

Brain Gugas

BIBLE GUIDE & WORKBOOK

STUDY & UNDERSTAND BOOK
BY BOOK



Bible Workbook and Guide Study and Understand Book by Book

Brian Gugas

[>>>BRIAN GUGAS AUTHOR PAGE..lists all my books](#)

Kindle Edition

Copyright 2020 Brian Gugas. All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Disclaimer: Disclaimer: This book contains general information that is based on author's own knowledge and experiences. It is published for general reference purposes only. The publisher and the author disclaim any personal liability, either directly or indirectly, for the information contained within. Although the author and the publisher have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information contained within, we assume no responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions and inconsistencies.

This book is Dedicated
To my parents

Bible Study Guide for Beginners .. Gives an Overview of all 66 Books of Bible

**[Bible Study Guide for Beginners: Each of the 66 Books Explained for
Getting Started](#)**

*All 66 books of the Bible are covered in detail, including: Author of each
book and the time frame in which it was written - Key themes for each book -
Summary of the message in each book*

Study Guide Series for each of the 66 Books

Book1 - The Book of Genesis

[Study Guide The Book of Genesis: Understanding God's Word](#)

The book of GENESIS is a book of beginnings-the beginning of the universe, the beginning of sin, the beginning of the need for God's mercy and forgiveness

Book2 - The Book of Exodus

[Study Guide The Book of EXODUS: Understanding God's Word](#)

The book of EXODUS is a story of how one man led his people out slavery and out of Egypt. That man was Moses

Book3 - The Book of Leviticus

[Study Guide The Book of Leviticus: Understanding God's Word](#)

The book of LEVITICUS provides readers with an in-depth look into the basics of the Mosaic Law in a way that is easily understood by anyone and everyone.

Brian Gugas How to Books

[How to Study the Bible for Beginners: Study Guide on How and Where to Start Learning the Bible](#)

Quick and easy guide for those who are grappling with how and where to start the Study of The Bible

[How to Memorize Bible Scriptures and Verses: Quickly and Easily](#)

Approaches and methods to memorize The Bible Scriptures and Verses

Study Lessons, Workbooks, Prayers and Journals

Bible Study Lessons Women of The Bible: What we Can Learn from the Women of The Bible

Bible Study Lessons from the Women of the Bible

Bible Study for Women: Guide and Workbook

A simple and easy to understand guide and workbook for Bible Study for Women

Thirty Quick Bible Studies That Will Change Your Life: For The Better

Each of the thirty studies contains scripture, a Biblical example of the subject matter, a more modern day example, and suggestions for applying what youâ€™ve read to your life.

40 Prayers from Bible for Believing in Yourself

40 days and 40 prayers will help you connect with God and give you strength to believe in yourself.

Marriage Prayers: Prayers and Encouragement for Every Married Couple

This book focuses on combining the examples of marriage we have in the Bible with passages of scripture that provides instruction on how to do marriage right.

52 Week Gratitude Journal

[The Gratitude Journal: Simple 2 Minutes of Daily Journaling, Weekly Prompts & Monthly Inspirations](#)

This Gratitude Journal will help you establish the habit of giving thanks. By spending a few minutes each day writing down a few of the reasons you have to be thankful, you will find yourself viewing life through a more positive lens, growing closer to God, the giver of all things, and making the world around you a more pleasant place to live.

Table of Contents

[Your Free Gift](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[The Book Of Genesis](#)

[The Book of Exodus-Part One](#)

[The Book of Exodus-Part Two](#)

[The Book of Exodus-Part Three](#)

[The Book Of Leviticus](#)

[The Book Of Numbers-Part One](#)

[The Book Of Numbers-Part Two](#)

[The Book Of Deuteronomy](#)

[The Book Of Joshua](#)

[The Book Of Judges](#)

[The Book Of Ruth](#)

[The Book Of 1st Samuel](#)

[The Book Of 2nd Samuel](#)

[The Book Of 1st Kings and 2nd Kings](#)

[The Book Of 1st Chronicles and 2nd Chronicles](#)

[The Book Of Ezra and Nehemiah](#)

The Book Of Esther

The Book Of Job

The Book Of Psalm

The Book Of Proverbs

The Book Of Ecclesiastes

The Book Of Songs Of Songs

The Book Of Isaiah

The Book Of Jeremiah and Lamentation

The Book Of Ezekiel

The Book Of Daniel

The Book Of Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah

The Book Of Jonah

The Book Of Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

The Book Of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

The Book Of Matthew

The Book Of Mark

The Book Of Luke

The Book Of John

The Book of Acts

The Book Of Romans

The Book Of 1st and 2nd Corinthians

The Book Of Galatians

The Book Of Ephesians

The Book Of Philippians

The Book Of Colossians

The Book Of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians

The Book Of 1st and 2nd Timothy

The Book Of Titus and Philemon

The Book Of Hebrews

The Book Of James

The Book Of 1st Peter and 2nd Peter

The Book Of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John

The Book Of Jude

The Book Of Revelation

Your Free Gift

Thanks for reading my book and as a way of saying Thank You I have this free gift for you.

In Bible Verses and Inspirational Christian Quotes Book , you will have quotes and explanations some very important aspects of our life i.e Friendship, Life, Peace, Motivation, Salvation and many more...

>>> Tap here to get Your Free Book : Bible Verses and Quotes

<http://faithhopefaith.com/Free-Gift>

Introduction

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. ~Psalm 119:105 NIV

The Bible was written over a period of nearly 1,500 years by 40 people. The earliest books were written by Moses over a period of about 40 years, spanning from (approx.) 1450 BC to 1410 BC (before the birth of Christ (Jesus)). The last book of the Bible, which is Revelation, was written around 100 AD (after the death and resurrection of Christ).

Despite the timespan of thirteen centuries, not one single word in the Bible contradicts another. In other words, the prophecies and historical accounts in the earliest books of the Bible are references and fulfilled hundreds of years later.

The Bible's truth and relevancy cannot be discredited. Despite countless efforts in the past as well as here and now in the present, not one word can be irrefutably disproved. It should also be noted that often times, those who set out to disprove the Bible's contents are so deeply moved and convicted that they give their lives to Jesus and are saved.

The Bible is as true as it gets. It is our guidebook for life. It is the proof of how and why we exist. It is a book of promises that cannot and will not be broken. Moses said it best in Deuteronomy 32:47 when he said this about God's Word: "...they are not idle words—they are your life." (NIV)

This workbook is meant to be used in conjunction with the other book by me which is the Bible Study Guide for Beginners where in I have explained all the 66 books. Most lessons focus on a single book of the Bible, while others encompass two or three books; depending on the length of the book itself and its content. A few books will even require two lessons in order to cover everything that needs to be covered. For example, the OT book of Isaiah will be broken down into two lessons, as will the book of Psalm, while Joel,

Obadiah, and Nahum will be grouped into one lesson.

Each lesson opens with a brief overview of the book(s) you will be studying. From there, you will be searching the scriptures themselves to find answers to questions about the book's content and what God intends for us to learn from it. You will then be asked to answer questions and participate in discussions on applying what you read and learn to your everyday life—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Last, but definitely not least, you will be challenged to actually do something with what you learn to deepen your relationship with the LORD. One of these challenges will always be that of memorizing a verse or two from the book you are studying. Each of these verses will be applicable to your life and when memorized, will be a huge source of comfort and encouragement in all sorts of situations.

The lessons are designed to teach you to look more deeply into God's Word for yourself rather than relying on the preacher or teacher to do all the work for you. Don't let this scare you. It's not difficult. It is a simple act of obedience to the scriptures themselves (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

The Book Of Genesis

The book of Genesis covers a span of nearly 2,400 years. That's a lot of time; time chock-full of history—*important* history. The events recorded in the book of Genesis are the foundation on which we stand.

The key events in Genesis are as follows:

Key events in Genesis:

- The creation of the universe
- The creation of man (Adam and Eve)
- Eve tempted by Satan
- Adam and Eve sin and are removed from the Garden of Eden
- The first murder
- God's broken-heartedness over the sinfulness of mankind
- The building of the ark by Noah and the flood
- The lineage of Noah's sons
- God scatters the people over the earth
- God calls Abraham to be the father of the Israelite nation
- The account of Isaac
- Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau
- Jacob becomes the father of the 12 tribes of Israel
- The account of Joseph and why the tribes of Israel end up in Egypt

Each is intricately woven together as part of God's big plan, and each one is a piece of the history of mankind. They are part of *our* family history as brothers and sisters in Christ and God's chosen children.

Creation of the universe

Chapter one of the book of Genesis provides a day by day account of how God created the universe. From speaking light into existence on day one to the creation of all the wild animals, livestock, and creatures that move along the ground on day six, God created it all.

READ Genesis 1:1-25.

1. Based on the understanding that everything God does has distinct and definite purpose, why do you think he created things in the order that he did?
2. What details about creation stand out to you and why?

READ Genesis 1:26-31.

1. What do we learn about the human race by reading these six verses?
2. What do you learn about the character of God from reading Genesis 1?

Creation of mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve

1. On what day of creation did God create man?
2. Why did God create man, i.e. humans?

READ Genesis 2.

Genesis 2 gives us the rest of the story. It is God's explanation of how and why he created Adam and Eve and the account of their earliest days (or weeks, months, and years) together.

In much the same way as he put humans on a higher level of importance than animals, God feels some animals are more acceptable or important to others. Cattle and sheep, for example are acceptable sacrifices later on when he establishes the Law of Moses whereas pigs are always considered unclean and animals like bears and fish were never considered 'sacrifice worthy'.

As you look at the events of creation; knowing what we now know about things like the water cycle, the food chain, the lunar cycle, etc., how can anyone doubt the all-knowing, holy nature of God and his perfect, infallible

ability to create everything to be just as it should be!

Day six was a big day for God. He not only created all the animals, but he created Adam and then Eve, too.

In creating Adam and Eve we are first introduced to the fact that God was not alone—that Jesus was with him: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule....” (Genesis 1:26a).

Immediately following the announcement of creating man, God tells us that he created them to rule over and to populate the earth. But that is not the only reason God created us. God tells us in Isaiah 43:7 that God created us to praise and glorify him. Revelation 4:11 tells us that God created all things for his pleasure. God wanted us. He needed to share the immeasurable amount of love he has with someone...millions of someones. Including you.

Eve tempted by Satan, Adam and Eve sin, and are removed from the Garden of Eden

READ Genesis 3.

