came to your mind because rare is the person who goes through this life unscathed by this kind of hurt.

* Have you ever been hurt by someone who said they were sorry, yet continued to hurt you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Why are words meaningless when it comes to faith and repentance? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Therefore, repentance means to have a change of mind and heart about your sins and turn away from them. For this to happen we need to have one of those “But God” moments when the Holy Spirit grants us a keen sense of awareness that we have sinned against God. This is what the Bible calls “Godly sorrow.” Again, this is God’s gift (Acts 11:15-18). When we see our sin for what it is and call it what He calls it, then we must own it. All this will result in a change in the direction of your life. Instead of running from God and headlong into sin, you are running to Jesus—the only one who can save you from sin. And sin is what He came to save His people from (Matthew 1:21). One thing is certain, a truly saved person will change from a habitual sinner to a habitual repenter.

**Romans 2:4-5 (NET)**

***Or do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, and yet do not knowthat God’s kindness leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornnessand your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed!***

It is interesting that the two Greek words for repent or repentance (metanoeo and metanoia) relate to the word transformation. In Greek, the word transformation is metamorphoo, and this is where we get the English word metamorphosis. Meta means to change, and morphoo means form. If you are thinking that is the word that refers to the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly—you are correct. What’s the connection between the two words? Without true godly sorrow that leads to repentance, there will be no salvation, and consequently, there will be no change or transformation (2 Corinthians 5:10-6:2). (This will be our focus for another lesson.)

**It is the love of God, most extravagantly displayed at the cross, that leads sinners towards repentance. But God is not a bully. He will not drive you to repentance, but who would not want to follow One who would love them this much?**

**Revelation 2:1-5 (NET)**

***“To the angel of the church in Ephesus,write the following:“This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who has a firm grasp on the seven stars in his right hand – the one who walks among the seven oldenlampstands: ‘I know your works as well as your labor and steadfast endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have even put to the testthose who refer to themselves as apostles (but are not), and have discovered that they are false.  I am also awarethat you have persisted steadfastly,endured much for the sake of my name, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you: You have departedfrom your first love!  Therefore, remember from what high state you have fallen and repent!***

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

1. Read Acts 11:15-24. What was the gift given after they believed, and what did God grant to the Gentiles that leads to life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read the following passages Acts 11:16-18; 17:30-31; Luke 13:1-5; John 8:24, 58; 12:31-33; Mark 1:15. What was the gospel that Jesus and His disciples preached? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:32, 33:1-11. What is the stated desire of God in these pas-sages? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. According to all the passages we have studied, can a person have true saving faith with-out true repentance? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read the account previously mentioned of the woman who was caught in adultery, and another account found in John 5:1-14. What was the last thing Jesus said to these two people? (John 8:1-11) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you think these two returned to their lives of sin? Why or why not? (Proverbs 28:13) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. To get a clearer picture of repentance, look at the Old Testament story of King David. It is found in these scriptures: 2 Samuel 11:1-27, 2 Samuel 12; Psalms 51:1, 69:16, 86:3-5; 103:8-12, 145:3-9. Make notes of the characteristics of repentance in David’s life, and share your insights with your small group. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

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

***For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death.***

**Week #8**

**Blessed Is She Who Believes…**



**Key passage**

**Ephesians 2:8-9 (NET)**

***For by grace you are saved through faith,and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not fromworks, so that no one can boast.***

**Introduction**

Saving faith and trust in Christ came slowly for me; in fact, it took twenty-six years. Frankly, I didn’t know that there was a difference in intellectual belief in the person of Christ and true saving faith. These terms are often thrown around so much that they can lose their meaning.

What does it mean to have saving *faith in* and to *believe on* the Lord Jesus Christ? Is faith nothing more than mere intellectual assent to facts about Jesus, or is it something more? For example, demons are fallen angels. Jesus declared that “Angels have seen the face of God.” and know who Jesus is (Matthew 18:10). Furthermore, James wrote, “Even the demons *believe* in Jesus” (James 2:19). Taking these details into consideration, if all a person must do to be saved is to believe in the historical facts of Christ Jesus, then the demons must also be saved. And we know, of course, that they are not. Then what is the difference in believing in Jesus as the demons do and possessing true saving faith? To understand this is of great consequence—eternal consequence, and we can’t afford to be ambiguous with the terms.

Therefore, this week’s lesson is a continuation of our previous one. The question at hand is this: “What must a person do to be saved?” Now that we have covered repentance, we will focus on faith, the portal through which we enter the kingdom of heaven. We’ve already discovered that salvation is God’s gift of grace; let’s take the next step towards receiving this extravagant gift.

**Where Does Faith Come From?**

**Hebrews 11:1-3 (NET)**

***Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see. For by it the people of old received God’s commendation. By faith we understand that the worlds were set in order at God’s command, so that the visible has its origin in the invisible.***

Everyone has faith in something, and while we may not realize it, we all live by a set of beliefs that govern every aspect of our lives. When you become a Christian, your beliefs shifts from tangible things to intangible. This requires faith. More specificly, it requires saving faith. So now we are going to talk about the origin of this kind of faith.

Belief in the Bible is at the core of Christian faith. Without it, there is no mooring to anchor your life to and nothing concrete to trust in. And, consequently, because faith precedes hope, without trusting in the reliability and inerrancy of the Bible, we have no other option but to live in a state of perpetual anxiety and hopelessness.

Any honest scientist knows that it takes more faith to believe in the “big bang” theory than to believe in the intelligent design of a divine Creator. As Hebrews 11, otherwise known as the “faith chapter,” clarifies, creation is where faith has its origins. It all starts with believing in the account of creation in the book of Genesis. Therefore, at least to some extent, saving faith necessitates believing the Bible. Besides that, faithlessness is rooted in the original sin of doubting God’s Word.

**Hebrews 4:2-3 (NET)**

***For we had good news proclaimed to us just as they did. But the message they heard did them no good, since they did not join in******with those who heard it in faith. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my anger,******‘They will never enter my rest!’”***

Furthermore, saving faith may be blind, but it’s not deaf. What I am trying to say is that we don’t have to *see* to have faith, but we do need to *hear* the gospel to believe. As Paul asserted, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17-18). By this, we can deduce that hearing God’s Word is the prerequisite to believing in Jesus for salvation.

Now let’s see the connection between faith and hearing. The apostle John was in the city of Ephesus when he wrote the book of John and his other epistles. These saints had never seen Jesus, but John had. It is written in Hebrews 11 that “Faith is being *convinced* of things we have never seen.” Since the saints in Ephesus had never seen Christ, how did they come to be convinced about Him? They *saw Him* through the eyes of John and others who preached the gospel to them.

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

***This is what we proclaim to you:what was from the beginning,******what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life –******and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce******to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us).******What we have seen and heard we announce******to you too, so that******you may have fellowship******with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ).******Thus,******we are writing these things so that******our******joy may be complete.***

In the following passage, John summarizes why the Bible was written. It was written so that you and I would hear about and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are a true believer, then you are blessed indeed because, although you have not yet seen Jesus, you believe in Him.

**John 20:29-31 (NET)**

***Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the peoplewho have not seen and yet have believed.”Now Jesus performedmany other miraculous signs in the presence of thedisciples, which are not recordedin this book. But theseare recordedso that you may believethat Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

* Has anyone ever seen Jesus through your eyes or heard about Him through your witness? If so, explain here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

So back to our question: Where does faith come from? Ultimately, saving faith originates with God. He has given to everyone a measure of faith so that we can believe in Him. However, the condition of the soil of the heart determines the receptivity of the gift God is extending (Luke 8:5-15).

**Synthetic Faith Versus Saving Faith**

**Romans 1:16-17 (NET)**

***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousnessof God is revealed in the gospelfrom faith to faith,just as it is written, “The righteous by faith will live.”***

I would like to tell you a story about a woman whose name is Iris Blue. Her story of amazing grace is quite incredible. Despite being raised in the church, she was in a state of total rebellion. Her life was marked by heroin addiction, prostitution and repeated incarcerations. Despite the obvious facts, Iris’ mother was completely blind to her daughter’s spiritual condition. Each time Iris had served her sentence and was released, her mother would kill the proverbial “fatted calf” and welcome her prodigal home. Iris would eat the meal and head right back to her life of sin. All the while, her mother pleaded with her to get back in church and rededicate her life to God. Eventually, Iris’ mother had to accept the truth. Her daughter was lost—not backslidden! Her mother humbled herself and confessed all of this to her church. That is when her prayers for Iris became powerful and effective. Within two weeks, the Lord miraculously saved Iris (Blue, Iris. Interview by author. November 17, 2016).

In defense of Iris’ mother, and as a mother who fears the Lord myself, retreating into a fantasy world of denial is completely understandable. The thought that even one of my children or grandchildren would die without Christ is simply more than my heart can take. Besides worrying yourself into an early grave, what’s a mother to do? And denial is a pretty good coping mechanism. I know; it’s one of my favorite hiding places. But, at my age, you would think I would know better.

**1 Corinthians 15:1-2 (NET)**

***Now I want to make clear for you,******brothers and sisters,******the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand,******and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.***

Getting back to the subject of faith, let me tell you about Iris’ father. In an interview I had with Iris, she shared with me her father’s testimony. Her father was a Sunday school teacher who said that he had loved Jesus his entire life. When given the opportunity to pray a prayer of salvation, he did. I liken this scenario to being inoculated; you get just enough of a disease to ensure you don’t get the real thing. He got what Paul called “vain belief” (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). Much later, after he had truly been saved, he confessed to her one day: “*I taught about Jesus and was really fond of Him, but it was like having a crush on a movie star. I knew about Elvis all my life too. But I didn’t know him*” (ibid.).So, Iris’ father passed his synthetic faith to her, and subsequently, she grew up hearing about Jesus constantly, but never really knowing him*.*

But God intervened in her life and everything changed. Iris said she always wanted to be pure and clean. She fantasized about it. Then, a man came and told Iris that Jesus would take even a whore and make her His bride. From that moment on she was hooked.

According to Iris' husband, Duane, Mark Hall, the front man for Casting Crowns, wrote the song "Wedding Day" based loosely on Iris' testimony. The lyrics certainly fit her story (mine too).

One last bit of information about Iris and Duane Blue. Their only child, Denim Blue, told me, “I was conceived while my parents were on the mission field,” (They have traveled all over the world telling their story.) Denim, like his mother and grandfather before him, made a profession of faith early in life. But he did not come to repentance and saving faith until he was in his mid-twenties. Although his conversion experience was the polar opposite of his parents, nevertheless, it took just as much grace to save Denim. Religious affiliation never saved anyone. The grandfather clause does not apply to the kingdom of God. Jesus said emphatically, “You MUST be born again” (John 3:1-7). To learn more about Iris, Duane and Denim, go to their website at duaneandirisblue.com.

**Faith is…**

**Ephesians 1:13-14 (NET)**

***– when you believed in Christ******– you were marked with the seal******of the promised Holy Spirit,******who is the down payment******of our inheritance, until the redemption of God’s own possession,******to the praise of his glory.***

**It would be very difficult to say how far a man may go in religion, and yet die in his sins; how much he may look like an heir of heaven, and yet be a child of wrath. Many unconverted men have a belief which is similar to faith, and yet it is not true faith. Certain persons exhibit pious affections which have the warmth of spiritual love, but are quite destitute of gracious life. Every grace can be counterfeited, even as jewels can be imitated.**

**C. H. Spurgeon ([1887] n.d., 4)**

The word believed is followed by the preposition “in.” Why does that matter? Because, as the following passage suggests, belief is directed to a person, and that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, one’s faith, in and of itself, is of no use whatsoever if it is not firmly anchored in the person of Christ Jesus.