Chapter 3 brings all the wonder and beauty of God’s perfect world to a screeching halt when Satan tempts Eve to disobey God and sin enters the world forever.

God gave Adam and Eve explicit instructions for living in the garden, as well as after he removed them from the garden. His instructions reveal a great deal of his character, *as well as* his expectations for ours.

What do we learn about God’s character in chapter 3?

What do we learn about God's expectations for us in chapter 3?

There are, however, a lot of things God doesn't tell us. For example, after God's statement about resting on the seventh day, we aren't given any timeline as to how long Adam and Eve lived in the garden before Eve allowed herself to be tempted by Satan; causing God to put them out of Eden. Sometimes it is the things God doesn't tell us that we choose to spend the most time thinking about. We let what we don't know about God become more important to us than what we do know.

Why do you think there are things God chooses not to tell us?

Let's take a look at a few of the things God doesn't spell out for us and some possible reasons as to why he chose not to?

Why do think no time frame is given?

Why did God put the tree in the garden if he didn't want Adam and Eve to bother it?

If God didn't want sin, then why did he let Satan into the garden?

Why was no timeframe given? Time is not an issue for God. It is only an issue for us. God is. He has always been, is, and always will be. Time has no relevance to God.

As for the tree and Satan's presence in the garden, God needed and wanted Adam to *choose* to honor him. In God's heart, it's always been about man desiring to love him...to honor and obey him. He wanted and needed to know that Adam and Eve could be counted on to make right decisions. Unfortunately, they didn't.

Yet God knew Adam and Eve would sin. His all-knowing nature wouldn't allow him not to. But he had to let them choose. While Adam and Eve's sin definitely caused a chasm between man and God, it did not keep them *from* God. God's willingness and ability to bring healing, forgiveness, and restoration ultimately makes Satan the loser. And that is what Jesus' death and the final judgement are all about—defeating Satan.

The first murder

Adam and Eve obey God's command to reproduce several times over. Their oldest two sons, Cain and Abel are grown men making their own living in chapter four of Genesis when the trouble breaks out.

Cain is jealous of Abel's sacrifice to God. He is jealous because God is more pleased with Abel's gift. Jealousy leads to resentment. Resentment leads to anger and hatred. Hatred then leads to murder. The moral of this story: sin, when left unattended, quickly gets out of control.

God's broken-heartedness over the sinfulness of mankind, the building of the ark by Noah, and the flood

Adam and Eve had several other children in addition to Cain and Abel. One of those children was a son named Seth. Nine generations later Noah was born to Lamech.

In this relatively short amount of time the human race had chosen sin over

God. Everyone, the Bibles says, but Noah. Genesis 6:5-6 tells us that in God's mind only Noah was worth saving. But God needed a way to repopulate the earth, so along with Noah and Mrs. Noah, God saved their three sons (the only children they had before or after the flood)—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives.

Following the flood God instructs Noah's sons and their wives to repopulate the earth. This is something that took place over time. God didn't whoosh more people into existence to help things along, as some believe. We know this for a fact in reading Genesis 9:18-19 which says, *"The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth."* (NIV)

The lineage of Noah's sons

READ Genesis 10.

Chapter ten of the book of Genesis gives us a listing or table of nations. In reading through the list you can see the names of the people groups who eventually led to Jacob (Israel) as well as those who later stand in opposition to Israel.

For example, the sinful people of Nineveh, who Jonah was sent to minister to, come from Ham's son, Cush, as are the Canaanites. Shem was the father of Arphaxad, who had a son who had a son who had a son.... Nine generations after Arphaxad, Abram, who later was renamed Abraham, was born.

God scatters the people over the earth

Just like Satan had aspirations of being God's equal, the people on earth decided they might possibly do the same. To prevent this from happening, God and Jesus (note the word 'us' in Genesis 11:7) came to earth and 'confused' their language (created different languages) and scattered people across the world.

READ Genesis 12:1-9 and chapter 13

God calls Abraham to be the father of the Israelite nation and the account of Isaac

Prior to God calling Abram to be the father of the Israelite nation, we have no insight into whether or not Abram had a relationship with God. We assume he did because of his willingness to obey—to leave his aging father, the only home he'd ever known, and everything else that was familiar to him. But this is another one of those things we don't know for sure.

If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, what was your situation before you realized your need for salvation?

What obstacles did Abram face by obeying God?

What does this tell you about your own relationship with God?

The story of Abram/Abraham's travels and the events leading up to the birth of Isaac, the son God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah in their very old age, is filled with unusual incidents and experiences. Among these

experiences is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their horrendous behavior. Rape, homosexuality, greed, lust, and disrespect for life in general...these are among the things God finds despicable and issued a death sentence for.

One of the two he most relevant experiences to us today, though, is the birth of Ishmael, who is Abraham's son born to him by his wife's maid, Hagar.

READ Genesis 16

Who was the root of the problem?

Write down as many adjectives as you can think of to describe the repercussions of Sarah's actions.

What does this incident tell you about God's holiness and the fact that his plan will come to pass despite our disobedience and lack of faith?

Ishmael and his descendants are the people we know as Egyptians and Assyrians, Iraqis, Iranians, and other Middle East nationalities. The Bible tells us that Ishmael's people will forever be at war with those outside of them or not like them (Genesis 16:12).

Do you see the snowball effect of Sarah and Hagar's actions and decisions?

What does this tell you about our decisions and actions?

READ Genesis 21:1-13; 22:1-19

The other highly relevant event in Abraham's life was his expression of extreme faith—the day God told Abraham to take Isaac up on a mountain and sacrifice him. So, Abraham and Isaac started up the mountain; Abraham fully trusting God to provide a sacrifice in place of Isaac.

You would think Abraham's heart had to be pounding out of his chest with dread and grief because of what God had told him to do, but it wasn't—or at least it doesn't appear to be. When Isaac asks where the sacrifice is, Abraham tells the boy not to worry—that God will provide it for them in due time.

Why do you think Abraham was able to tell Isaac that God would provide a sacrificial lamb?

Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau

Ever the obedient son, Isaac goes back to the place of his parents' upbringing

so he can marry someone from their own people. He marries Rebekah—his cousin. Their marriage is filled with lies and deceptions of the worst kind. Rebekah has an extreme case of ‘playing favorites’ between her twin sons, Jacob and Esau—to the point of convincing Jacob to carry out a plot to deceive Isaac who is old and sick, into giving him the birthright that rightfully belongs to Esau.

READ Genesis 25:19-34 and chapter 27

What similarities do you see between Sarah and Rebekah?

What do Sarah and Rebekah’s actions teach you about your own faith and obedience?

Jacob becomes the father of the 12 tribes of Israel

God knew before Jacob and Esau were even conceived that it was Jacob he wanted as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. So no matter who or what tried to rearrange or reinvent God’s plan, God’s ultimate plan won out. It always does. It always will.

Jacob also returns to his roots—his mother’s family—to find a bride. He falls madly in love with Rachel, but because deception runs in the family, Jacob’s uncle Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Rachel’s older and matronly sister, Leah.

Let’s go back and take a look at Genesis 2:24. Nowhere does God mention

polygamy. Nowhere in the Bible does God ever encourage or even condone the practice of having more than one wife. But just like people disregard God's forbiddance of things like idol worship, greed, lying, and murder, they disregarded God's views on marriage.

In the end the twelve tribes of Israel come from Leah, her maid, Rachel's maid, and even Rachel. God blessed Jacob and Rachel's love by blessing them with two sons—Joseph and Benjamin. Sadly, however, she died giving birth to Benjamin, the last of Jacob's twelve sons.

You would think that after seeing what favoritism does to a family, Jacob would have done anything and everything in his power to make sure that didn't happen to his family. But no—Joseph and Benjamin are clearly Jacob's favorite sons...especially Joseph.

Why do you think history kept repeating itself?

In each of these situations, God's plan superseded the plans and disobedience of the people through whom he had chosen to work through. How might things have been different had these people (Sarah, Rebekah, Jacob, and Laban) obeyed God instead of following their own selfish hearts and minds?

READ Genesis chapters 37 thru 50

NOTE: I know 13 chapters sounds like a lot, i.e. too much, but this is one of the most amazing and intriguing accounts in the Bible. It is a real page-turner

and you don't want to miss a thing.

The account of Joseph and why the tribes of Israel end up in Egypt

The last thirteen chapters of Genesis tells one of the most beautiful and amazing life stories in the Bible. It is the account of Joseph's life.

The account of Joseph's life allows us to see Joseph grow from an overly-confident teenager to a slave in a strange and distant land, to a young man in authority, to a wrongly-convicted prisoner, to the ruler of all of Egypt. He was, in all reality, one of the most important and influential people in the world.

Do you think teenage Joseph knew his dreams were God-sent? Why or why not?

It has been said that God doesn't call the equipped, but rather he equips the called. How do you see this truth in the life of Joseph?

How might this be true in your own life? What might God want to accomplish through you?

Joseph's sphere of influence allowed him to be reunited with his brothers and his father; saving his father, brothers, and their families from starvation because of a major drought and famine in that area of the world.

The reunion between Joseph and his brothers was the second-most emotional event recorded in the Bible—the first being the death of Jesus on our behalf. More than the emotion it evokes, however, is the messages God sends to us through the life of Joseph.

The lessons God teaches us through the life and times of Joseph are authoritative and redemptive in nature.

How did Joseph and his family respond to each of the lessons God taught through Joseph?

- **As long as there is breath in our lungs there is hope for forgiveness and restoration between us and God.**
- **God's methods and means of accomplishing his plan won't always make sense to us, but if we have faith, we will always realize the blessings that come from trusting him.**
- **God will make something beautiful out of the worst situation if we let him.**

How have you, or how can you apply these lessons to your own life?

- **As long as there is breath in our lungs there is hope for forgiveness and restoration between us and God.**
- **God's methods and means of accomplishing his plan won't always make sense to us, but if we have faith, we will always realize the blessings that come from trusting him.**
- **God will make something beautiful out of the worst situation if we let him.**

Summing up Genesis

If we had to sum up the book of Genesis in five words or less, I think those words would be:

History-The book of Genesis tells us how and who we came from. No matter what our nationality, culture, or skin color, and no matter what continent we live on, we are all descended from Noah. This shared lineage makes everything that happens our history...our *family* history.