**Acts 16:30-31 (NET)**

***Then he brought them outside and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied,“Believe in the Lord Jesusand you will be saved, you and your household.”***

In summarizing faith, Kevin Twisdale, a fellow disciple maker, said, “Faith boils down to three things: conviction, commitment and conduct” (Twisdale, Kevin. Teaching session. 2015).  He explained that a person must be so convinced in what they believe about Christ that they live by that conviction.  Conviction, he said, is in the head, and commitment is of the heart. But conduct is the thing of habit or the reality of what we live (ibid.).

Therefore, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to place yourself fully *in Christ*, rest in His finished work at the cross and renounce all other means to earn salvation (including behavior modification). In doing so, you receive Him as the sovereign Lord and ruler of your life. But, let me be clear, surrendering to His Lordship is *not* necessarily a means to receive salvation. However, in my opinion, it is certainly a part of true repentance.

Before we move on, let’s unpack some words of great importance to understanding God’s terms of salvation. The words believe, faith, trust and faithfulness are pretty much tied to one Greek word: Pisteuo. Here is a definition from Strong’s Greek Lexicon: “to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by implication, to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ)” (Blue Letter Bible 2016).

**The Cornerstone of Faith**

**Ephesians 2:19-20 (NET)**

***So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household, because you have been builton the foundation of the apostles and prophets,with Christ Jesus himself asthe cornerstone.***

Have you ever heard someone who has lost a loved one say, “He or she was my rock”? When we lose someone or something we trusted in as the stabilizing force in our lives, it is devastating. Whether it be through death or other circumstances, the loss is cataclysmic. The truth is that nothing in this earthly world is eternal or immortal, and we can’t really put our faith in anything we can see. No human being can truthfully say, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” The fidelity of that statement rests in God alone (Deuteronomy 31:8; Hebrews 13:5). In addition, every single person you know is fallible. Even those who love you the most.

Do you know what anxiety is? It’s the body’s physical response to trauma, and it is exacerbated when we try to find security in something or someone other than God. I should know—I have been there, and it’s not a good place to be. Growing up in a broken home left me with great insecurities. When I met Art, whose family seemed to be perfect in my eyes, I thought, “Now I will have the stability of a secure home.” I’ll save the details for book number two, but the reality was that I put all my eggs in the wrong basket. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, I made a lie my refuge, my hiding place (Isaiah 28:15). When it was all removed, I was shattered because my trust had been misplaced. That’s when the Lord led me to the following passages and spoke tenderly and specifically to me. He used them to correct me, to heal me and turn me to Jesus—the only one who will never fail, leave or forsake me - Jesus is the Rock.

**Isaiah 28:15-16 (NET)**

***For you say, “We have made a treaty with death, with Sheol we have made an agreement.When the overwhelming judgment sweeps by it will not reach us. For we have made a lie our refuge, we have hidden ourselves in a deceitful word.” Therefore, this is what the sovereign master, the Lord, says: “Look, I am layinga stone in Zion, an approvedstone, set in place as a precious cornerstone for the foundation.The one who maintains his faith will not panic.***

It is not insignificant that this portion of scripture is quoted eight times in the New Testament. The subject in this passage is a *Stone in Zion - Precious Cornerstone,* alluding to the One to whom faith is directed. Speaking of the importance of faith and belief, I would like to unpack a word that embodies these concepts. In the aforementioned passage, it is translated as faith, but in other translations, it is rendered as relies on, believes in or to trust in. The same Hebrew word is also found in Habakkuk 2:4, “…the just will live by *faith*.” Additionally, remember the people of Nineveh that we talked about in the last lesson? As you see in the following passage, their salvation was also based on repentance and *belief* in God.

**Jonah 3:5 (NET)**

***The people of Nineveh believed in God, and they declared a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.***

I love to study the original languages of the Bible. For me, it is like searching for hidden treasure. I am never disappointed by what I find. I hope you will bear with me as I try to unpack this profound word. In Hebrew, the word *faith* or *believe* is *aman or amen*. As you read this partial list of Hebrew words and definitions*,* notice how they are tied to the faithfulness and security found in God.

Among other things, aman is defined or translated as follows: “*to build up or support; to foster as a parent or nurse; to render or be firm or faithful; to trust or believe; to be permanent; be true; or certain; to go to the right hand: - hence assurance; continuance; steadfast; sure; surely; trusty; verified; put trust; turn to the right; faithfulness; fidelity; security; steady and, finally, …truth”* (Strong 1990).

Thought-provoking, are they not? Two of the definitions of aman are particularly intriguing: *to foster as a parent* and *go to the right hand*. The words *right hand* are translated from the Hebrew word *yaman*. Do you see the word aman? There are 58 verses in the Bible that talk about God’s right hand. Here is just one example:

**Psalm 16:11 (KJV)**

***Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand, there are pleasures for evermore.***

Do you know who sits at the right hand of God the Father? The Lord Jesus Christ does! As a Hebrew scholar, Paul must have had all of this in mind when he ended his long run-on sentence with the following statement:

**Ephesians 1:19-21 (NET)**

***And what is the incomparable******greatness of his power toward******us who believe, as displayed inthe exercise of his immense strength.******This power******he exercised******in Christ when he raised him******from the dead and seated him******at his right hand in the heavenly realms******far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.***

“Amen,” according to W.E. Vine, “is transliterated from Hebrew into both Greek and English. Its meanings may be seen in such passages as Deutronomy 7:9, ‘the faithful (the Amen) God,’ Isaiah 49:7, ‘Jehovah that is faithful,’ 65:15 ‘the God of truth, the God of Amen.’” (1983)

The word amen is also found in the New Testament. In Greek, it is defined as *firm* or *trustworthy*. Curiously enough, Jesus used this specific word 78 times. Every time Jesus prefaced His statements with “truly, truly” or “verily, verily” He was saying “amen, amen.” Often, it is used to punctuate a prayer, a statement or a book. These are a few examples: Ephesians 3:21, 6:24; Philippians 4:20-23; Romans 1:25 and Romans 16:27. In fact, Amen is the last word in the Bible (Revelation 22:21). For such a small word, amen is enormous—it’s as big as God. After all of my research, I came to the conclusion and the conviction that **Amen *is* Jesus**, but I had no validation for this truth until I found this statement in Vine’s. He said, “Once in the N.T. ‘Amen’ is a title of Christ, Rev. 3:14, because through Him the purposes of God are established, 2 Corinthians 1:20.” (1983) Is He awesome, or what?

**2 Corinthians 1:18, 20 (NET)**

***But as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” 20 For every one of God’s promises are “Yes” in him; therefore also through him the “Amen” is spoken, to the glory we give to God.***

The word amen has been passed from the Hebrew to Greek, Latin, English and other modern languages with little change. So interestingly, the history of the word "amen" mirrors its meaning for us:  it is stable, steady and unchanging. The reason that we can believe in God and put our faith in Jesus Christ is that He *is* the Truth (John 14:1- 6; Revelation 3:14). Jesus is the epitome and reality of God’s faithfulness. The only foundation upon which we can rely is Christ Jesus. He is the Precious Cornerstone who is seated at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:19-22; Mark 16:19). Of this you can be sure - those who turn to Him in repentance and faith, will never be disappointed.

**Revelation 21:5 (KJV)**

***And he that sat upon the throne said Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me. Write: for these words are true and faithful.***

* + Read the following passages and then summarize what they say about God’s faithfulness to His Word. 1 Kings 8:56; Joshua 21:45, 23:14-15; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 10:23 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Those Who Believe, Will See**

**Hebrew 11:6 (NET)**

***Now without faith it is impossible to please him, for the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.***

Unbelief, according to the Believer’s Bible Commentary, says, ““Let me see and then I will believe. But, God says, Believe and then you will see**””** (1995).One of the many blessings of being saved is that God rewards our faith by revealing Himself to us, just as He said He would do in John 14:1-21. For instance, after I truly believed on Jesus, I became increasingly aware of how personally involved He is in my life. Even so, for the most part, I trust in Him with no evidence whatsoever to lean on. But there are also some rare moments when the Lord has allowed me to see, feel and know His presence in very tangible ways. You may be thinking, “Are you saying, Ginny, that you have *seen* the Invisible God?” Of course not. But I am saying that since I have put my faith in Jesus and entrusted my eternal soul to Him, He’s made Himself known to me in so many ways, impossible to mention all of them here. And I’m not just talking about things I have seen concerning Him in the Bible.

You see, I’m just a housewife. Yet in the mundane, as well as the monumental moments, Jesus has revealed Himself to me. I’ll not take up our time to elaborate now, but I would like to list just a few examples. I have seen Him move a typhoon, find a needle in a haystack at my request (well—a ring in a field), take a heart of stone and change it to a heart of love and compassion, and heal my broken heart. I’ve heard His voice speak to me through His Word. These occasions have catapulted my faith. Yet admittedly, there are times when He seems silent, and I wonder if He is with me at all. Once, in frustration, I asked Him why He did not answer my prayer for a specific request. He answered with a question. In a still small voice, He asked me, “Why do you insist on seeing to believe me? Blessed are those who have *not seen*, yet believe.”

After almost thirty years of getting to know Jesus, there is so much about Him and His ways that remain a mystery to me. I am comfortable with that because I have a history with Him—a personal relationship. I believe in Jesus, not because I have experienced Him, but I experienced Him because I have believed on Him to save me. Because I believe in the truthfulness of God’s Word, I am confident that when I die, my faith will become sight and I will see the face of God.

**Revelation 22:3-4 (Net)**

***And there will no longer be any curse,and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city.Hisservantswill worshiphim, and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.***

We search aimlessly for something or someone whom we can trust. We want security, don’t we? So, let’s get personal here. Are you still searching for someone to believe in? If so, how is that working out for you? The Lord knows that when it comes to faith, we struggle with the issue of trust. After all, who on earth can we really trust? That is why God will wrestle with those who struggle to believe on Him (Genesis 32:22-32, Isaiah 1:15-20). If you want to believe, here is an honset prayer you might pray:

**Mark 9:24 (NET)**

***…I believe; help my unbelief!***

**DIGGING DEEPER:** John 14:1-14; Acts 4:11-12; Matthew 21:42; Romans 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6-7; Hebrews 10:38; Titus 1:2; Psalm 118:22; Psalm 119:160

* From the previous passages, what is significant about the words fidelity and cornerstone? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Mark 16:16 (NET)**

***The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.***

**This is Your Invitation**

If you have not yet come to faith, you may question why God would even bother with a person who doesn’t even believe in Him. The answer is: He loves you. For this reason, there is hope, even for the skeptic. Does this describes you? You’re in good company with a man who was dubbed “doubting” Thomas. The Lord knows what you need to take that final leap of faith. And often, His modus operandi will uniquely fit the person who is struggling to believe Him. What Jesus did to solidify Thomas’ faith, He can do for you too.

**John 20:24-28 (NET)**

***Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “Unless I see the wounds from the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the wounds from the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe it!” Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Putyour finger here, and examinemy hands. Extendyour hand and put it into my side. Do not continue in your unbelief, but believe.” Thomas replied to him, “My Lord and my God!”***

If you are still are unsure of who Jesus is and what He has done to save you, then everything we have studied probably seems like nothing more than a bunch of foolish platitudes. Even so, since you have come this far in this study and put up with so much of my foolishness, then I’ve little doubt that God has given you a measure of faith to believe in Him. Otherwise, you would not have even picked up this study in the first place, let alone come this far. But I’m so happy you have because there’s a King who stands at the door of your heart, and He wants to come in. But, make no mistake about it, when He comes in, He comes in to take over. The kingdom of heaven is no more and no less than the place where the *King of Heaven is on the Throne!*

**Revelation 3:17-20 (NET)**

***Because you say, “I am rich and have acquired great wealth,and need nothing,” butdo not realize that you are wretched, pitiful,poor, blind, and naked, take my adviceand buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from mewhite clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakednesswill not be exposed, and buy eye salveto put on your eyes so you can see! AllI love, I rebuke and discipline.***

***So be earnest and repent! Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his homeand share a meal with him, and he with me.***

As you’ve studied through God’s Word, did you hear Him knocking? Then I would like to admonish you with the words of Charles H. Spurgeon. He said, “O my dear Hearers, He stands before the door of your heart right now! He is gently knocking, not with a sledge hammer, but with His own pierced hand! … Admit Him at once! If not, it may be that He will never knock again” (1896).

***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!***

***2 Corinthians 6:2 (NET)***

If you have heard the Lord’s voice, please my friend, don’t harden your heart! This is your invitationfrom the King. What will you do with Jesus? If you have access to the internet, I would like to for you to hear a beautiful song written by Steven Curtis Chapman and Geoffrey Paul More. It’s called **“The Invitation.”**

(You can find this on YouTube.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hA7q0jA9VtE>

**Romans 10:9-13 (NET)**

***Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation. For the scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.***

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

1. What is the difference in believing on Jesus as the demons do, and true saving faith? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Find 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 above and describe what it means to have vain belief. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. From 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, what specific facts must one believe in to be saved? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you ever put your faith in someone who proved to be unfaithful? If so describe here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. What did Paul preach everywhere he went (Acts 20:17-21)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. When all is said and done, what two things does God want from you and me? Read Luke 8:15-21, 11:27-28; Matthew 7:21-23; Revelation 2:5-7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Look again at the definitions of the Hebrew word Aman. What stands out as strange to you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. One word in Hebrew that is derived from the word Aman is to turn to the right Hand. Read the following verses and list everything you can find about the right hand of God. Psalm 16:11; Hebrew 1:1-13; Matthew 22:44; Mark 16:19; Revelation 3:14 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. What do the following passages say about unbelief? John 3:16-20, 36; 5:24-40, 6:63; 1 John 5:9-13; Romans 11:23; Hebrew 3:6-12; Revelation 21:6-8 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. Read Romans 10:9-13. What is the connection between calling on Jesus as Lord and sur-rendering to His Lordship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. Is it possible to receive Christ as your Savior without Him being your Lord? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
12. Think about the following statements and explain the differences: Remorse is not repentance, conviction is not confession, and sorrow over sin is not surrender to Christ’s Lordship! \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
13. If someone were to ask you, “Who is Jesus to you,” what would you say? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

**John 6:29 (NET)**

***Jesus replied, “This is the deed God requires –to believe in the one whom he sent.”***

**Week #9**

# Signs of Life



**Key Passage**

**Ephesians 2:5 (NET)**

***… we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved!***

**Introduction**

Is there a person who knows your life story so well that they could write your biography? Timothy was that person for Paul. Some time after Paul’s departure from the saints at Ephesus, Timothy became their pastor. He remained there for about one and a half years. It was during this time that Paul wrote two personal letters to Timothy.

As his primary disciple, Timothy spent large amounts of time with Paul. Every truth the Holy Spirit entrusted to Paul was passed down to his spiritual son, Timothy. This included the account of Paul’s life before Christ, as well as his conversion experience. There is little doubt Timothy could recite Paul’s story verbatim because he had heard it time and time again (1 Timothy 1:1-17; 2 Timothy 1:1-6, 2:1-2).

In the first letter Paul wrote to his young protégé, he begins by addressing the false teachers and doctrines that had crept into in the Church at Ephesus. Just as he often did, he recounts his story of amazing grace. Timothy must have been thinking to himself, “Here we go again…. Does he have any idea how many times I have heard this story?” It mattered not to Paul, because unlike so many believers, Paul never got over the wonder of what Jesus had done in his life. After his transformation, Paul was as different as night and day, or you might even say death and life. As every true believer, Paul had experienced the miracle of being raised from the dead.

**Galatians 2:20 (NET)**

***I have been crucified with Christ,***[*59*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Galatians+2) ***and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So***[*60*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Galatians+2) ***the life I now live in the body,***[*61*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Galatians+2) ***I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God,***[*62*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Galatians+2) ***who loved me and gave himself for me***.

It’s not uncommon for a person to question her salvation. And actually, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. Unless, of course, that person is living with unwarranted anxiety about her eternal destination. If this describes you, I’ve got some good news. Based on the authority of the Word of God, you can know for sure. Since this is such an important issue with eternal ramifications, you don’t want to miss this opportunity to find out where you stand. There is no time like the present to settle the matter once and for all.

So here’s the plan: together, we will take the Bible and lay it side by side with our lives. In this way we can determine if there is legitimate proof that we are saved. However, if this subject makes you a little edgy, please don’t close the book yet! Ignorance or denial comes at a high cost, and there is too much at stake. This is a win—win exercise. Regardless of the outcome of this examination, God loves you and desires for you to live with blessed assurance.

**Being a Member of a Church Doesn’t Make You a Christian**

**Matthew 7:21-23 (NET)**

***Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’***[*24*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Matthew+7) ***will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do***[*25*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Matthew+7) ***many powerful deeds?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!***

Most of us just assume that people who attend a church are saved. But is that really the correct criteria to assess one’s salvation? As a lost person, I thought it was. There are churches of all denominations that are full of misguided people who are trusting in church affiliations, reformations, confirmation, dedications and family relations as their ticket to heaven. But tragically, some who think they are going to heaven when they die are in for a rude awakening!

As I tell Yuki, my sister in Christ from China, just because we eat at her family’s Chinese restaurant, doesn’t make us Chinese. Likewise, going to a church building and having your name on the roll, does not mean that you’re a Christian. Church attendance does not equal salvation.

My husband, my father and I were all church members, yet we were lost and empty until the Lord quickened our dead spirits. In fact, because of Biblical ignorance, it took me sixteen years to discover that my moment of rebirth took place when I was twenty-six years old and not when I was baptized at twelve. No one ever challenged me to evaluate my spiritual condition. Like so many people, because I had this experience as a child, I was confused about what happened when I was twelve. I’m not dogmatic about this, but I liken that event to a *conception* of my faith. I guess you could say, I was in the womb of God for about fourteen years before I was born spiritually. Nevertheless, God doesn’t have grandchildren—He only has children who are birthed into His family by the Holy Spirit.

**2 Peter 1:10 (NET)**

***Therefore, brothers and sisters,***[*37*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1) ***make every effort to be sure of your calling and election.***[*38*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1)***For by doing this***[*39*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1) ***you will never***[*40*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Peter+1) ***stumble into sin.***

Usually, there are at least three witnesses present for a natural birth. Obviously, there is the mother, the doctor, nurses and perhaps the father. The same is true of the spiritual birth, and all three witnesses will be in agreement. They are the ones who can honestly attest to our second birth, or, spiritually speaking, our “resurrection from the dead” (1 John 3:13-14).

**Deuteronomy 19:15b (NET)**

***…A matter may be legally established***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Deuteronomy+19) ***only on the testimony of two or three witnesses.***



**The three witnesses to your second birth are: one, a personal salvation experience, two, the Word of God, and three, a transformed life. The weightiest witness is the Word of God.**

The circumstance surrounding the day of your second birthday is witness number one. Or you might call this a personal salvation experience. If, however, you’re like me, you may not have an actual date recorded. But that’s inconsequential because the next two witnesses are more reliable than that one anyway. However, before we go any further, let’s add a couple of important caveats. The test is *not* someone else’s experience compared to yours. Moreover, you can’t look at a one-time event in your life as proof that you are saved, nor a time of great failure as proof that you are lost.

Granted, at times you may not “feel saved,” but that’s not the point. Rather, to build a strong case for assurance, you need to look at *all* the evidence in light of God’s Word—witness number two. Unlike a circus mirror that distorts things, the Bible is the only true mirror and judge of our hearts. And so, this mirror will show us our true condition. By the way, the apostle John was in Ephesus when he wrote the litmus test for salvation. It’s the entire book of 1 John.

Finally, witness number three is a changed life. Yet this is not of your own doing. When you are born again by the Holy Spirit, He produces His fruit in you thus proving that you are no longer dead in sins, but alive in Christ.

* To help you get some perspective of your life story, use the graph below to mark the major highs and lows in your journey thus far.
* Have you ever served on a jury in a court of law? If so, describe what kinds of evidence it takes to convict a person. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Am I Alive?**

**1 John 5:11-13 (NET)**

***And this is the testimony: God***[*25*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***has given us eternal life,***[*26*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5)***and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son***[*27*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***has this***[*28*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***eternal***[*29*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have this***[*30*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***eternal***[*31*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***life. I have written these things***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***to you who believe***[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***in the name of the Son of God so that***[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***you may KNOW that you have eternal life.***

When someone has been born again, the Spirit of God takes up residency in them. This is the beginning of an internal transformation where her inner character begins the process of metamorphosis—just like a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. It’s called sanctification. When this happens, our lives will be characterized in such a way that we progressively bear a striking resemblance to the One to whom we belong. This gives proof of a genuine conversion. Just as the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, so we are raised to walk in a newness of life, and we will bear some unmistakable birthmarks that authenticate that we are His (Ephesians 1:13-14).

To illustrate, look with me at the word ***know*** found in 1 John 5:13. The Greek word is *eido*. This word is also translated as *show*, *see,* or even, *to be sure* (1 John 3:13-14, 5:13, 15,16-18,19, John 1:47-48). Likewise, the Greek word for ***see,*** ***behold or look*** (idou) is also derived from the same word as know.It is found in the following passage.

**2 Corinthians 5:17 (NET)**

***So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***– look, what is new***[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5)***has come!***

My point in bringing these Greek words to your attention is this: if we cannot *see* the signs of life, then we cannot *know* we are saved. The change should be apparent, not only to us but also to those who know us best. If we claim to be saved but there is not one iota of evidence in our actions and attitudes, then this should lead us to ask ourselves this question, “Am I saved?” We may *profess* to know God but not *possess* salvation, and therefore, we are still lost and separated from God who loves us.

**Romans 8:6-9 (NET)**

***For the outlook***[*6*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Romans+8) ***of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in***[*7*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Romans+8) ***the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him.***

[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5)

In a message entitled “Clearing up Christ-less Confusion” from Luke 11:24-28, my pastor, David Lawrence, pointed out some serious consequences of morality without a new birth (2016). From my notes on his sermon, here is the gist of the message: Try as we may to reform our lives, without a spiritual birth, we become as the Pharisees. We may look good on the outside, but inwardly, we are still dead. If you are deluded by the notion that you changed yourself, then why would you need a savior? What’s more, those who are in this spiritually dead and empty condition are in danger of demonic possession!

* Read the following passages and then make note of the fruits and results we have just discussed. Luke 11:24-28; Matthew 12:35, 23:25 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Can Others See That You Are New?**

**2 Corinthians 5:11; 14-18(NET)**

***Therefore, because we know the fear of the Lord,***[*18*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***we try to persuade***[*19*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***people,***[*20*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***but we are well known***[*21*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***to God, and I hope we are well known to your consciences too. For the love of Christ***[*26*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ***[*27*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***died for all; therefore all have died.***

***And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised.***[*28*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***So then from now on we acknowledge***[*29*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***no one from an outward human point of view.***[*30*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***Even though we have known Christ from such a human point of view,***[*31*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***now we do not know him in that way any longer. So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***– look, what is new***[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***has come!***[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation***.