Not only is Genesis a family history of sorts, it is a perspective of world history not fully revealed in secular history books. But what you need to know is that there is secular archeological evidence, as well as evidence from ancient world histories that correspond to and validate the events recorded in Genesis.

Revealing-Genesis reveals:

- How the universe was created and the order in which it was created
- The beginning of the human race—created by God
- The reason God created man (to honor and praise God and to be his children)
- The fact that God gives us free choice to be his child
- How sin entered the world
- God's plan to deal with sin
- The character of God—holy, creative and imaginative, loving, jealous, justifiably demanding, authoritative, forgiving, purposeful
- God's amazing and immeasurable capacity to love
- The intricate wisdom and omnipotence of God—nothing is coincidental. Everything happens for a reason and everything he created is a unique masterpiece

Grace- Salvation and the gift of eternal life are the result of God's grace. It is grace that lets God forgive our disobedience and indifference to him. It is grace that caused God to formulate a plan that will allow us to be in his presence. Thank you, God.

Promise-Genesis is where we learn of God's promise of family. It is where we learn that what God says, he does. Always.

Holiness-Genesis reveals God's holiness. He is the one true God. He is Almighty. His will and his ways are perfect and cannot be stopped. Choosing to live outside of God's will for our life will not change God's ultimate plan. It only changes our role in that plan...and always in a way that is detrimental to us.

GENESIS—The beginning of knowledge, life, love, and hope for us all

All too often people discount the relevance and importance of the Old Testament to the Church. I was actually asked the following question by a woman who I thought was well-grounded in the faith and knowledgeable of the New Testament Christian Church: “Why, if we are a New Testament church, read from the Old Testament?”

This question really threw me. I was raised in the nondenominational Christian church—one that spent as much time in the Old Testament as the New. I was raised to view and embrace the Bible as one book with many parts that are fused together; each one giving validity and authenticity to the others. And quite honestly, I am beyond convinced that this is how God desires us to view his Word (2nd Timothy 3:16). For this reason, as we come to the end of each lesson I am going to challenge and encourage you to choose at least two of the following key verses and memorize them.

Don’t panic! You can do this. Think about how many songs you know by heart. Sports stats. Movie lines. Recipes. Okay, *now* do you believe me when I say you can memorize a few Bible verses.

Key verses in Genesis

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ~Genesis 1:1

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ~Genesis 2:24

Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years. ~Genesis 6:3

The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.” ~Genesis 6:5-6

These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth. ~Genesis 9:19

His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

~Genesis 37:11

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with ourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ~Genesis 45:4-5

“... “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”
~Genesis 15:1b

(To Hagar about Ishmael) “He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.” ~Genesis 16:12

The Book of Exodus-Part One

The book of Exodus could easily be described as a journal or diary of sorts. Written by Moses, the historical accounts recorded in Exodus covers a period of about 400 years—from the time the Egyptians force the Hebrews (Israelites) into slavery through the second year of the Exodus.

NOTE: The word exodus means ‘mass departure’ or ‘mass exit’, which is the perfect way to describe approximately one million people leaving somewhere all at the same time.

Key events in Exodus:

- Israelites become slaves to Egypt
- Moses’ birth and life in Egypt
- Moses runs away
- God speaks to Moses
- The plagues
- The Passover
- The exodus from Egypt
- The parting of the Red Sea
- God provides food and water for the Israelites
- God speaks to Moses on Mt. Sinai and gives him the Ten Commandments
- The building of the Tabernacle and establishment of the priesthood
- The construction of the Ark of the Covenant
- God leads Israel by a cloud

Because the book of Exodus contains so many details and historical accounts essential for a strong faith and relationship with God, and because it is packed with foreshadowing and symbolism of the ultimate plan of salvation through Jesus, three lessons have been devoted to what the book of Exodus has to say. This lesson (Part One) starts with the Israelites’ induction into slavery and ends with God’s instructions for making a fresh start (the Passover and leaving Egypt). Part Two will look closely at the Passover; the

details of the Seder meal and its symbolism and meaning to the Israelites who were there, and to you and me today. Part Three will cover the actual exodus out of Egypt and the main events that took place over the course of the Israelites' first two years in the desert.

As you work through the three lessons covering the book of Exodus, there are three messages that keep repeating themselves over and over again:

- There is nothing God cannot do.
- God's commands and what he expects of us are unwavering and purposeful—never random or unreasonable.
- The love God feels for us and demonstrates to us is immeasurable, incomprehensible, undeserved, and unending.

As we work through the book of Exodus, think about how these three messages are spoken and demonstrated throughout the book.

Israelites become slaves to Egypt

READ: 1:1-14

Why were the Hebrews made to be slaves?

The king's lack of knowledge combined with the fact that the vast number of Israelites now living there made him **uncomfortable**.

Write down some adjectives you think describe the uncomfortable feeling the Pharaoh felt towards the Hebrews?

What does this passage of scripture teach you about communication?

The fact that the new king was unaware of Joseph's contributions to the world, let alone Egypt, is troubling, but also somewhat ironic. It is troubling in the fact that in such a relatively short amount of time (three or four generations) something so important would not have been recorded or passed down. This is especially surprising with the Egyptians because they were so advanced in recording their history.

How good are you at passing on our family's history to your children and grandchildren?

What life-lessons and/or information that could be of value to their lives can you incorporate into these stories?

Take a minute to re-read Genesis 15:13. What is the unifying factor between this verse and the verses in Exodus 1 you just read?

What does this say to you about the consistency of the Bible?

READ Exodus 2:1-10

Birth of Moses

Approximately 350 years after the Egyptians started using the Israelites as slaves, God started preparing for their time of deliverance by way of a baby boy born to Amram and his wife, Jochebed. The baby's name was Moses.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever wondered what Moses' name was before Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses?

Moses was raised as an Egyptian but knew this was not his biological heritage. His love for his people led him to commit manslaughter against an Egyptian soldier. As a result of his unintentional crime, he ran away to the land of Midian where he worked as a shepherd, fell in love, got married, and had a family.

While Moses was able to run away from the judicial system of Egypt, he was not able to run away from God. God knew where Moses was the entire time. In fact, it would be fair to say that God orchestrated the events in Moses' life as a way to prepare him for the grueling task of leading a huge group of people through the desert.

God speaks to Moses and the plagues

READ: Exodus chapter 3 and 4:1-14

Chapters three through eleven of the book of Exodus provides us with the account of God's initial meeting with Moses by way of a burning bush all the way through the night of the tenth plague God brings down upon Egypt as punishment for Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelite's leave.

Moses' initial attitude toward God was not what you might expect from someone who had just heard God's voice speaking directly to him. And in spite of the fact that God tells us in the book of Numbers that Moses is the most humble man who has ever lived, Moses tells God "No"...more than once.

Why do you think Moses argued with God?

When have you been guilty of the same?

Why do you think God persisted? Why didn't he just choose someone else?

After God convinces Moses that he is the man for the job—that rescuing Israel from the bondage of slavery is his purpose in life—Moses returns to the land of his birth to do whatever God tells him to do.

What challenges did Moses face coming back to Egypt after 40 years?

The Bible doesn't give any indication that Moses had any contact with his biological family after running away from Egypt. What does this say about Aaron's character—the fact that he was so willing to partner with Moses?

Read Exodus chapters 4-10

NOTE: I know it sounds like a lot, but once again, it's a page turner and you can't *not* read it. It's is a major part of the revealing of God's plan.

What major change took place with the plagues beginning with the plague of the flies?

Why do you think God did this?

What are your thoughts on verses 9:12 and 10:20?

Okay, now that you've voice your opinions, thoughts, and questions, let's look at these verses say...literally. We'll use Exodus 9:12 because the words are the same in 10:20. The Hebrew words for **hardened** and **heart** are *vaychazzek* and *lev*. The translation for *vaychazzek* is "to make firm or strong", and for *lev*, it is "mind" In other words, Pharaoh dug his heels in against God's words of instructions. God's warnings and demands made Pharaoh angry, resentful, irate, and all those other you-can't-make-me-do-it words.

Take a minute to let that soak in so that you fully understand what happened...and what didn't happen. Contrary to what a lot of people think, God didn't zap Pharaoh with some sort of spell. Nor did God prevent Pharaoh from obeying by taking away his free choice. God's words disgruntled and infuriated Pharaoh *so much* that he closed his heart, ears, and mind; refusing to listen.

Here's an example you might be better able to relate to that will help you understand what actually happened: Lauren had her heart and mind set on becoming an elementary school art teacher. Her dad, however, insisted she take over the family business—so much so that he said he would withhold her college fund unless she agreed to take over the graphics arts and printing business he and his dad had worked so hard to make successful. The more he talked the harder Lauren's heart became. No zapping. No physical or supernatural forces. Her dad hardened her heart because she didn't want to hear or comply with what he had to say.

Does this explanation and example make it easier to understand? I hope so, because it is imperative that you understand that God isn't in the business of

preventing someone from coming to him. He would never say 'no' to someone wanting to be his child.

How does this explanation help you in understanding the scripture?

The tenth plague, which killed the first-born in every Egyptian household, was enough to put Pharaoh over the edge. His heart was hardened against God, but not toward his son. After losing his son and hearing the grievous wailing of his people, not only did he tell Moses to take the Israelites and get out of his land, he told them to take whatever they wanted to with them. He just wanted them out!

Do you think Pharaoh was acting out of belief and respect for God's obvious holiness and power, or from a feeling of defeat and fear? Explain.

Can you relate to this in any way? Has God ever used the trials and difficult situations in your life to get your attention? What happened? Did you respond obediently? What did you learn from these situations?

Read Exodus 12:1-30

God gave Moses a very specific set of instructions for a celebratory meal the Israelites were to eat on the evening before they left Egypt. The meal is called the Passover Meal and is still celebrated to this day by those of the Jewish faith.

In addition to the specifics of the meal—what it was to consist of, how it was to be prepared, and how it was to be eaten—God told Moses that the day he gave him these instructions was to be the first day of the first month of the Israelite’s year. The Passover was to be their new beginning. A fresh start to a new life in a new home. Starting over.

What does the term ‘passover’ mean to the Jewish celebration?

What is the new beginning of the first Passover meal a foreshadowing of?

What meal do Christians share that is in remembrance of this new beginning called salvation?

The Passover meal is called the *seder meal*. It is called the seder meal because the word ‘seder’ means order, and there is a very specific order and purpose for each and every detail of the seder meal eaten to celebrate the Passover.