I’d like to tell you about a special brother in Christ who exemplified the fruit of a changed life. His name was Frank Lucido. Not only was Frank part of our church family, he was very much a part of my family. Every holiday, youth trip, mission trip, wedding, birthday, you name it, he was there—oxygen tank and all. He had C.O.P.D. as well as some other serious illnesses. These were the effects of fifty years of abusing his body with drugs and alcohol. By the way, Frank said that he had been through every self-help, 12-step program available to him. And like the people described in Luke 11:24-28, Frank didn’t get better. He became increasingly addicted and afflicted. It takes the power of God to break these chains.

As the story goes, Frank told us, “I was so addicted to drugs that once I took my wife’s car, and while still making payments on it, sold it to a prostitute for drugs.” Before the Lord saved him, Frank had been in the notorious Folsom prison in California. In fact, he said he was so bad that upon his release the police escorted him to the airport and told him he was never to set foot in the state of California again or he would be locked up forever. That was the old Frank – I only knew the new Frank.

A true child at heart, he never missed our annual “Birthday Party for Jesus.” And he always came to our home with a busload of children. Frank was fifty years old when he was born again. He never got over it. He loved the Lord Jesus, his church family, his children and mine. He cared deeply for people and their eternal souls.

**You cannot know for sure if you are spiritually alive unless you can see the evidence. There is no way that a Holy God can occupy a person’s life and be inconspicuous. When you have been grafted into the Tree of Life, you will produce the fruit of the Spirit. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding!**

Once, Frank and I were together on a mission trip to Corn Island, Nicaragua, when I joined him and my pastor at a small radio station. This day just happened to be Frank’s 70th birthday. I was excited to know that his testimony would be broadcast throughout two islands. For reasons I did not understand at the time, I recorded Frank’s story and felt that something very special was taking place. A few months after we taped his testimony, Frank went home to be with Jesus. And through this recording, Frank preached his own funeral service. In fact, you can hear it for yourself by going to [www.catalystmissions.org](http://www.catalystmissions.org) and clicking on the Women’s Discipleship page. This picture was taken on Frank’s birthday just before we went to the radio station. His smile tells it all!

People like Frank and Iris Blue are few and far between. Not everyone has such dramatic testimonies as theirs. But, if we are saved from our sin, there will be evidence of it in our life. And as we’ve already noted, the evidence is not just church attendance. However, like Frank, Iris and Paul, one sure sign that we belong to Christ is that we will love His church.

Next week, we will look at the evidences of salvation. But as we conclude this week, here is something to consider: You can’t love the Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom, and not love His bride, the church. That is *if* you are part of that bride. Naturally, this premise is based on the assumption that you are already part of the bride and body of Christ.

But my point is that Paul addressed his epistles to the saints who were members of specific churches. So, if you are not part of a local church body and have no desire to be connected, then there is a real problem. People who are alive in Christ aren’t comfortable hanging out with people who are spiritually dead. Birds of a feather flock together. We need one another to help us grow and thrive. Otherwise, it’s very difficult to abide in Christ and to avoid disconnecting from His body. If you are doing this study with a group of believers, then you are connecting with the body of Christ. Yet this is not a substitute; you still need a local church family to worship and serve with. In the following passage, Paul speaks clearly on this matter.

**1 Corinthians 12:12-20 (NET)**

***For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body – though many – are one body, so too is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slavesor free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.  For in fact the body is not a single member, but many.  If the foot says, “Since I am not a hand, I am not part of the body,” it does not lose its membership in the body because of that. And if the ear says, “Since I am not an eye, I am not part of the body,” it does not lose its membership in the body because of that. If the whole body were an eye, what part would do the hearing?***

***If the whole were an ear, what part would exercise the sense of smell? But as a matter of fact, God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided. If they were all the same member, where would the body be?  So now there are many members, but one body.***

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

1. Have you ever examined your life to see if you are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe the differences Christ has made in your life (1 John 3:13-24). \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Of the three witnesses listed on page 104, why is the Bible the most reliable of the three? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Imagine that you are an eyewitness to an accident. Someone is badly hurt and laying on the ground in front of you. After you call 911 for help, what will you do next? How will you assess their condition? What are the universal signs of life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you know anyone who has a testimony like Frank or Paul? If so, who is that person, and what changes make it obvious that he or she is alive spiritually? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you or someone you know have a story of being in church, and later being saved? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you have anyone with whom you have entrusted your personal testimony? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. If so, who is this person and why do they know your testimony? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. Read Paul’s personal testimony (1 Timothy 1:12-17). Can you relate in any way to his story? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. When is the last time you shared your story of grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Your small group is a good place to practice if you have never told your story. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. Is there someone who knows you well enough that she can attest to your resurrection? If so, will you ask her for the proof that she sees in your life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
12. List every reason that comes to mind why believers need to be with other believers in a local church: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

**Ephesians 5:14 (NET)**

***For everything made evident is light, and for this reason it says:***[***18***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Ephesians+5) ***“Awake,***[***19***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Ephesians+5) ***O sleeper!***[***20***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Ephesians+5)***Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!”***

**Week #10**

**A Spiritual Checkup**

**Key Passages**

**2 Corinthians 13:5-6 (NET)**

***Put yourselves to the test to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize regarding yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you – unless, indeed, you fail the test!***[*6*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+13) ***And I hope that you will realize that we have not failed the test!***

**Introduction**

The carnality (or lack of fruit) in the lives of saints who lived in Corinth, evidently, cast some doubt in Paul’s mind about the validity of their confession of faith. Some things in their lives were apparently out of sync with the truth that Paul and others had taught them. So we see in the above passage Paul’s admonition to these saints to test themselves. No matter where you are on your faith journey, spiritual checkups are not only Biblical, but they’re beneficial.

Have you ever experienced some symptoms that indicated that you may have a serious illness? Then you know that the only way to alleviate nagging anxiety and worry is to visit a doctor who will perform a thorough examination. Only then can you have peace of mind, a proper diagnosis and a plan of treatment. Likewise, a checkup of our spiritual health can alleviate the uncertainty of where we stand in relation to God. In this lesson, we’ll be checking our “spiritual pulse” so to speak.

**Do You Desire the Hearing of God’s Word?**

It doesn’t matter how long a person is saved, you never tire of hearing that Jesus loves you. As John put it in 1 John 4:16, we know and *rely on the love of God*. In the words of the familiar children’s song, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” When I need to hear from God, I go to the Bible, and He assures me that He loves me—no matter what.

There are two internet connections between the Lord and His bride. One is the Bible and the other is prayer. For the believer, these are not obligatory requirements; this is a relationship! The Bible is God’s love letter to His bride. And what bride does not cherish every word from her beloved? Since the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible, when He occupies a believer, He brings with Him a hunger for the Bread of Life—God’s Word.

**Perhaps the best way to keep you honest as you examine your life, is to ask someone who knows you best to take this with you. This will require transparency and humility. Take it from wise King Solomon, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6 KJV). In other words, a real friend will tell you the truth.**

**John 10:27-28 (NET)**

***My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give***[*67*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+10) ***them eternal life, and they will never perish;***[*68*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+10) ***no one will snatch***[*69*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+10) ***them from my hand.***

On the other hand, spiritually dead people don’t have an appetite for spiritual things such as God’s Word. For further evidence, let’s look at the words hear, follow and obey. In Greek, they are as follows: hear—akouo, follow—akolotho and obey Hupakouo. Clearly, they are derived from the same Greek word. Why does this matter? It matters because Jesus said that those who are His not only hear His voice, they follow and obey Him. This leads us to the next test of salvation.

**Do You Obey God’s Word?**

Did you know that Jesus is referred to as Savior 24 times in the gospels, yet He is called “Lord” 433 times? Why is that? Because when we believe on Christ for salvation, we relinquish our rights to autonomy, thereby accepting Christ’s rule in every aspect of our lives. Jesus succinctly explained it this way: He said, “My mother and brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21). He asked another question: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). We touched on this in another lesson, but all of us live by a worldview whereby we act on a set of beliefs. Therefore, if the Bible does not transform my worldview and translate into my practical everyday life, then can I legitimately claim that Christ is the Lord of my life?

You see, at the very core of rebellion is a heart that declares, “No one is going to boss me around—not even God!” It’s like a person in a small dingy about to be crushed by a battleship yelling those famous last words to the captain of the large vessel, “No! You get out of *my* way!” The fool says in his heart, “There is no God—I’ll do what I please!” As C.S. Lewis so eloquently put it, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell chose it (2009).”

* Read Luke 19:1-14,19-27. What kind of end will there be for those who refuse to have Jesus rule in their lives? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

However, when we first come to faith in Christ, obedience may be more of a struggle than we anticipated. As we come to know and trust Him better, His love begins to disarm us. We understand that He truly desires what is best for us.

In short, the Lordship of Christ is no more and no less than the unpretentious words spoken by Mary, the mother of Jesus, at a wedding in Cana. She said: “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:1-8). Plainly put, at least on some level, obedience (not sinless perfection) will accompany true saving faith, and a heart that is yielded towards God is evidence of salvation.

**1 John 2:3-4 (NET)**

***Now, by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments. The one who says “I have come to know God” and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person***.

**Love, the Birthmark of God’s Children**

**Ephesians 6:23-24 (NET)**

***Peace to the brothers and sisters,and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.***

Mark this down and never forget it - ove for God and love for others are the acid test of salvation. They are the tangible pieces of evidence and birthmarks of a child of God. Whereas, an absence of love clearly indicates there is no relationship with God—who is Love!

May I give a brief personal testimony? The most obvious proof that the Lord had truly saved my husband was love. Just recently, I had one of those days when the enemy of my soul reminded me of one of the most hurtful rock-bottom times in my marriage. This situation afforded the devil the opportunity to hurl these memories right in my face making me relive them all over again. This bothered me for a few days. Then, my daily Bible verse from Faith Radio came in my email. It didn’t dawn on me until later that day what the Lord was trying to tell me.

The verse in my inbox was 2 Corinthians 5:17. ***So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***– look, what is new***[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5) ***has come!***[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/2+Corinthians+5)Later that day, Art and I found ourselves in a situation much like the one I just mentioned. That is when I knew why the Lord sent me that particular verse. He knew I needed to be reminded that He had truly changed my man. God replaced a calloused, stone-cold heart with His heart full of love, compassion and tenderness. That’s what He does when He saves us. In that still small voice, the Lord Jesus said to me, “Ginny, behold My new creation - the old Art is gone and the new Art replaced him.” Moments like this don’t happen every day, but when they do, I can’t help but fall deeper in love with Jesus. Could you blame me?

I’m really looking forward to sharing more of our story in the next book. But for now, I hope you will stop and take your time to look up each of these passages and do some soul searching. Then ask yourself, “Do I really love God? Do I love others?”

**1 John 3:14 & 18-22 (NET)**

***We know that***[*47*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we have crossed over***[*48*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***from death to life***[*49*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***because***[*50*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we love our fellow Christians.***[*51*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***The one who does not love remains in death. Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth.***[*64*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***And by this***[*65*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we will know that we are of the truth and will convince***[*66*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***our conscience***[*67*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***in his presence,***[*68*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***that***[*69*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***if our conscience condemns***[*70*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***us, that***[*71*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***God is greater than our conscience and knows all things. Dear friends, if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God, and***[*72*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***whatever we ask we receive from him, because***[*73*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+3) ***we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him.***

**Can God Get a Witness Out of You?**

**Acts 1:8 (NET)**

***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest partsof the earth.***

This will be a little shorter than our other signs of life because, in our next lesson, we’ll discuss this point in greater detail. So, we’ll only focus on a few key facts for now. For starters, if we are in Christ, we’ve been called out of the darkness of sin and death. As Jesus said, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16). In case you haven’t noticed, it’s getting quite dark in this world.

Although we are alive in Christ, we still live amidst multitudes who are dead, blind, enslaved and hopeless—just as we were. Therefore, we are no different than beggars who found a feast. By the way, God’s love in Greek is **agape**, and it is defined as a love feast or feast of charity. We are living among love-starved people. Once you have tasted God’s love feast, how can you hoard it? As C.H. Spurgeon said, *“Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that”* (1888).

John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:9-18; 2 Corinthians 5:11-20; Isaiah 43:8-12

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**Does God’s Phone Vibrate in You When You Sin?**

If you will notice in this subtitle, I did not say *if* you sin—but *when* you sin. Unfortunately, Christians still have a battle with our old sin nature. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit is subjected to sin, He becomes uncomfortable and so does the child He lives in.

Often believers will go through times when they feel that God is distant. I know I have. Usually, this is because I am struggling with sin in some area of my life. However, one indicator that a person is saved *from* their sins is that they have the desire to fight *against* sins that once enslaved them. When the Holy Spirit lives in you, He won’t let you remain in sin for long. You may find it interesting that the Greek word for *voice* is *phone*. Yes—voice in Greek is spelled PHONE! Do you hear God’s phone ring *inside* of you when you are disobeying God, or is He still *outside* convicting you of your sins (1 John 1:8-10; 2 Corinthians 7:10)?

**John 16:8 (NET)**

***And when he***[*16*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***comes, he will prove the world wrong***[*17*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***concerning sin and***[*18*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***righteousness and***[*19*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/John+16) ***judgment.***

**God Disciplines His Own**

**Psalm 89:30-33 (NET)**

***If his sons reject my law and disobey my regulations, if they break***[***52***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89) ***my rules and do not keep my commandments, I will punish their rebellion by beating them with a club,***[***53***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89)

***their sin by inflicting them with bruises.*** [***54***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89)***But I will not remove***[***55***](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Psalms+89) ***my loyal love from him,***

***nor be unfaithful to my promise.***

The translation from the Net Bible in the above passage is not quite my favorite. But I add it to make a point. Not to put words in, nor take them out of God’s mouth, but I think we can safely say that this passage is not to be taken literally.

**Hebrew 12:6 (NET)**

***For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts****.*

Hebrews 12 clearly states that those whom God loves, He disciplines. God does not “club” His children or beat them black and blue, does He? Absolutely not! Then why did I include such a strange passage, you ask? Just to say this: while God is serious about our holiness and does not sweep our sin under the rug by ignoring it, He will never ever stop loving us. We are His! If you’re a parent, you know instinctively what I’m talking about.

For example, for the most part, my sons have made their momma proud. But there have been some occasions when I received that dreaded, humiliating phone call from the school where I was informed that the child I had given birth to had done something less than stellar. Sure, I was mad as a hornet but, not even for a millisecond, did I stop loving them. We are made in God’s image, and when we have been placed in Christ, it’s a done deal. We are His for eternity. However, when we sin, we dishonor our Father’s name. Out of love, He will allow the natural consequences of our sins to come upon us to teach us. To ignore God’s discipline, is to invite calamity. And if He must spank us all the way home to heaven (or take us home prematurely), that’s just what He will do.

The above passage is rendered in such a way that it sounds like God will beat His children half to death to punish us. Other translations of this passage chose words that suggest He is speaking here of the Messiah (the Hebrew word for Christ). Yes, God has punished our sins when Jesus took our beating. He was crushed, wounded and beaten black and blue. Then He said, “It is finished” (John 19:1-30). For this reason, God the Father will discipline us, but He will never take His love away from us because we are in His Beloved Son (Hebrew 12:5-11).

And so, if you are not corrected by God when you sin, this could be an indicator that you are not His. In speaking of the perfection of God’s Son, Jesus, C.H. Spurgeon said, “*God had One Son without sin, but not a single child without the rod”* (1868).

**When You Pray, Do You Get Any Response?**

**1 John 5:13-15 (NET)**

***I have written these things***[*32*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5)***to you who believe***[*33*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***in the name of the Son of God so that***[*34*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have before him: that***[*35*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***whenever***[*36*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know***[*37*](https://lumina.bible.org/bible/1+John+5) ***that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.***

As we wrap up this lesson, let’s consider one final evidence of salvation—answered prayer. AccordingtoIsaiah59andotherpassages**,** God does not hear the prayers of those who are separated from Him in their sins. But, because we are in Christ, answered prayers are one of the fruits of having an intimate relationship with Him. Furthermore, as you will see when you look up the following passages, there is ample evidence that answered prayer is a clear sign of salvation (Titus 3:3-11; 1 John 1:5-6-10; 1 John 2:3-11; 1 John 3:6-24).

But, let me clarify. When it comes to prayer, I am not saying that we can simply name it and claim it. What I am saying, though, is that there should be some undeniably answered prayer throughout the life of every saint. He is our Daddy and because of Christ, we have twenty-four hour a day access to Him in prayer. Because He is our Father, He delights in taking care of His children. Just today, my friend Cathy, a widow, shared with me how she was talking to the Lord and expressing her needs to him. She said she had been quite specific in her prayer for an exact amount of money that she needed. And do you know what? Within days she received a call that she would receive a sum of money that was part of her husband’s inheritance. The amount? Just what she needed. Our heavenly Father is just good that way. Answered prayers is one way we know He hears us and we are His. (Book number two will cover prayer in detail.)

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

1. From the following passages, what do you think matters most to God?

Ephesians 1:15; Matthew 5:43-48; Galatians 5:13-22; John 13:34-35, 15:12-13; Romans 5:5; James 2:8

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1. Can you honestly say that you are quick to obey God when He reveals actions that He wants you to take? Or do you require complete understanding before stepping out in faith and obedience? If so, do you recognize why this could be? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Can you identify a moment when you began to care about other people’s souls? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. When was the last time you shared your testimony? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Can you describe a time in your life that God revealed specific sins that were unconfessed? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read John 14:12-17, 16;23-28 and list some recent answers to specific prayers. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Read Romans 8:31-39. From these passages, once we are placed in Christ, what are the specific things that can never separate us from the love of God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. If you were put on trial for being a Christian, do you think that there would be enough evidence to convict you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you struggle to surrender to the will of God when it costs you time, money, relationships, reputation or convenience? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. If you have ample evidence of these signs of life, do you feel like you are growing in your faith and love relationship with God? Why or why not: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

## Memory Verses

**1 John 5:13-15 (NET)**

***I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him***.

**Week #11**

**The Gospel of Your Salvation**



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 1:13-14 (NET)**

***And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation) – when you believed in Christ – you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of his glory.***

**Introduction**

Every saint has a line in the story of the ages, and, therefore, every one of us has the potential to impact history. Saints of God—that title includes you! But to find our place in God’s story, we must assimilate the gospel into the narratives of our lives. And so, returning to where we started with the history of the church at Ephesus, let’s take another look at a few of the folks who left eternal footprints that we would do well to follow. The gospel brings salvation and transformation, but first we must know what it is and what we are to do with it. That is what this lesson is all about.

**A Change of Address**

**Psalm 90:1 (KJV)**

***Lord****,* ***thou hast been our dwelling place***

***in all******generations.***

When Priscilla and Aquila arrived in Ephesus, they were carrying a message that had the power to change everything. The city was under the dominion of the devil masquerading as a goddess named Diana. The demonic temple built in her honor was one of the seven most spectacular structures of the ancient world. But the God who made the world and everything in it doesn’t live in man-made temples (Acts 17:19-24). He lives in His saints, and His saints live in Him. They are the temple of God!

As the citizens of Ephesus heard and received the gospel proclaimed by Pricilla and Aquila, their address changed. They became citizens of heaven. You might say the embassy or meeting place for the church at Ephesus was the humble abode of these two spiritual matchmakers. Their home was ground zero for the crucial work of discipling these new believers.

While Pricilla and Aquila were the first to bring the gospel to this city, they were by no means the last to do so. Eventually, Paul, Luke, Timothy, Mary, the mother of Jesus, the apostle John and others came along and watered the gospel seeds that had previously been sown.

Yet regardless of who plants the gospel or who waters it, “It is God who brings the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). Incidentally, Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this letter to the church at Corinth, and it was Titus who delivered it. In the epistle addressed to the saints at Corinth, Paul was adjudicating a dispute over who was the most important leader to follow. This underscores the importance of discipleship. If we lead people to Christ but don’t disciple them, we should not be surprised at the problems that ensue when you have a new church full of self-centered babies in Christ. (This is what Paul called them.) The conflict mentioned here involved another key player in the history of the church at Ephesus; this was *Apollos*, the disciple of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-28).

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

***I urge you, brothers and sisters,by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together,to end your divisions,and to be united by the same mind and purpose. For members of Chloe’s household have made it clear to me, my brothers and sisters, that there are quarrelsamong you.  Now I mean this, thateach of you is saying, “I am with Paul,” or “I am with Apollos,” or “I am with Cephas,” or “I am with Christ.” Is Christ divided? Paul wasn’t crucified for you, was he? Or were you in fact baptized in the name of Paul?***

Generally, we tend to overlook some less known but invaluable people in the story of the church at Ephesus such as Tychicus. He was the one who delivered the letters to the saints at Ephesus and throughout Asia Minor. Where would we be today if not for servants of God like Tychicus? He could not possibly have known the life-giving power bundled up in the documents he transported. Yet he was faithful and trustworthy (Ephesians 6:21-22).

As the citizens of Ephesus heard the Word of Truth and responded to the gospel, the whole culture and spiritual atmosphere of the city changed. Pagans became preachers. Idol worshipers became true worshipers of God. Sinners became saints. And light burst forth in the darkness of a hedonistic society because people who had the Light of the World *in them* became like a city on a hill. The impact was far reaching. All of Asia Minor was ablaze with the knowledge of God and His great salvation – at least for a while. However, approximately thirty years later, their zeal and love for the Lord grew cold. It’s been said that those who don’t learn the lessons from history are destined to repeat it. May it not be so of us!

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Matthew 5:13-16; John 12:46; 1 John 1:5-7; 1 Peter 2:9-12; Colossians 1:12-14; Philippians 2:12-16; Ephesians 5:1-15

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* From the above passages, make a list of the things light does to darkness. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Evangelism… Spiritual Matchmaking**

**Psalm 68:11 (NET)**

***The Lord******speaks;******many, many women******spread the good news.***

Names are important. As I make some personal applications, please forgive me if I am over spiritualizing here. For example, Ginny is my nickname, but my given name is Virginia. It means virgin. The implications of this name are profound, and we will cover that in our next book. But, for now, I would like to make this one point: when the Virgin Mary received the news of her blessed and holy assignment to bear God’s Son, she named herself “the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1:27-38). A handmaid in Greek is doulos; it means *a* *salve* or *bondservant*. In truth, all saints are servants of God.

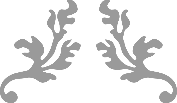
My maiden name is Page, and my married name is Porter. Both are names used for the occupations of servants. For example, the primary role of a page is to deliver messages, but in Medieval times, a page was like a disciple in training to become a knight. Once they proved themselves faithful, a knight would pledge his loyalty to his lord. A porter, on the other hand, is a person employed to carry luggage or assist passengers on a train. In Biblical times, a porter was a door or gatekeeper.