Each dish of the Passover meal is symbolic of something having to do with the exodus from Egypt and the relationship between God and Israel and between God and us.

Over the past few years there has been a renewed interest among Christians in celebrating the Seder Meal during the Easter season. What are your thoughts on this? Explain.

In the next lesson we will be taking a closer look at the Seder Meal. I hope you will take the time to actually share a seder with your family and/or Bible study group. Let the experience bring you closer to the truth that God is the God of details and that his plan for us has been in place since the beginning of time; each generation and event intricately woven together in ways we miss, ignore, or overlook...but that God does not. Let the experience bring you closer to the reality of who Jesus is and what he did for you.

Summing up Exodus Part One

The book of Exodus begins with a simple, yet poignant statement declaring God's all-knowing nature. The Israelites would go from being respected and known as Joseph's extended family, to a large people group under a heavy weight of oppression and suffering. From there we see God revealing the part of his plan in which he sends a rescuer by the name of Moses.

In the eyes of the Israelites, Moses is an unlikely man for the job on several levels. For that matter, he is an unlikely man for the job in the eyes of Moses himself. Yet God persists and insists. His plans will prevail.

Throughout this lesson, which covers the first 12 chapters of the book, we see God's miraculous power displayed in numerous ways. From protecting the midwives and Moses' biological families, who risk their own lives to save baby Moses' life, to causing unimaginable pain suffering in an effort to elicit

obedience from Pharaoh—God’s power cannot be ignored.

Key verses in Exodus 1-12

The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.... (Exodus 3:7-8)

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you. (Exodus 3:14)

But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. (Exodus 4:22)

Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshipped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. (Exodus 12:24-28)

The Book of Exodus-Part Two

The focus of this lesson will be on the Seder Meal eaten on that very first Passover night. Everything about it—from the preparations to the last bite taken—is purposeful, meaningful, and symbolic of something much greater and bigger than we are.

READ Exodus 12

Use the space below to jot down the details about the Passover and the Seder meal given in this chapter.

You will notice that the bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and the roasted lamb are the only foods God instructs the Israelites to eat during this meal. The additional foods which are now part of this special meal are not meant to distract from the original Passover feast, but rather as symbols to impress upon the hearts and minds of participants just how important this time in history is to Jews and Christians alike.

The following is a list of items used and eaten in a Seder meal, along with instructions on how each one is used/eaten and the symbolism associated with it. Study the list; making notes beside each item of how each one symbolizes a time (or times) in your own life and your relationship with God.

EXAMPLE: The parsley symbolizes prosperity. When have you been blessed by God's monetary or relational prosperity?

Karpas (like parsley): symbolizes prosperity when the Israelites first arrived in Egypt

Salt water: symbolizes the tears shed by the Israelites during their 400 years in slavery and is used to dip the parsley in to symbolize the change from prosperity to hardship

Charoset, which is the Hebrew word for 'clay' (a mixture of chopped fruit and nuts): symbolizes the mortar used by the Israelites to make bricks for the Egyptian pyramids and other structures

The sweetness of the charoset is symbolic of hope for a future beyond that of slavery

NOTE: Charoset was added to the Seder at some point after the first Passover, as it is not mentioned in the Bible.

Maror (horseradish-type herb): symbolizes the bitterness of slavery

Z'roa (roasted lamb): symbolizes the exclusion from death of the first-born Israelite boys by the Passover Angel

Beitzah (roasted egg): symbolizes the sacrifices made in the temple

NOTE: Originally the egg was roasted in its shell in a hot oven and was not eaten. Today a true Seder Meal will not include the egg in the meal, as sacrifices are no longer made. Other variations of the Seder use a hardboiled egg and include it in the meal; making mention of the sacrifices made by their ancestors. Christians participating in a Seder often eat the hardboiled egg in remembrance of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice.

K'arah: the Seder plate used to hold the elements of the meal, with the exception of the matzah

Haggadah (telling): the book from which the account of the Israelites' time in bondage, the exodus, and their wandering in the desert is told

Matzah (unleavened bread): symbolizes a) the hurried manner in which the Israelites escaped, i.e. leavened bread wouldn't have had time to rise
b) the leavening symbolizes sin spreading throughout the purity of our hearts and minds—nothing it touches is not affected

NOTE: There are three pieces of matzah used in the Seder Meal. Two of the three pieces are eaten during different parts of the meal. The third is often placed in a special bag and hidden somewhere in the house. After the meal is over, the children hunt for it and bring it to the table to be shared by everyone.

Afikoman (hidden matzah or the last bite of lamb): symbolizes the end of the meal and celebration of deliverance (thought of as the dessert of the meal)

The meal is not set before a person and then consumed as he or she sees fit. It

is a communal meal that includes a great deal of ceremonial reading, washing of hands, prayer, praise, and singing. It is a meal in which the focus is NOT on the food, but rather on the reasons for eating the food and the historical and spiritual significance of it being instituted.

Use the following space to record your thoughts and observations on what Jesus' willingness to be the ultimate Passover Lamb has done for your life.

The Book of Exodus-Part Three

One of the most telling verses of scripture in the entire Bible is found in Exodus 12:41. It says, “At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD’s divisions left Egypt.”

To the very day of what? To the very day Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt to live. The reason this is so telling is that Moses, the writer of Exodus, would have had no way of knowing this. Not one living soul on earth would have known that. Only God could have known this not-so-trivial piece of information, which is just one more piece of evidence of the authorship of the Bible and the reality of God’s existence and holy nature as Master of the universe.

Exodus 12:37 tells us that over 600,000 Israelite men plus women and children, *plus* many other people of another (or other) nationality(ies) left Egypt in the early morning hours that day. That equals out to over ONE MILLION people!!!! Full of hope, questions, fear mingled with excitement, and full of faith in Moses and the God they thought had forgotten about them.

When have you experienced similar feelings of hope and excitement teamed with nervousness and intimidation because of changes coming to your life?

How did God help you deal with these feelings?

Everything God does has purpose and everything God does is part of a plan for his creation. And that includes the route the Israelites took when they left Egypt. God directed Moses to take the Israelites on a less-direct route as they headed for the Promised Land of Canaan. This route took them on the desert road straight to the Red Sea.

But why? Here's why: The Israelites had spent four hundred years living as slaves. They were not an aggressive people and were not trained to fight or defend themselves. They were used to a life of submission without question. Had they taken the most direct route they would have encountered the Philistines within a matter of a few days. The Philistines, as we know, were a combative and aggressive people. The Philistines wouldn't have hesitated to attack the Israelites. And what would the Israelites have done? They would have dissolved like snow in the hot, summer sun.

When have you been able to look back and see God's timing of the events in your life to be perfect—despite the fact you felt otherwise?

The Philistines, as it turns out, weren't the only ones the Israelites needed to be worried about. Pharaoh's grief was short-lived in comparison to his desire to keep the Israelites under his control. So within a matter of a day or two, Pharaoh regretted his decision to let them go and sent his army to bring them back.

Read Exodus 14:5-31

When the Israelites realized they were being pursued and that the only way they could retain their freedom was to be on the other side of the Red Sea, they panicked, which was exactly what God knew they would have done had they been confronted by the Philistines.

“We were better off as slaves!” they cried. “We are all going to die!” they cried. “This is all your fault, Moses!” they cried.

What are some examples of how we respond to God in similar fashion? Why do you think both the Israelites and people today (including you and me) react this way?

Moses quieted their fearful and angry outbursts and promised that God would continue to deliver them from the hands of Pharaoh. In Exodus 14:14 Moses told the people all they had to do was be still (quiet) and faithful—that God would fight for them. And did he ever!

Using Moses by having him lift his staff out over the water, God **parted the Red Sea so that the Israelites could walk across (without even getting their feet wet)**. All one million ‘plus’ men, women, children, and non-Israelite people with them **passed through** on dry ground just as Pharaoh’s army was closing in. The army was in the sea and God closed the waters back over them; drowning the entire army and their horses. When the Israelites saw what God had done for them through Moses, they put their faith and trust in God and Moses...for a while, anyway.

How has God gotten your attention?

God knew the hearts and minds of the Israelites. He knew they lacked the ability to lead themselves. To reassure Israel that he was with them night and day, no matter what, God led his people on their journey by causing a pillar-like cloud to move in front of them by day and a pillar of fire to move in front of them at night. When the cloud or pillar stopped, the people stopped. When it moved, they moved.

Read Exodus 16:1-18; 17:1-7

When the Israelites left Egypt, they took provisions in the way of food, water, gold, and other things to use for trade, but the food and water they took was not enough to last the entire journey. When their food and water supply was diminished, the Israelites once again started whining and complaining. And once again God came to their rescue. God didn't just meet their needs, though. He met their needs *miraculously*. God supplied water from a rock and food called manna from heaven.

Despite everything God was doing for these people, they still didn't quite get it. They grumbled, complained, doubted, and out and out ignored God's goodness. For multiple reasons, they couldn't and wouldn't allow themselves to give themselves over completely to God.

In what ways are you like the Israelites, i.e. in what ways are you unwilling to completely surrender yourself to God?

Why is this so difficult? Write down three words or phrases you feel best answers this question about you personally.

The Ten Commandments is the basis of God's commands and expectations for us even still today. It is also the basis for our societal law.

Read exodus 19:20-21; 20:1-21

Moses' relationship with God was special and unique. Moses spoke to God face to face and was spoken to by God. There are several references in the book of Exodus that tell us of these conversations. In addition to God speaking to Moses via the burning bush, we find multiple accounts of conversations between God and Moses. The most 'famous' of them all is when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God's own mouth and hand.

In giving Moses the Ten Commandments God was initiating his covenant with Israel. Instead of 'just' promising to provide and protect them, God made it crystal clear that he expected something in return.

Read Exodus chapters 21 through 23:1-19

Many of the laws God gave the people seem ridiculous and outlandish. But remember—nothing God says or does is random or without sound reasoning and justification.

What are your thoughts on the various laws and regulations God put in

place for the Israelites?

Why do you think God was so specific?

Do you think God's specific nature makes it easier or more difficult to be faithful and obedient to him? Explain.