As a Page, I am really nothing more than a common servant or messenger. What makes the name Page extraordinary is *Who* I serve and the gospel message I carry. Every page of this book was written with the humble intent of sharing the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ with you. I know the power and worth of this message because it has changed my life, and I know it can change yours too. The second purpose of this study is to give you a tool to use in sharing the gospel with others. What about the name Porter? As a “doorkeeper,” my desire is to swing open the doors to the kingdom of heaven so wide that others will see Jesus—the King of glory in all His radiant beauty.

The Sons of Korah were the “porters” to the temple of God, but the most remarkable thing about them is that during the time of king David they were the music directors who wrote eleven Psalms of praise and thanksgiving to God. Not only were they the doorkeepers, they were also the worship leaders! We have already read some of their songs throughout this study, but this is one more:

**Psalm 84:10 (KJV)**

***For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper (porter) in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.***



**A spiritual matchmaker is -- a person who introduces others to the heavenly Bridegroom**



Now, as I promised from the start, I will tell you about being a matchmaker. Here are my credentials. It’s a short resume. I have planned two successful matches in my life. Over thirty years ago, with the help of my husband, Art, we planned, or schemed, to introduce Chuck Ferguson to Dianne Edge. Art went to the University of Memphis with Chuck, and Dianne worked with me at Dillard’s Department Store. Here was the plan. Art would bring Chuck and another friend named Mitch to the store. When they arrived, Dianne would hide in the stock room to get a peek at Chuck. If she didn’t like the looks of him, she would stay put, and I would tell him she was not there. Well, things did not go exactly as planned. When she came out of hiding, she ran right past Chuck and embraced Mitch, whom she knew from college. Poor Chuck, he just stood there looking pitiful. Nevertheless, after this awkward introduction, the match was a success! Art and I were in Chuck and Dianne’s wedding. On their thirtieth wedding anniversary, they reconnected with us on Facebook to say thank you. I am delighted to report they are still happily married. And, as it turned out, Mitch married Chuck's sister, Laura.

Before I tell you about the second match, let me interject a disclaimer. In reality, we are all just following a divine script, aren’t we? Not to say that we are just puppets on a string, we are, however, instruments of God in fulfilling His eternal plan. Most of the time though, we’re oblivious to what’s really going on.

Now I will tell you about the second match. It was really more like an arranged marriage between my daughter, Allie, and her husband, Justin. Allie was in high school when I asked Justin, a young man at our church, if he and I could make an agreement that he would wait for Allie. (He is 5 years older than she is.) This is what he said: “You make the contract, and I will sign it!” A risky proposition, I know. And furthermore, how could I be sure he was even serious?

I had always prayed for Allie to have a husband who loved the Lord Jesus with all his heart, and after observing Justin’s life, I believed that he was the one. Thankfully, they both were pleased with this arrangment. After all the brides I had dressed over the years, it was my greatest  joy to dress my beautiful daughter and present her to Justin at their wedding. So, that’s my story, and I am sticking to it.

Now let’s talk about what it means to be a spiritual matchmaker. There are people all around us that have not yet met the Bridegroom. When we introduce our friends and family to the Lord Jesus, we are “spiritual matchmaking”—only these matches were made in advance in heaven. This is what evangelism is all about, and this is the first step of disciple making. Or as I like to think of it, it is dressing the bride of Christ for the wedding. I hope you will join me in the next book as we delve into this mystery in greater depth.

**What Is the Gospel?**

“Extra! Extra! Read all about it,” is what newsboys would shout from the street corners as they peddled their newspapers. That’s how news was spread in the olden days. In Bible times, news was spread by word of mouth or handwritten letters delivered by “pages” such as Titus and Tychicus.

Do you know that many of the New Testament books were personal letters written to specific individuals? Paul wrote two letters to Timothy. The letters that Luke wrote to Theophilus are also perfect examples of this. Luke wrote the first letter to evangelize Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4). Then he wrote Acts to disciple Him (Acts 1:1-3). However, we have lost the arts of penmanship and letter writing. They have become obsolete, and this is such a shame.

My, how things have changed. Nowadays, we have social media, the internet, cell phones, television and a plethora of other inventions. However, God’s preordained method to propagate His news was, is and always will be through His servants—“the good newsboys.” We might call them evangelists or spiritual matchmakers (1 Corinthians 16:19). All of this just emphasizes the personal responsibility of every believer to steward the gospel treasure. To do so, we must first understand what the gospel is.

If someone were to ask you to define the gospel, what would you say? When pressed to give a definition, most people respond: “The gospel is the Bible,” or, “The gospel is the good news.” In a very broad sense, they would be correct. The Greek word for gospel is euaggelion, and it is defined as “the good news.”

Most my life I have attended church on a weekly basis, and, therefore, you would think I could easily define the gospel. Obviously, I’m a slow learner because that was not always the case. Unlike the saints in Ephesus who had been thoroughly discipled by Paul and others, I was not discipled until I had been a Christian for almost twenty years! Sure, I knew that the gospel meant the good news, and I could quote a few passages by heart—like Ephesians 2:6-10. However, a few years ago, while listening to a message, a question popped into my mind—“What is the gospel?” And that’s when it dawned on me: I really didn’t know. I was further perplexed when I asked a youth pastor if he could give me a passage that would summarize the gospel. The question seemed to stump him, and so, I left without an answer. Thankfully, it is written in Luke 11:9, “Seek and you will find,” and when I did, the Lord led me to 1 Corinthians 15:1-6.

I know that I am being redundant in pointing this out, but Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this succinct explanation of the gospel to the church at Corinth. As any Bible teacher knows, when the Holy Spirit teaches you truth, you can’t contain it. Those who are nearest to you are going to hear it first. Therefore, we can safely assume that the saints in Ephesus heard this message long before Titus left the city to deliver this epistle to the church at Corinth.

**1 Corinthians 15:1-6 (NET)**

***Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters,the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.***

***For I passed on to you as of first importancewhat I also received – that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sistersat one time, most of whom are still alive,though some have fallen asleep.***

The world we live in is replete with tragedy, and good news is scarce. Thanks to the internet and social media, we have twenty-four hour a day access to all the bad news our weary minds can handle. Isn’t it strange that bad news spreads faster than good news? Even though I seldom watch the news, there is just no escaping it. And quite frankly, it is just sad and depressing. For instance, just today in “God blessed America” we are reeling from yet another senseless, mass shooting. In Managua, Nicaragua, a volcano that has been quiet for 100 years exploded with fire, ash and smoke. Not only did the earth quake, but the hearts of people did also. These are my spiritual family, and so what affects them also affects me. All of this is in addition to the news that my pastor’s mother passed away. Yesterday, we received the very sad news that a three-year-old girl we were fervently praying for died and went to be with Jesus. Our hearts break when we hear bad news, and it seems to get worse by the moment. Couldn’t we all use some good news?

* If you were put on the spot and were asked for a definition of the gospel, how would you answer? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Has anyone clearly defined the gospel for you or taught you how to share it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Are You a Gospel Herald or a Gospel Hoarder?**

**Mark 8:38 (NET)**

***For******if******anyone is ashamed******of me******and******my******words******in******this******adulterous******and******sinful******generation,******the Son******of Man******will******also be ashamed******of him******when******he comes******in******the glory******of******his******Father******with******the holy******angels.***

In the United States of America, we are gospel-rich, but dirt - poor spiritually. There are churches on almost every corner and bookstores full of Bibles. But are we being good stewards of this gospel wealth that we have been given? Granted, along with the true gospel, we have an abundance of “false gospels” as well as folks preaching “different Jesuses.” (More on this subject in another book.)

According to an article published on Bible.org., “eighty percent of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ” (2009). That means that eighty percent of the people who say they have received salvation are hoarders of the gospel. What is the explanation for this? While many profess to know Christ, they are not *in* Christ, and, therefore, they need to receive the gospel and be saved.

How tragic, that in the midst of a world full of corruption, chaos, carnage and conflict we keep the good news to ourselves, hidden safely within the walls of our church buildings while the world full of people who “God so loves,” goes to Hell (Matthew 5:13-16). Jesus had more to say about hell than He did about heaven. Consequently, the more we hoard the gospel, the more hell breaks loose around us. The ramifications are too numerous to count. Furthermore, we must not think that the Master will be pleased with us when we are called to give account at the judgment seat of Christ. We should shudder at the thought of the righteous anger of God against His people who have squandered the gospel treasure He entrusted to us.

A glaring example of selfishly hoarding the good news is found in the Old Testament in the book of Second Kings. I have only printed a portion of the story, although you may want to read it in its entirety.

**2 Kings 7:3-9 (NET)**

***Now four men with a skin diseasewere sitting at the entrance of the city gate. They said to one another, “Why are we just sitting here waiting to die? If we go into the city, we’ll die of starvation,and if we stay here we’ll die! So come on, let’s defect to the Syrian camp! If they spare us,we’ll live; if they kill us – well, we were going to die anyway.”So they started towardthe Syrian camp at dusk. When they reached the edge of the Syrian camp, there was no one there. The Lord had caused the Syrian camp to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a large army. Then they said to one another, “Look, the king of Israel has paid the kings of the Hittites and Egypt to attack us!” So they got up and fled at dusk, leaving behind their tents, horses, and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives. When the men with a skin disease reached the edge of the camp, they entered a tent and had a meal. They also took some silver, gold, and clothes and went and hid it all. Then they went back and entered another tent. They looted itand went and hid what they had taken. Then they said to one another, “It’s not right what we’re doing! This is a day to celebrate, but we haven’t told anyone. If we wait until dawn,we’ll be punished. So come on, let’s go and inform the royal palace.”***

* Read the entire passage above. Using this Old Testament account as an allegory, compare what is it like when we, the recipients of the gospel, hoard it. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

If we are in Christ, we’ve been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). And part of that ministry, as Paul told Timothy, is a ministry of continual intercessory prayer for the advancement of the gospel (1 Timothy 2:1-6). Jesus told us to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His field, but undoubtedly, it is the laborers who are the ones praying for others to join them (John 4:30-35). As we have already discussed, prayer is vital. (See the list on page 66.) But praying for the lost does not negate our individual responsibility to share the good news (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47). Those who have been freely given the gift of salvation should be busy trying to give it away.

What’s more, no ethnic group in the body of Christ is excluded from this command (Revelation 5:9-14). Did you know that 2 out of every 7 people in the world have no idea who Jesus is? Most of them live in countries where the gospel is restricted. What that means is that approximately 1.7 billion people live in areas where they have no access to the gospel. And sadly, the precious few indigenous believers in these parts of the world have not been equipped to share the gospel with their own neighbors. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. But people must *hear* the gospel to be saved. As Paul told the Romans, how can people hear it if we—the redeemed—don’t tell them?

**Mark 16:15 (NET)**

***He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.***

I would like to tell you about two women who are not ashamed of the gospel. The first one is still impacting the small corner of the world in which she lives, and the second one is now at home with Jesus receiving her rewards.

In our small town, just north of Memphis, Tennessee, there is an older, African-American sister who stands on a street corner with a bag full of Bibles and a bullhorn in her hand. She unashamedly proclaims the gospel to anyone who will take the time to listen to her message. I’m sure that many people mock her (Luke 10:10-16). She is like the seed sower in Mark 4:26-29. Only heaven knows what will become of her efforts. But as Jesus said about the woman who anointed His feet, she did what she could, and I have no doubt the Father in heaven smiles upon His faithful servant.

**Mark 14:8-9 (NET)**

***She did what she could. She anointed my body beforehand for burial. I tell you the truth,wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”***

Approximately twenty years ago before my husband came to Christ, he was on a flight returning home from a business trip. It just so happened that he was seated next to a woman on the plane who was “fishing for my man.” The funny thing is that in her “B.C.” days, she might have been trying to catch Art for other, less noble, reasons. Art came home with her business card and told me about how she had been witnessing to him. (At the time, Art was confident that he was a believer, but I knew better.)

Her name was Sister Denise K. Smith (Matthews was her maiden name), and on the back of her card she wrote down her old stage name—Vanity. She was once the backup singer for the artist known as Prince. She had a lot in common with Frank and Iris Blue. If you look her up online, you will see a woman whose life was completely transformed by the gospel. I have not yet read her autobiography, *Blame it on Vanity;* therefore, I can’t endorse it. But there is plenty of information on the internet about her life, before Christ and after. Just this year, after Prince died, I remembered her and found her old business card. She was a beautiful woman, but what impressed me the most was what was printed on her card. Here it is.

When I looked her up, I discovered she passed away on February 15, 2016. This was printed on the front of her business card: “I’m about my Father’s business.” Really, she was an answer to my prayers that the Lord would send His servants out to witness to Art. She was busy about fishing for men and women. I like to think of her hearing the Lord say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant. Welcome home!” I look forward to meeting her in heaven one day.

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

1. Will everyone believe the message of the gospel? Why or why not (Romans 2:13-16, 10:16-21)?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Romans 1:16-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:17-25. To those who are perishing in their sins, what is the gospel to them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you regularly share the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. If not, what are some things that keep you from doing so? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2. What is meant by “vain belief” or receiving the grace of God in vain? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Whose responsibility is it to take this good news to *all* Nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:19-23)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you believe that the responsibility of sharing the gospel is only for special people like pastors, missionaries and theologians? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. If so, where did you get this idea? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verse**

**Romans 1:16 (NET)**

***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.***

**Week #12**

**A Gospel Story**



**Key Passages**

**Luke 23:37-39 (NET)**

***Two other criminals were also led away to be executed with him. Sowhen they came to the place that is called “The Skull,”They crucifiedhim there, along with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [But Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”] Then they threw diceto divide his clothes. The people also stood there watching, but the rulers ridiculedhim, saying, “He saved others. Let him savehimself ifhe is the Christof God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “Ifyou are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscriptionover him, “This is the king of the Jews.” One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at him, saying, “Aren’tyou the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

**Introduction**

Can you believe that we have arrived at our last week of study together? That’s the bad news. Although spiritual life begins with the gospel, it doesn’t end there. So I’m happy to announce some good news. This booklet is only one in a series of four, and I hope this has served to whet your appetite to continue this journey through the book of Ephesians. We are going to wrap up our time together and approach this lesson by solidifying the truths we have learned in our hearts.

Did you know that according to the International Orality Network about 80% of the world’s population are oral learners? Roughly 5.7 billion people either can’t read or write, or they have no written language (2016). So how do you share the gospel with them so that they can understand? Obviously, you can’t just give them Bibles. You communicate with them the way Jesus did by using stories.

**The Gospel of The Three Crosses**

One of my favorite gospel messages is the narrative that took place when Christ was crucified on the center cross in between two thieves. The message originated from one of Brother Herb Hodges’ lessons. But this is my adaptation of this treasured story, and every time I revisit it, the Lord opens my eyes to truths not previously discovered.

By way of introduction to this message, I would like to tell you about my third mission trip to Nicaragua. In many ways, it was by far the most difficult trip I have been on. We arrived in Bluefield, Nicaragua, only to miss a small boat that was to take us to the village of Pearl Lagoon. From that moment on, it was one spiritual battle after another. We arrived in Pearl lagoon in the middle of the night in pitch darkness. We had no electricity, no lights and no water. I spent the first night unable to breathe because of the heat and afraid to unlock the door to get air. So I prayed the scriptures all night long. By day number two, knowing that food does not keep when there is no power, I decided it was a good time to add fasting to my praying.

The first two trips were relatively uneventful; therefore, I was not prepared for all the difficulties we would face. Sometimes the attacks of the enemy are more covert, yet other times, there is no doubt of his frontal assault. This was one of those times. Even so, after this long night of prayer, I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in my great weakness as we got to share “The Gospel of the Three Crosses” in each school in two villages. After that, I had the opportunity to teach the women from some of the churches the Biblical model of discipleship. Their hearts seemed very open and receptive to the Word of God. However, these were only the first two days of our trip. Then we traveled by small boat and small plane, and, finally, we reached Corn Island, Nicaragua.

**Spare Coffins**

Once on the Island, we were greeted by yet another power outage! I had planned to meet and teach the ladies while our youth pastor taught the young people. Monday through Thursday was my time with the ladies. On each of these days, someone died, and a funeral was held on the same day. On Monday, my plan to meet with the ladies was canceled due to the first funeral. But, God had another plan. After the funeral, a faithful disciple named Gwen rode up on her motorcycle and asked if I would like to come speak on her new radio station. I asked Doug, our youth pastor, if he wanted to go and speak, but he declined. I was wearing a dress and discovered you cannot ride a motorcycle side-saddle! I was smiling the whole time at the thought of this unexpected opportunity, and myself, in a dress, on a motorcycle! I must admit, it was fun. This was the second motorcycle ride of my life. (My Daddy took me on the first ride.) While on the slow ride around the island, Gwen told me how she had been traveling all over looking for opportunities to share the gospel since our first trip. The radio station was next to her house, and when she went inside to change shoes, I stepped outside to pray because my nerves were getting the best of me. I asked the Lord to calm me and help me to boldly proclaim the gospel. Between Gwen’s house and the station was her husband’s workshop, and out in front was a small coffin. Gwen said it was the spare coffin, and he had provided the one for the funeral she had just attended. I do not know how many spares he had, but three more would be needed before we left the island on Friday.

When it was time to speak on the radio, I was extremely nervous and shaking—so was my voice. To make matters worse, our team was in the mission house listening to the program and critiquing me. They said I got really loud when I quoted Jesus’ words from Luke 13:1-5: “UNLESS YOU REPENT YOU ALL WILL PERISH.” I was so loud, in fact, one of our team members said, “There has just been a mass exodus to Little Corn Island!” What he and I did not know was that the program was reaching Little Corn Island too. The good news proclaimed through the airwaves that day was Gospel of the Three Crosses.

On the morning of our last full day on the island, just as we were starting a lesson, we received some terrible news. A 26-year-old man had been violently murdered and mutilated.  Regrettably, we had walked passed this young man every day but never shared the gospel with him. We could not possibly know that would be his last moments before eternity began.  My hope is that this man somehow heard the message on the radio before it was too late.

My last ministry to the women on the island was to go with them to this young man’s funeral. Alba, the pastor’s wife, had to leave to find clothes in which to bury the young man.  She was so upset that she could not even make it to the funeral. The scene was surreal. We stood in the yard of this young man’s home only five hours after his death. His poor mother looked as if she was in complete shock. The “spare coffin” that held him was placed on an old, iron bed frame. I doubt she heard a word Eli said. We sang a few hymns, and Eli spoke a warning to all who would hear. In his Creole accent, he said the angel of death is moving all over the island, and he gave a call to come to Jesus now before it was too late. What had this young man done that he died such a violent death? The same kind of question was posed to Jesus—I implore you to listen carefully to His response.

**Luke 13:1-5 (NET)**

***Nowthere were some present on that occasion who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He answered them, “Do you think these Galileans were worse sinnersthan all the other Galileans, because they suffered these things?***  ***No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! Or those eighteen who were killedwhen the tower in Siloam fell on them,do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repentyou will all perish as well!”***

Please hear the words of the Lord Jesus: “UNLESS *YOU* REPENT *YOU* WILL *ALL* PERISH.” It does not matter if you attend church weekly, prayed a thousand prayers, or have been a good, moral, upstanding citizen. It does not matter if, like me, you have experienced baptism twice. Unless you repent—what did Jesus say would happen to you? It is not a suggestion; it is a command. And it’s also a requirement of salvation. Now, let’s look at Luke’s account of the passion of Christ and see if we can distinguish between the two thieves on either side of the cross of Christ.

**The Cross of Rebellion**

**Luke 23:32-39 (NET)**

***Two other criminals were also led away to be executed with him. Sowhen they came to the place that is called “The Skull,”they crucifiedhim there, along with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [But Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”] Then they threw diceto divide his clothes. The people also stood there watching, but the rulers ridiculedhim, saying, “He saved others. Let him savehimself ifhe is the Christof God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “Ifyou are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscriptionover him, “This is the king of the Jews.” One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at him, saying, “Aren’tyou the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

We know that the cross in the middle was prepared for a murderer. The murderer was set free, and in his place was the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. One day, God will put His sheep on the right, and the goats on his left (Matthew 25:32-34). The One on the center cross divides the two.

The man on the left of the cross of Christ represents the goats, all the once born, unbelieving, unrepentant sinners whose destiny is hell. This man had sin in him and sin on him (Romans 3:9, 23, 5:12, 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-5). He was blind in his unbelief to the gospel on display on the cross in the middle (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Jesus said in John 8:24-28, “Unless you believe I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins.” The man to the left of the Son of Man was condemned to eternal death already for his unbelief. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). This man had no fear of God. Oh, he wanted to be saved but not from his sins. He wanted to be saved from the painful consequence of his sin. His present suffering was nothing compared to the undiluted wrath of God he was about to experience in hell (Luke 12:4-5).

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

***For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death.***

The man on the cross of rebellion had to walk all over the One in the middle to enter hell in spite of the following incredible facts. Number one: The God who hung in the middle did not come to condemn him, but to save him. He did not desire that he perish, but for him to come to repentance.

**Romans 2:4-5 (NET)**

***Or do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, and yet do not knowthat God’s kindness leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornnessand your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed!***

Number two: The cross in the center is a perfect display of two attributes of God -- His Holiness and His Love. When we look at the one who hung naked between the two sinners, we see a God who is holy—so holy that He must punish sin. Greater love has no one than this: that he would lay down His life, not for his friends, but his enemies. Number three: Hanging just to the right of this ungodly man on the cross of rebellion was the Lord Jesus with his arms open wide. These words of the prophet Isaiah come to mind when I envision this horrific sight: “All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.” And again, “Indeed, the LORD’s hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear. But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made him hide his face from you so that he does not listen” (Isaiah 65:2). This sinner had worldly sorrow, not true repentance. Today, he is separated from God in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth called hell.

**Luke 13:23-29 (NET)**

***Someoneaskedhim, “Lord, will only a fewbe saved?” Sohe said to them, “Exert every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Oncethe head of the housegets upand shuts the door, then you will stand outside and start to knock on the door and beg him, ‘Lord,let us in!’ But he will answer you,‘I don’t know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ Buthe will reply,‘I don’t know where you come from! Go away from me, all you evildoers!’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teethwhen you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,and all the prophets in the kingdom of Godbut you yourselves thrown out. Thenpeoplewill come from east and west, and from north and south, and take their places at the banquet tablein the kingdom of God.***

**The Cross of Repentance**

**Luke 23:40-43 (NET)**

***But the other rebuked him, saying, “Don’tyou fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we rightly so, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did, but this man has done nothingwrong.” Thenhe said, “Jesus, remember mewhen you come in your kingdom.” And Jesussaid to him, “I tell you the truth, todayyou will be with me in paradise.”***

Now let’s look at the sheep on the right hand of God incarnate. He was born in sin, as all of us were, and when he was placed on his cross, he was separated from God in his sins. Not only that, but he started out on this cross just like the criminal on the left. But God had mercy on this man. He had sin in him, but in the end, he had no sin on him. Because all his sins were placed on the God-man in the middle. This man is alive today in heaven with the risen King. He had a second birth on the cross of repentance. One moment he was cursing God, just as the other thief, and the next moment he was a preacher (Matthew 27:44). What happened?