The building of the Tabernacle and establishment of the priesthood came next. What we read in this portion of the book of Exodus concerning the construction of the Tabernacle and the establishment of the priesthood, we need to remember the following:

- God's instructions for worship were meant to teach the people to see God as holy and above all things
- God's blessing of Bezalel and Oholiab is evidence that God blesses each of us with specific talents and gifts we are to use to bring him honor and glory
- God expects to be set apart—he expects our worship to be intentional and deliberate rather than happenstance and casual

Read chapters 25 through 27 and 29 through 31

The Tabernacle was the first time God had designated a specific place for worship and sacrifice. It was the first 'church building' and it serves as our introduction to the truth that God demands a special place in our life and that he demands and desire that we set apart time in our life for only him—to worship and to acknowledge our need for him as our Savior.

Considering the exactness and attention to detail God had regarding the Tabernacle, how do you think God feels about the lack of reverence so often seen in respect to places of worship today—even by Christians?

What benefits can you see to making the place of worship more 'set apart'?

What deficits or downfalls do you see in doing so?

God's reasoning for selecting Aaron's family for the establishment of the priesthood was not because Aaron's family was superior or more blessed. God established the priesthood with Aaron and his sons because of *Aaron's* commitment to God. He had a genuine heart for the LORD. He was also highly respected and trusted by his fellow Israelites. Aaron had been with them his whole life—unlike Moses. Aaron was one of them, so serving in the role as spiritual leader was one he was well-suited for. As you will soon see, however, Aaron wasn't perfect.

Along with the Tabernacle and the establishment of the priesthood, was the construction of the **Ark of the Covenant**. Throughout Israel's history, the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Tabernacle, taken into battle to signify God's presence and protection, and was housed in places designated by God—including the temple constructed by Solomon. At one point in history the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and took it into their possession, but they soon realized God was punishing them severely for this act, so they returned it to the Israelites.

When the Babylonians took Israel captive and destroyed the temple in 587BC the Ark of the Covenant disappeared and its fate is still not known even to this day. It is safe to say, however, that the Ark of the Covenant, like the twelve tribes of Israel living as God's chosen people, no longer exists. Israel refused to participate in God's covenant so there was no longer a need for the symbolic covenant which was the Ark of the Covenant.

What things hold a special place in your heart to remind you of your

relationship with God and the events in your life that have brought you closer to him?

Read chapter 32

God encourages us to talk to him in prayer and he speaks back to us through the Bible, through sound teaching and mentoring, and through the council that is the Holy Spirit living inside those who have accepted Christ as Savior. But never did he speak to anyone the way he spoke to Moses. At the time of this particular incident, Moses had been on the mountain talking to God. But while he was gone, the Israelites grew impatient. In spite of the fact that they had already witnessed and benefitted from God's miraculous works (multiple times over), they grew impatient at Moses' absence of several days. They were 'certain' God had forgotten them and that they were determined to make a god to take his place—a golden calf made from melting down the gold jewelry they had brought with them out of Egypt. Even more shocking is the fact that Aaron helped them without hesitation.

God, in his ability to see and know all things, saw the people worshipping the golden calf they had formed. And to put it bluntly, God lost it. He wanted to destroy every single one of them. God told Moses that their lack of trust and gratitude was too great for him to put up with any longer. Moses listened to what God had to say, but then Moses did something incredible. He reasoned with God and soothed God's anger...

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why

should your anger burn against your people whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?' Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever." Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. ~Exodus 32:11-14

People often point out this passage of scripture as one in which God's sovereignty is put into question. They say he cannot possibly be all-knowing *and* change his mind. The two are in conflict with each other, but that's simply not the case. The word in verse 14 for 'relented' is the Hebrew word, 'nacham', which means to be sorry and to console oneself. *Oneself*. Moses didn't change God's mind. God expressed his anger (got it off his chest, so to speak) and moved forward.

What are your thoughts on these verses?

Moses had no idea of the level of the people's disobedience yet, but God did. Do you think God was trying to prepare or warn Moses about what he was going to see when he got to the bottom of the mountain? Explain.

If you go back and read verses 9 and 10, you will see God offering to make Moses even more prominent than he already was.

Do you think God might have been testing Moses? If so, how? If not, why not?

After this conversation Moses left to return to the people. But when he saw them dancing around the idol and committing all sorts of sinful acts, Moses' anger was more than he could handle. And that is when he hurled the Ten Commandments to the ground; shattering them into countless pieces.

God didn't hold Moses' anger against him. Nor do we have any reason to believe God was angry or displeased with Moses for breaking the stone tablet. God simply called Moses back up on the mountain to meet with him again in chapter thirty-four, where he once again inscribed the laws on a stone tablet for Moses to present to the people of Israel.

What do the incidents in chapter 32 reveal to you about each of the following:

God

Spiritual leaders and mentors

Yourself

The Glory of the LORD is the best way to describe the content of the remaining chapters of Exodus. They outline in detail the setting up and taking down of the Tabernacle, the articles to be put inside the Tabernacle, the actions of the priests, offerings and sacrifices, and accounts of God's interactions with Moses.

Summing up Exodus-Part Three

The words best used to sum up Exodus-Part Three are: **order, obedience,** and **omnipotence.**

God knows order is essential for right living. We need boundaries, routines, and guidelines for living out our purposes the way HE created us to do.

God demands obedience. He is the Master of the universe. He is justified and

deserving of our full obedience and in his perfectness, he cannot accept anything less than that. He is a just and loving God. He is quick and willing to reward our obedience and trust. But he is also a jealous God who disciplines out of love and concern for those who are in danger of being lost and separated from him.

God is omnipotent—all-knowing. His ways and his timing are perfect. He cannot lead us down a wrong path. All we have to do is follow.

Key verses in Exodus-Part Three

To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. (Exodus 24:17)

The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD. (Exodus 19:8)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: Exodus 20:1-17

The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still. (Exodus 14:14)

“He said, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.” Exodus 15:27

The Book Of Leviticus

The word Leviticus means ‘law’; making the Old Testament book of Leviticus aptly named since it is a record of the laws God gave Moses for the people of Israel. The book of Leviticus, or The Law of Moses, was given by God to instruct the people of Israel on how to:

- Live physically clean (hygienic) and healthy lives
- Establish fair and just laws of the land
- Establish a judicial system
- Live under the leadership and direction of God
- Live spiritually clean lives
- Approach God for the purpose of confession, repentance, and for seeking forgiveness from their sins
- Honor and worship God as the Almighty and Holy God

Reading through that list, it is easy to see that God had the people’s best interest at heart. He wanted to keep them safe and healthy, help them to live productive lives as free of chaos as possible, and to live under the umbrella of his blessings. What could be better than that, right?

As you think about the laws we observe today—both as citizens and Christians...

What are some examples of health and hygiene laws that greatly benefit the general public?

What would happen if these laws suddenly became null and void?

What are some examples of civil laws and judgements that keep our society in check?

Read Leviticus chapter 11. It is a part of the Law that deals with the foods that are safe for us to eat and which ones are not. Why do you think God instructed the people in this way?

HINT: Think about the diet of these animals and their life habits.

Read Leviticus 18:6-29. What are some of the consequences we live with (and force others to live with) because of breaking these relational laws?

Read Leviticus 6:2-3. How do these judicial laws keep society in check and what would happen if we didn't have them?

As Christians we know we are no longer bound to the Law of Moses—at least not from a sacrificial standpoint. But it would be reckless to say we are not bound by any of it. And here is why...

READ Matthew 5:17-18.

What do Jesus' own words say to you about the Mosaic Law?

What was the fulfillment of the Law Jesus was talking about?

What are some things God commands the Israelites not to do, that are still considered wrong (sinful) for Christians today?

Do you think this is what Jesus means when he is talking about the Law not being abolished?

.

To help you understand just how thorough and detailed the Law is, we are going to look at some of the basic laws God gave his people in a number of different ‘categories’. We will also look at why God gave the people the laws he gave them. **In looking at the Law of Moses it is important to remember that everything God says and does is perfect and in accordance to his perfect plan.**

The laws for sacrifice are given first in the book of Leviticus. This is only right since God expected and accepted nothing less than being number one in the lives of his people. The laws of sacrifice were meant to make people feel the weight and guilt of their sin to the point of being repentant and to long for forgiveness. The laws of sacrifice were also meant to humble them; causing them to realize how completely inadequate they were without God’s divine protection and provision.

The five offerings of sacrifice were:

- **Burnt offering:** A voluntary act of worship, atonement for unintentional sin, and an expression of commitment and complete surrender to God. A bull, ram, or male dove with no defect were the acceptable burnt offering sacrifices.
- **Grain offering:** A voluntary act of worship recognizing God’s goodness and provision. Grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, baked breads or wafers were offered. No yeast or honey was allowed to be a part of anything baked that was given as a grain offering. Drink offerings of wine were also included in the grain offerings from time to time.
- **Fellowship offering:** A voluntary act of worship, thanksgiving, and fellowship. Any animal without defect from a herd or flock or a variety of breads was used in the fellowship offering.
- **Sin offering:** This was a mandatory offering that served as atonement for specific unintentional sin. It was an offering of confession, forgiveness, and cleansing from being defiled. The animal used for a sin offering sacrifice depended upon who you were. The priests were required to sacrifice a young bull. Leaders of families offered a male goat, the common person offered a female goat, and the poor offered either a dove or a tithe (tenth of a portion) of fine flour.

Sacrificial offerings had to be presented in a very precise and detailed manner. The offerings of sacrifice were also a means of provision of food to the priests and their families. For example, portions of the grain offerings were burned on the altar as an offering to God and portions were given to the priests and their families to eat. This only makes sense due to the fact that the priests were not allowed to farm or make a living any other way, so this was God's way of providing for them—much like we support missionaries and pay our preachers today.

We know Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice and that this part of the Law is what Jesus came to fulfill.

READ Leviticus 1:1; 2:1; 2:11; 3:1; 4:32; John 1:29

What do all the sacrifices and offerings have in common? How are they different?

Clean and unclean foods were a priority with God when giving his people laws to live by. He was very specific about which animals could and couldn't be eaten. God wasn't 'playing favorites' when selecting the foods suitable for consumption. All of God's creation is precious to him and every single living thing serves useful purposes. The distinctions between clean and unclean animals were given for the safety of the people. Clean animals are animals that don't consume waste or carcasses—both of which harbor bacteria that would be dangerous for human consumption. To eat unclean animals would

have been the same as eating meat infected with listeria, e-coli, or other life-threatening bacteria.

The ramifications of eating unclean food are still present today. That's why we have government agencies whose job it is to monitor our food sources, safety standards, recalls, and so forth. What additional problems would the Israelites have faced by not obeying God's laws for clean eating?

Laws about infectious diseases, childbirth, mold and mildew, and discharges from the body were instituted for the health and safety of everyone. Infectious skin diseases such as ringworm, yeast infections, thrush, scabies, lice, and rashes from toxic plants were a problem for the people of Israel just like they are for us today.

People dealing with any of these things were removed from the general population for a period of time. They also went through a ritual of bathing, shaving their heads (if appropriate), their clothes were washed or burned, and they had to present themselves to the priest for examination in order to be declared clean so they could return to their families.

Once a person was pronounced clean, they had to offer sacrifices to God as a final step to returning to their families.

In Leviticus 13:47 God instructs the people to isolate any garment showing

signs of mold. Mold, which is a fungus, causes breathing problems, rashes, headaches, nausea, and sometimes leads to chronic and more serious health issues. Once the item had been isolated the priests were to clean it in a specific manner and set it aside to see if the mold would die. If so, the garment could be returned to the owner after a period of time that served to ensure the mold would not return. If, however, the mold could not be cleaned from the garment, the garment was burned.

What are some of the reasons God was so specific and particular in treating these ailments?

How do we still practice these laws today? What improvements have we made to reduce the stigma of being tainted and undesirable?

Read Leviticus 18:3-5

Laws about sex are of great importance to God. God went into explicit detail concerning unlawful sexual activities. His attention to detail tells us two very important things:

- 1: God has clear and definite intentions for sex.
- 2: The people of Israel had been exposed to a sexually-depraved society in Egypt, and would be exposed to the same when they encountered the people of Canaan.

As you look at some of the laws regarding sex God gave the Israelites, it is obvious that God's intention is that sex be between a husband and wife (male and female) only.

- Do not have sexual relations with your mother.
- Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter.
- Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister.
- Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife.
- Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter.
- Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife.
- Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.
- Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it.
- A woman must not preset herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.

What do these laws say to you about the people of the day?

READ Leviticus 19:11-19.

Societal laws are an absolute must in order for people to co-exist. As our creator, God knows this. Because God created the universe, he knows that if not treated with care and respect, it will not be able to 'live up to its potential'.

How do you think we're doing in living up to our potential? Explain.

One of the most unusual laws God gave the Israelites (to our way of thinking, anyway) is the law that said **every seventh year would be a Sabbath year**. During the Sabbath year the land was to lie dormant—no crops were to be planted or harvested, the vineyards were not to be pruned, and so forth. They were to have faith that God would provide for their needs while giving their land the rest it needed; depending on what grew voluntarily to sustain them.

What benefits can you see in having a Sabbath Year?

What reasons do you think God had for declaring a Sabbath Year?

How would having a Sabbath Year look now? What benefits could it bring to your life spiritually, physically, and emotionally?

Another 'strange' law God instituted was **the Year of Jubilee**. The Year of Jubilee also happened every fiftieth year. In that year all debts were cancelled, land was returned to its original owner, and slaves were returned to their families. This ensured that no Israelite would ever be forever enslaved or without their inheritance. The Year of Jubilee was also a Sabbath Year, so the people lived on what was naturally produced by the land.

What are your thoughts regarding a Year of Jubilee? Because it was a legally binding law, it worked for the Israelites. But since that's not the case in our society, how might you incorporate a jubilee into your life?

Do you think having a Sabbath Year and a period of Jubilee is wrong since we are no longer under the Law? Explain.

The Passover meal is the

If you will remember, just prior to leaving Egypt, God commanded the Israelites to prepare and eat the first Passover Meal in preparation for leaving and in commemoration and celebration of being spared from the death angel passing over the houses of the Egyptians. The Passover meal was not the only holiday that included a special meal or feast. Knowing God leaves nothing to

chance and that he is a God of details, it should come as no surprise that the **feasts and holidays were also included in the giving of the Mosaic Law.**

READ Leviticus 23.

- The feast of unleavened bread follows the celebration of the Passover. It is a seven day period in which no bread made with yeast is to be eaten, fire offerings were to be made to the LORD, and the people gathered for a time of worship.
- The Offering of Firstfruits was a feast to celebrate the harvest. The first grain harvested, along with a lamb and fine flour was to be offered to the LORD as a burnt offering.
- The Feast of Weeks followed fifty days after the Offering of Firstfruits. This feast included burnt offerings of rams or bulls as well as grain offerings. This feast also included a time of worship and feasting for the people.
- The Feast of Trumpets was celebrated on the first day of the seventh month. The people gathered together in worship, blasted trumpets, and presented an offering of fire to the LORD.
- The Day of Atonement took place on the tenth day of the seventh month. This was a day of fasting from everything. It was a day of complete denial of all food, water, and activity as a show of complete dependence on God.
- Shortly after the Day of Atonement came a seven day celebration called the Feast of the Tabernacles. Day one of the celebration included a worship service. Burnt offerings were made on all seven days, and the final day was a day of worship much like the first.

What similarities do these feasts have in common?

What are the primary reasons for each feast/festival?

What, if any, comparison can be made between these festivals and the reverence and respect we show God in the way we approach church services? For example, do you think we need to take a more respectful and reverent attitude toward the way we dress for church? The casual approach we take to being there, i.e. coffee and donuts during the worship and preaching? Explain.

God's attention to detail is equal to his expectations for his people—expectations for our faithful obedience. God promises discipline and punishment for disobedience, as well as rewards for their obedience,

READ [Leviticus 26:3-13](#)

List several of the promises God made to the Israelites in return for their faithfulness and obedience.

God made some pretty amazing promises. Isn't it a shame Israel was too stubborn and prideful to submit?

What promises has God made in exchange for *our* obedience?

What keeps us from enjoying the full benefit of these promises?

A more detailed description of the priesthood is given in the eighth and ninth chapters of Leviticus. The priesthood is something most of us have trouble wrapping our head around. But that's okay because of all the aspects of the Law, the sacrifices and the priesthood are the two main things Jesus'

life, ministry, death, and resurrection fulfilled. Did away with. Replaced.

The symbolism between the priesthood and their job as mediator between the people and God was no longer necessary when Jesus came onto the scene. Jesus was and still is the only mediator we need.

Why is there no one other than Jesus worthy or capable of mediating between us and God?

READ Leviticus 10.

Shortly after the establishment of the Law and the priesthood, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who were also serving in the priesthood, disobeyed God. And as a result, God killed them. The reason God killed Nadab and Abihu was, in a word, DISOBEDIENCE.

Do you think God's punishment was too strict? Why or why not?

If you think God was acting too severely, you are not alone. Many people read Leviticus 10 with the attitude that God is being too harsh. Before you rush to that conclusion you need to know what the text really says. In the Hebrew text the 'unauthorized fire' is 'strange fire'; meaning it was not offered at the request or command of God. It was not part of any offering God had instituted and was not offered in the way God had commanded the priests to take this sort of action. In breaking so many of the rules God had set into place, Nadab and Abihu demonstrated a severe lack of respect and

disregard for God and for the position of leadership they had been placed in.

God could not tolerate their lack of obedience because they were supposed to set the example for everyone else. If God allowed these two to be so blatantly disobedient, the rest of Israel would feel free to bend whatever rules they wanted to bend...or break. And as we know from prior incidents (the golden calf) and many more to come, the Israelites did not need any encouragement to disobey. The deaths of Nadab and Abihu were God's way of reiterating his holiness and his insistence on complete obedience and faithfulness to him.

Why does God demand such strict obedience?

Has he lowered his standards? Explain.

The final chapter of Leviticus is subtitled "Redeeming what is the LORD's". The focus of this final chapter in Leviticus—the book of the Law—sets a monetary value on things people would commit to the LORD as tithe or offering.

Why do you think God placed monetary value on these things and on people?

Read verse 8 of chapter 27. What does this tell you about God's expectations for giving?

Now that you have answered these questions, let's take a minute to consider the chapter as a whole, the meaning of the Hebrew words used in the original text, and let's look at it from the perspective of offering and sacrifice.

If this chapter had to be summed up in three words or less, those words would be **personal investment**. God wants us to participate in our relationship with him. He wants it to 'cost' us something; meaning he wants us to invest ourselves into the process. Have you ever heard the saying, "The best things in life don't come easily"? Or what about "You only get out of something what you put into it"? That's basically the point God is making here. Or should I say one of the points he is making. He is saying that when we dedicate ourselves, our house, our children, or whatever to God, we need to take it seriously because he does.

The second point God is making in this chapter can be found in verse 30. Read verse 30. Underline or circle the word "'belongs'".

NOTE: Depending on which translation or version you are using, it may say

‘is owned’ or ‘is the LORD’s. But you get the point.

Rewrite verse 30 in your own words.

Why is tithing an act of faith?

Why do we make tithing optional (in our own minds) when God clearly does not?

Throughout scripture we are reminded that everything and everyone the LORD God created is his. Yet even though we have it spelled out for us in black and white, we still hold back. We still have a problem sharing back with God—giving back to him what is really his in the first place. I’m not just talking about money or material possessions, either. I’m also talking about our lives. Our body, heart, mind, and soul.

God gave the Israelites the Law to protect and guide them, to teach them how to govern themselves since they didn’t know how, and to show them just how desperately in need they were of God and his redemptive love and mercy. For the Israelites, the Law was their path to a relationship with God. Sadly, many rejected it over and over again.

Today, Jesus is our ‘Law’. He is the path to a relationship with God. Sadly, many reject him over and over again just like the Israelites rejected God. But for those who accept him and give themselves to God in faithful obedience, what seems from the outside to be oppressive rules and expectations for how you live your life, is actually freedom from the pain and consequences of making the wrong choices in life.

How has this lesson changed your understanding of the Law of Moses?

How has this lesson altered your thoughts and beliefs about the holiness of God and your responsibility for being part of God’s family?

Summing up Leviticus

Leviticus is one of those books in the Bible most people pass over; giving the excuse that it’s boring and not applicable to Christian living because as Christians, we are no longer under the Law. Hopefully this lesson has proved to you that just the opposite is true—that the book of Leviticus is significant for understanding God’s holiness and that as Christians, aka, God’s children, aka the Church, our number one purpose is to praise and glorify God.