**All Things New**

**2 Corinthians 5:17-19 (NET)**

***So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away– look, what is newhas come! And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation.***  ***In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people’s trespasses against them, and he has given usthe message of reconciliation.***

Most likely, his eyes were opened, and his faith came by hearing Jesus pray these words on his behalf, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” This man was led by the lovingkindness of God to godly sorrow and true repentance. His transformation was instantaneous. One moment he was dead in sin, and the next he was alive in Christ. He changed from an unbelieving criminal, cursing God, into a preacher. Even though he was a new believer, he didn’t waste a precious moment, he became a messenger of reconciliation. He preached his first sermon to the other thief. He said, “Don’t you fear God?” He was trying to get the other one to look at the God on the cross in the middle.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 (NET)**

***God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.***

When this man saw the holiness and perfection of the Lord Jesus, he saw his own sins. He said, “We deserve everything we are suffering, but He has done nothing wrong.” He confessed Jesus as Lord and King, and He believed in Jesus’ resurrection from the grave when he said, “Remember me *when* you enter your kingdom!” And lastly, he called on the only one who had the power to save him. “There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:12).

This man is eternally alive because Jesus rose from the grave. By grace through faith, he took hold of the outstretched hand of the One in the middle and rode a cross into heaven: the cross of Christ Jesus. It just struck me afresh that on that very day the Good Shepherd put his *found sheep* on his shoulders and carried him straight home to heaven and into a party! Remember, all of heaven breaks into joyful celebration over one sinner who repents. He is saved and home with the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

**The Center Cross of Redemption**

**1 Peter 1:18-21 (NET)**

***You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed – not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was manifested in these last times for your sake. Through him you now trustin God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.***

Now let’s turn the spotlight on the center cross. The Son of God was wearing all the shame, guilt and sin of the world. He, who knew no sin, became our sin, and at that moment His Father had to look away from His Son because His eyes are too holy to look on sin. Jesus bore the undiluted wrath of God in my place and in yours. Jesus had no sin in Him, but He had all sins on Him. As He hung suffering and separated from His Father who loved Him, He experienced the emptiness and loneliness that each of us is born into as sinners far away from God. The door to the kingdom of heaven was open to sinners by God on the center cross.

**Acts 20:20-21 (NET)**

***You know that I did not hold back from proclaiming to you anything that would be helpful, and from teaching you publiclyand from house to house, testifyingto both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.***

The gospel has the power to save anyone who repents and puts his faith in the One on whom God put his sins, the *LORD JESUS CHRIST*! The cross of Redemption is the greatest dividing force of all of history. And yet, it’s also the greatest reconciler for those who will believe in the God-man who was on the cross in the middle.

**Excuses! Excuses!**

We use all sorts of excuses for not sharing the gospel. I’ll elaborate on a few. Many people, myself included, have erroneously believed that this was the job of pastors, evangelists and theologically trained professionals. The extent to which we believe this lie determines what we do with the gospel. When we do nothing with it, we are like the slothful servant in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Furthermore, you can be assured that the notion that only “professionals” are to take the gospel to the world did not originate with God. It originated in the heart of the devil! There are no professionals in the kingdom of God—only born again saints. To drive home this point, look at the credentials of Jesus’ first disciples, Peter and John. In Acts 4:13 it said they were “ignorant and untrained men,” but they were recognized as having been with Jesus. I encourage you to stop and read the account that took place before Paul’s conversion and make note of who was going everywhere preaching the Word of God (Acts 8:1-5).

* Paul said in Romans 1:16 that he was not ashamed of the gospel. Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What do you think it means to be ashamed of the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Ephesians 3:1-2 (NET)**

***For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeedyou have heard of the stewardshipof God’s grace that was given to me for you.***

For those of us who, like Paul, realize our personal responsibility and stewardship of the gospel, it’s imperative that we understand a few things. First of all, we don’t save anyone; salvation belongs to God alone. We must not be mistaken about our role. Second, we don’t have a clue who will be saved and who will not. That’s the Lord’s business—not ours. And while Jesus declared in Matthew 7 that *many* will *not* be saved, this does not negate the fact that He desires for all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. How do we know that? We don’t want to be found guilty of putting words in God’s mouth; let’s see what is written.

* Take each of the following passages and beside each one make note of what the will of the Lord is as it concerns the souls of all mankind.
* Titus 2:11 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* 1 Timothy 2:4\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* 2 Timothy 2:24-26 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* 2 Peter 3:9 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Ezekiel 18:23\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Now, I may not be a theologian, but it does not take a rocket scientist to understand the words *all* and *every*! Clearly, God desires that all people hear the gospel! We know many will hear, yet few will heed the gospel. So, you may ask, “Why is it important for people to hear it if they are going to reject it anyway?” Because those who reject it will one day stand at the Great White throne of Judgment and be reminded that, although they refused the message, God gave them a chance to hear it.

Now, a word of encouragement for those of you who are by nature a bit timid. If just the thought of trying to share the gospel causes you to have an anxiety attack, then please take heart. You can find comfort in the fact that even Paul ends the letter to the saints at Ephesus by asking the saints to pray for him to have boldness in proclaiming the gospel.

**Ephesians 6:19-20 (NET)**

***Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak – that I may confidently make knownthe 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.***

Now, if Paul needed prayers for boldness, don’t you think we do also? The lesson here is this: No matter who we are, or what our social bent, sharing the gospel is not something that comes naturally. That’s why when Jesus called His first disciples, He said, “Come follow Me and I will *make* you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). The emphasis is on the word *make*, or we could say “turn you into” fishers of men. Sharing the gospel is a work of the Holy Spirit. To cooperate with Him, we need the encouragement and instruction of others who have mastered the craft of fishing for men. Why do you think the Lord Jesus sent the seventy out in pairs of two (Luke 10:1-16)?

The best tool I have ever found to share the gospel with is a little book by Charles Brock called *The Good News For You*. Not only is it available in many languages, but it cost only $1.00! It is widely used all over the world for evangelistic Bible studies and as a gift to hand out everywhere you go. You can order it at [www.churchgrowthinternational.com](http://www.churchgrowthinternational.com). Or contact them at [www.cpqa.org](http://www.cpqa.org). Additionally, in case you haven’t noticed already, this study itself is laid out in such a way that you can use it to share the gospel. (I told you that there is a method to my madness.) So, all you need to do is ask someone if they would like to do this study with you. It’s that simple!

And finally, here are some questions for personal reflection. Is Jesus the unequaled treasure of your life? Are you sharing Him with others? As a recipient of the gospel, God has made you a steward of it, and He expects a return on what He has invested in you.

These questions are not meant to evoke feelings of guilt or conviction. They are, instead, an admonition to contemplate your responsibility and the privilege of being a co-worker with God. God saved you and me for a purpose. That purpose, in part, is to share the good news. Perhaps you feel disqualified. Have you been reconciled to God in Christ? If you have, you are qualified. In fact, you have been given this ministry. You are commissioned, appointed and commanded to share the gospel. Don’t worry about failure. Obedience, motivated by love, is all the Lord asks of us. As someone has said, “We weren’t saved just to smuggle our souls into the Kingdom of heaven.” My friend, now that you have received the gospel, what will you do with it?

What if the mansion Jesus is preparing for His bride is only as big as the souls you bring with you? If we hoard the gospel, we may get there to find that our mansion is the size of a coat closet!

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

1. The Lord Jesus gave the apostle John a glimpse of the church: His bride. What does heaven look like, and what role will you personally play in this scene (Revelation 5:9-10)?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Are we responsible for anyone’s salvation (Acts 2:39-41; Revelation 7:9-12? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Why do you think Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you have to leave your own country to reach other ethnic people groups? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Would you like to learn how to live the lifestyle of an evangelist? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Let’s discuss practical application to this lesson. List some ways that you can share the gospel here. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Think of a person that you know who is effective in sharing the gospel. Would you be willing to ask them if you can join them so you can learn? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think on These Things

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

**Memory Verses**

**Ephesians 6:19-20 (NET)**

***Pray******for******me******also,******that******Imay 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.***

**Afterthoughts**

Congratulations! You have just taken the first of five steps toward spiritual growth. I want to say a heartfelt thank you for joining me through this gospel study. For the gospel is the bedrock of our faith, and so it’s the starting place. Whether you have solidified your conversion, or better yet, had a “but God’ kind of experience, we have only just begun. We haven’t even gotten to the Profound Mystery yet!

My prayer is that you have developed some close bonds with a few other women, learned a lot about yourself and, most importantly, you have achieved our primary goal of growing in the knowledge of the Lord. One thing is for certain, life is all about changing, and the Lord refuses to allow us to become stagnant. Remember, we are in preparation for the wedding to end all weddings! There is so much more to do as the wedding approaches. That is what discipling is about.

Some of us have an entire lifetime of issues that need addressing from a Biblical worldview. We have four more steps to go in this discipling process. I can hardly wait to share with you our new identity in Christ. And then we will get better acquainted with our Father in Heaven, the Lord Jesus—our Bridegroom, and last but not least, we will learn more about our Helper—the Holy Spirit. I think you will find an enormous amount of soul healing truth here. So gather your friends together and be prepared to be blessed as we uncover the divine mystery of Christ and His bride, the church.

It matters not if you are the person in the group who is being discipled or the one who fills the role of a group leader, please don’t stop here! We learn from each other, and the whole strategy falls apart if you don’t have these kinds of spiritual relationships.

As we end our time together, I sincerely hope you will accept my invitation to continue this journey through the book of Ephesians. Until we meet again, I leave you with Paul’s parting benediction to the saints at Ephesus:

**Acts 20:32 (NET)**

***And now I entrustyou to God and to the messageof his grace. This messagecan build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.***

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**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, Art and I have now been married for over 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, so far, He has given us three 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).

**Endorsements**

This is a Bible study of colossal scope that will deepen your walk with God and enhance your Christian growth.  It caused me to think and ask myself if I am producing fruit for God. Is there evidence that I am a Christian?  It brought me to the realization that, yes, I want to see more people saved and that I am not satisfied with the status quo.  The study depicts Paul as an apostle that never got over the miracle of being saved by Jesus and reminds us that neither should we. I pray that you will not only read this study, but use it to examine your heart, as I did. This workbook sparked a hunger for God’s Word in me, and I believe that it will for you too.  It was an honor for our ladies at Dover First Baptist Church to do this Bible study and to grow in God’s grace.

Nellie Anderson, Discipleship Training Leader—First Baptist Church Dover, Dover, Tennessee

*A* *Profound Mystery: Spiritual Matchmaking* is a study that I believe all women can relate to. Every little girl has dreams of her wedding and her future bridegroom. This study shows each of us that our ultimate bridegroom is Christ. Although the overarching themes and images are of the mystical union between Christ and his bride, the church, there is a lot of practical knowledge here too—like the nuts and bolts of a truly spiritual, earthly marriage when you have Christ as your Savior. In each section, you will see how Christ is leading you into a deep personal relationship with Him and preparing you for the one marriage that will last throughout eternity.

Denise Miller, Women’s Ministry—First Baptist Church Dover, Dover, Tennessee