From the book of Leviticus, we also need to learn that:

- God always keeps his word—for better or worse
- God does nothing without having sound reasons for doing so
- Everything God does is ultimately for your own good
- God will not settle for anything less than first place in our hearts
- As Master of the universe, God is deserving of first place in our hearts
- God is eager to bless us in amazing and wonderful ways
- God will not withhold discipline and punishment when we are disobedient
- There is a difference between a disobedient and sinful heart and unintentionally letting ourselves act on the temptations that come our way

Kew Verses in Leviticus

NOTE: Read through the book of Leviticus—especially those chapters dealing with laws for clean eating, health and hygiene, and social and legal justice.

Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.
(Leviticus 20:8 NIV)

Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf. (Exodus 22:20 NIV)

The Book Of Numbers-Part One

The book of Numbers was written by Moses. Its primary focus is just as the name implies...numbers. The book of Numbers is a census report of the nation of Israel. Numbers also records the events that took place during the Israelite's journey from Mt. Sinai through Moab to the border of Canaan (the Promised Land). It is also a book that contains a significant amount of history that is of the geographical, sociological, and spiritual kind.

The incidents recorded in the book of Numbers gives undeniable proof of God's love, care, and forgiveness despite disobedience and utter unworthiness. Both that of the Israelites and ours.

As you look at some of the main events recorded in the book of Numbers you will not be able to ignore the following:

- God is the Almighty and holy by nature
- God has a sense of creativity like none other
- God accepts nothing less than first place in our lives
- God's way is always best

READ Numbers chapter 2 and chapter 3

The book of Numbers opens with taking a census of the Israelite people and those who came with them out of Egypt. The first four chapters are a census of the Israelite people. The people were counted by tribes (sons of Jacob/Israel). But in addition to the actual count, God assigned each tribe certain jobs and responsibilities, and an order for their living arrangements, i.e. the specific placement of each tribe's community around the Tent of Meeting.

Why do you think God took such great care to give such specific instructions about where each tribe camped?

What does this tell you about God's nature?

READ Numbers 5:11-31

This is one of the most perplexing passages of scripture in the Old Testament. Why would God let women be treated that way?

The answer to that question lies in verses 11 and 12.

What is the answer?

The method of testing for marital unfaithfulness is unique and seemingly bizarre from our point of view, but when you consider the fact that God spoke these words directly to Moses, using words like bizarre to describe it becomes borderline disrespectful. Regardless of what we think, we need to remember that God's ways are never random, senseless...or bizarre. We also need to remember that everything God does is infallible. This means that the unusual method used to prove or disprove infidelity, was one hundred percent accurate one hundred percent of the time.

Keeping what you just read in mind, what are your thoughts about this passage of scripture?

How does this test work in the wife's favor—protecting her from her husband?

Why are we still not using this practice today?

READ Numbers 6:1-8

What are the specifics of the Nazarite vow?

Why do you think there is no set amount of time the vow is supposed to last?

Another description often used for the Nazarite vow is a vow of separation. The vow of separation was a time in which the man or woman removed themselves from all work and responsibilities for the purpose of prayer, meditation, worship, and ministering to those in need. They were dedicating themselves to temporary ministry.

The Nazarite vow is not part of the Law, so what merits could you see in taking a Nazarite vow today? What are some reasons a person might do so?

What spiritual discipline is similar to the Nazarite vow? HINT: Ready Matthew 6:16-18

The exception to the Nazirite vow being a temporary situation is Samson. For reasons only God knows, Samson was to be set apart for life. Why? We don't know, but does it really matter? Just as God chose Abraham to be the patriarch of all Israel, and just like God chose Mary to be the one to bring his son, Jesus into the world, God has reasons for choosing the people he chooses to do amazing work for his kingdom here on earth.

Rewrite each of the following verses in your own words. Do these verses help confirm or refute that all Christians are set apart to do God's work?

- 1st Peter 1:14-16

- Psalm 26:4-5

- Romans 12:1

- John 14:15

- Psalm 4:3

- Micah 6:8

Chapters 7-10 record several 'housekeeping' issues between God and the Israelites; detailed instructions for presenting certain offerings to God, further instructions to the Levites, and preparing the Israelites to pack up camp and leave Sinai in preparation to enter the Promised Land of Canaan.

At this point the Israelites had been out of Egypt for barely two years. God was ready to lead them into the land that was to be their forever home. The question was, were the Israelites ready to go?

READ Numbers 11:1-6.

Who were the 'rabble' with the Israelites? If you don't remember, read Exodus 12:38.

Being dissatisfied with their food choices was a symptom of more serious problems. What were these problems?

Write three words to describe what you believe to be the reason for the problems the Israelites and the ‘rabble with them’.

In what ways do you see the ‘rabble’ causing problems among Christians today?

It wouldn’t be fair to blame ‘the rabble’ for every negative and disobedient thought and action the Israelites had. Let’s be honest—they did a pretty good job of being ungrateful and disobedient on their own. And as you are about to find out, it was about to get worse.

What problems do we face in the Church and among fellow Christians that cannot be blamed on ‘the rabble’?

READ Numbers chapters 13 and 14.

There are ten phrases that sum up these two chapters, and essentially, the entire book of Numbers. They are:

- God commanded. God commanded Moses. God commanded the people.

God's commands are holy, just, and right. His commands are always for the good of the people—to protect them, to prosper them, and to point them toward a relationship with him.

How have God's commands protected, prospered, and pointed you toward God?

- They left. The twelve spies chosen by God—one from each tribe—left to explore the land of Canaan. They left with specific instructions as to the route they were to take and the things they supposed to do.
- They returned. At the end of forty days the spies returned—just as they were told to do.

Do you feel you are following God's leading in your life? Explain.

- We can't. Ten of the twelve spies said, "We can't do it. We can't take possession of the land because the people are too big and powerful." And they were right. *They* couldn't. But with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the spies chose to ignore the fact that they weren't in this alone. God was with them; ready to lead them in all things and in all ways. They were invincible. They could not be defeated.
- They rebelled. The ten spies doubted God's ability and willingness to keep his promises. Instead, they rebelled by refusing to do what God told them to do.
- **What are you afraid to do, or what have you refused to do for God? Why?**

- The LORD is abounding in love. This phrase comes from verse 18. At this point the Israelites had ignored, disobeyed, and complained about God's handling of their circumstances more times than we want to count. Yet there they are—on the brink of enjoying the abundant blessings of his promises. But...

How have you experienced God's love despite your disobedience?

- God does not leave the guilty unpunished. This phrase is also from verse 18. As our father, God cannot let those who are guilty of rebellion and disobedience off the hook. He cannot look the other way, because disobedience is sin and God cannot ignore sin. The punishment God chose was appropriate for the situation. God declared that those who were counted in the census (those twenty years old and older) would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. After all—they said it wasn't possible, so.... The only exceptions would be Joshua and Caleb.
- God is purposeful. We know from other incidents in the Bible—most of which involved the Israelites—that God didn't hesitate to strike people dead when that is what he thought would be the most appropriate way of dealing with a situation. But not this time. This time God chose to make the Israelites participate in their punishment. By requiring the Israelites to wander for forty years, those who wouldn't be allowed to enter Canaan would be allowed to die of natural causes; knowing the entire time *why* they were out there. Not only that, but their children and grandchildren would grow up knowing what they were doing and why. God's purpose was simple: indelible impressions. Every day they

wandered in the wilderness made a deeper impression on those that would be allowed to claim Canaan as their home, to honor and obey God with their whole heart, soul, and mind.

What lessons should the Israelites have learned from their forty years of wandering?

What lessons should you learn from the Israelites' forty years of wandering?

- You can't outsmart God. These people just didn't know when to quit. Re-read Numbers 14:39-45. This is their response to hearing what their punishment would be for rebelling against God's instructions for entering Canaan. They were only willing to obey after they had exhausted their other options...and because they didn't like the alternative, aka, their punishment for their former disobedience.

Do you think the following statement accurately describes their actions? Why or why not: The Israelites weren't sorry for their disobedience—they were sorry they got caught.

The Israelites' penchant for whining and complaining is interesting when you stop and think about it. You would think the fact that they were free would have been reason enough to be happy, but these people were free AND experiencing the miraculous power of God first-hand time and time again and it still wasn't enough. They even made their situation in Egypt sound like the better option (11:4-6).

But then again, is it really so unusual? Aren't we free to live an abundant life? Aren't we free AND living with the option of experiencing the gift of salvation and the power of God in our lives? Yet for all of that we still whine and complain that it isn't enough.

In chapter 16, **God kills Korah, Dathan, and Abiram for disobeying.** Remember—Numbers is filled with historical accounts of Israel's rebellion and faithless disobedience. When we look at it in print it is easy for us to shake our heads and ask why they were so stubborn and prideful. Why didn't they learn? What would it take for them to realize what they had with God and embrace it with thanksgiving?

This is especially true when we read about the deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These three men were members of the tribe of Levi—part of the priesthood. But even that was not good enough for them. They wanted more authority and challenged Moses' authority in their quest to get it.

God demonstrated his displeasure with these men and his power and authority by opening the ground (earthquake) so that it swallowed the three men, their families, their tents and their belongings. And then the ground closed over them; leaving no trace of who and what had been.

You would think this would be enough to 'put the fear of God' into the Israelites. But it wasn't. Many of them blamed Moses and Aaron for this frightful event; making God so angry that he sent a plague on the people and in just a few hours, we read that 14,700 people died before God relented. But it wasn't.

Chapters 20 through 21 give us the details of more acts of disobedience along with God's handling of each situation. None of God's actions are random or without meaning, but the incident in which God's actions and purpose are as

much about prophecy as they are punishment.

The incident is found in Numbers 21:4-9. Read this passage of scripture.

What is the prophetic significance of this incident? Hint: Read John 3:14-15

Why do you think both the Israelites and people today are such slow learners?

Summing up Numbers 1-21

The first 21 chapters of the book of Numbers gives us multiple reasons to open our mouths in awe at God's power, love, and grace, and to shake our heads in disbelief at the blatant disobedience and disregard for God's holiness. There is much we can learn from this book that often goes unread and overlooked simply because of its name. But as you can see, the book of Numbers is so much more than that, and as you will see in the next lesson, the final 13 chapters still has a lot to say on the matter.

Key verses in Numbers 1-21

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Numbers has to offer.

“The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”
Numbers 14:18

“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” Numbers 12:3

The Book Of Numbers-Part Two

This lesson covers chapters 22 through 36 of Numbers. It is the account of the forty-year journey the Israelites took from Sinai to the boundaries of the Promised Land of Canaan. Chapter 33 provides a detailed map, so to speak, of the journey; giving us the names of the places they stopped and camped during this time. Another important piece of information we are given is the record of the second census (chapter 26).

Why do you think God thought it necessary to share these facts and figures with us?

Chapters 22 through 36 also contain a great deal of information about various encounters the Israelites had with people along the way, as well as among themselves. But before we get into the meat and potatoes of what chapters 22 through 36 of Numbers has to say to us, there is one extremely important event we need to look at that took place in chapter 20.

READ Numbers 20:1-13.

Yes, you've read correctly—God was not going to allow Aaron and Moses to enter the Promised Land. After seeing and conversing with God face to face, Moses would not be allowed to go in. After putting up with near-constant whining and complaining (and 38 more years of it to go), Moses would not be allowed to enter the land flowing with milk and honey. One mistake. One indiscretion and God took from Moses the reward for his entire mission.

Why do you think God took such harsh and serious disciplinary action against Moses and Aaron?

What do we learn about Moses in this passage of scripture?

In thinking about Moses and the price he paid for his act of disobedience, it should make us extremely and humbly grateful for the gift of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. It was the sacrifice that made restitution for our sins and allows us to seek forgiveness in repentance and the hope of the eternal promised land of heaven.

Shortly after God announces to Moses and Aaron that they will not be allowed to enter Canaan, Aaron dies, and the people spend thirty days in mourning for their beloved high priest before continuing on their journey.

READ Numbers 20:22-29.

Passing the authority and responsibility from Aaron to Eleazar is a lesson in respecting and honoring the office or position of authority more than the person in that position. In other words, we need to be careful not to transfer our faith from God to a person.

How have people in general, as well as the Church, been guilty of this in the past? Examples: Trying to make Paul a god, putting Jesus' mother, Mary, on a pedestal of holiness, televangelists who become arrogant and greedy, and cult leaders like Jim Jones.

What can we do as Christians to make sure we don't make the person more important than the ministry?

After Aaron's death the Israelites entered into a period of being at war. As they traveled toward their final destination they came into contact with Canaanites, Moabites, and Amorites. God was with them each and every time—giving Israel victory over their opponents. It was during this time that one of the most amazing (and fun) accounts in history....

Balaam's donkey talked. Balak, who was the king of Moab at the time, was aware of the success the Israelites had wherever they went. He was terrified of what they would do when they reached his territory. In an attempt to stop the Israelites, Balak sent for a man named Balaam, who was obviously a soothsayer or mystic. They sent for him in hopes of getting him to put a curse on the Israelites.

READ Numbers 22:1-35.

In the end, Balaam did the right thing, but he did it for all the wrong reasons. Chapters 23 and 24 are the oracles (prophecies and predictions) Balaam gave to Balak about the Israelites. On the surface it looks like Balaam is doing his best to obey God and help the Israelites on their way. But that wasn't what was on Balaam's mind at all.

The evidence of this is found in verses 22:12 and 22:18-19.

What did Balaam do wrong?

Read Numbers 24:1. What does this verse say about Balaam?

With the exception of the census and the record of Israel's journey, the remaining chapters of the book of Numbers reveals the following information:

- Israel rejecting God's commands *not* to intermingle with the paganistic Moabites (Numbers 25). It was the beginning of the end for Israel—even though the end wouldn't actually come for 528 and 664 years (the time between the Exodus and Israel's captivity by the Assyrians and Judah falling to Babylon).

What does chapter 25 teach us about how we should conduct our lives—relationships, worship, morality, principles, and faith?

- God's commands and instructions for various offerings and feasts.
- God's vengeance on Midian for seducing Israel.

Do you think God punishes unbelievers for their actions against Christians? Explain.

- The boundaries of Canaan
- An interesting situation regarding women's rights (Numbers 27:1-11)

Knowing we are no longer under the Law, what can we learn from this passage of scripture about God's sense of fairness and justice?

How does this incident contrast with what we often presume to be the Old Testament times' typical mindset toward women?

- Information on what is now a highly controversial topic (Numbers 25:6-15).

How are the cities of refuge under the Law different from those we hear about today?

The last topic we will cover in our study of the book of Number is that of **Joshua being chosen to replace Moses as the leader of Israel when they**

enter Canaan.

READ Numbers 27:12-23.

What three words best describe Joshua's qualifications for taking Moses' place as leader of all Israel?

Have you ever been chosen to take the helm from someone on the job or in a volunteer position? How did you handle the transition?

How do you think Joshua felt about his new position?

Summing up Numbers Part Two

The journey was almost over. The Israelites are almost home. The journey hasn't been an easy one, but it is fair to say every problem they encountered was of their own doing.

If we learn anything at all from the Israelites, we need to learn the following:

- God accepts nothing less than our total commitment and obedience.
- God is loving, fair, and just.
- God will not leave the disobedient unpunished.
- God has a purpose for everything—nothing is random, coincidental, or by happenstance

In reading the book of Numbers, we have a tremendous opportunity to grow in knowledge and understanding of who God is, our utter inadequacy to attain God's favor on our own, and our need for his loving favor.

Key verses from Numbers 22-36

God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?
(Numbers 23:19 NIV)

When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.
(Numbers 30:2 NIV)

The Book Of Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses and is the fifth and final book written by Moses. The word 'Deuteronomy' literally means second law. This doesn't mean a literal second version of the law, meant to replace the first version God gave Moses, but rather a second or re-reading of the law by Moses to the people of Israel.

In addition to re-reading the Law to the people of Israel, Moses also gives his farewell address, so to speak. If you'll remember, Moses was not going to be allowed to enter the Promised Land because he disobeyed God by hitting the rock to produce water for the Israelites to drink instead of speaking to it.

If you have trouble wrapping your head around this, and question why God didn't extend more mercy to Moses and Aaron, you are not alone. It seems incredibly unfair—especially when you compare God's seeming lack of patience with Moses, to the extreme amount of patience he had with the Israelites. In order to help you understand God's heart and reasoning on the matter, read Luke 12:48.

Does this explanation of why God did not allow Moses (and Aaron) into the Promised Land help you understand God's reason and purpose better? Explain.

What does this tell you about God's desires and expectations for you and me?

Chapters 1 thru 3 are Moses' recap of the journey—the highest of highs and lowest of lows. This recap isn't meant to be critical or condemning. He's just setting the stage for giving the people a sense of responsibility by re-reading the Law. His goal is to humble their hearts and create a sense of need in both their hearts and minds for God—his goodness, his protection, wisdom, and his love. Moses' introduction also reveals the purposes of the book of Deuteronomy, which are:

- Reminds the Israelites of God's goodness
- Reminds the Israelites of the laws God gave them
- Reminds the Israelites of God's love for them and his boundless grace and mercy
- Prepares Israel for crossing over the Jordan into the Promised Land
- Prepares the people for Joshua assuming the role of leader of all Israel

READ Deuteronomy 3:23-29

The first few words of verse 23, “At that time...” are referring to God telling Moses he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land because he disobeyed God. When we first read about this incident in Numbers, chapter 20, no response or reaction on the part of Moses is given. It is stated very matter-of-factly that because Moses and Aaron disobeyed, they would not be allowed to enter Canaan. The end. A ‘because I said so’ from God. But these verses in chapter 3 give us a lot more details into Moses' response and feelings. And because they are Moses' own words, they are most assuredly accurate.

This is an interesting part of the text for two reasons:

1: We see once again that Moses wasn't afraid to dispute God's decision. He had done so numerous times, beginning at the burning bush when he tried to convince God he wasn't the right man for the job. Moses had also argued on behalf of the Israelites on more than one occasion when God wanted to wipe

them out.

2: God is less willing to give in to Moses for *Moses'* sake than he is for the sake of the Israelites.

In thinking about God's refusal to change his mind, our first thoughts generally tend to go toward the 'side' of God being too harsh. Why forgive the Israelites so many times but not Moses? This mindset, however, is incorrect.

God forgave Moses, but forgiveness isn't a pass to get what you want. Moses still had to be disciplined for his sin—just as the Israelites were disciplined for theirs.

Paraphrase these verses in your own words.

What does verse 29 tell you about God's response and Moses' attitude to God's response?

READ Deuteronomy 4:1-15.

Beginning in chapter 4, we see Moses taking the first steps toward preparing

the people for moving forward (literally and figuratively) without him. Despite the fact that Deuteronomy is basically a recap of Leviticus and Numbers, it is fair to say that it is also one of the most beautifully written books in the Bible. The beauty of Deuteronomy comes from the fact that it is written from Moses' heart.

As frustrated, angry, and even irate as Moses got with the Israelites, he loved them deeply. He had invested over forty years of his life in theirs, and now that his time with them was nearly over, he wanted to make sure they were as spiritually healthy and physically and emotionally prepared to enter the Promised Land as they could possibly be.

What three words would you use to describe Moses' character at this point?

Moses' care and concern for the Israelites pales in comparison to God's care and concern for these people—and for you and me, as well.

READ John 14:1-17

What similarities do you find between this passage and Deuteronomy 4:1-15?

After sharing this part of his heart with us, Moses continues to remind the

Israelites (and us) what the Law is about—that it is about developing and maintaining an intimate relationship with God our Creator and Redeemer. But rather than just reciting the Law, Moses expounds on it by telling the people why and how they should obey as well as the blessings and consequences of doing (or not doing) so.

Obedience commanded

Moses instructs the people to obey God's laws so they can enjoy peace, prosperity, and protection that results from doing so.

When have you experienced peace, prosperity, and/or protection because of your obedience?

If you have children, what are some practical things you can do to instill this concept in their hearts and minds?

Beginning in Deuteronomy 4:15 and going through chapter 26, Moses reminds the people of the Law that was given to them while they were still in Sinai. This reminder is detrimental to their present and their future as individuals and as a society.

IMPORTANT: You need to remember that when the Law was originally read to the people, those hearing it *now* were either very young or not even born yet. So for the vast majority of them, this was their first 'official' reading. But make no mistake, they knew much of what it said. They had been raised under the Law with its sacrifices, feasts and festivals, and knowing what foods were clean as well as unclean. They knew what it was to have to go through the various purification rituals and they knew what was and wasn't

considered legal from a judicial point of view.

In re-reading the Law, Moses was impressing upon them the fact that their generation would be responsible for leading all of Israel for many years, and that they needed to have a thorough knowledge and heartfelt commitment to their role.

Idolatry forbidden

It's no coincidence that Moses starts with Idolatry. The Israelites had already defiled themselves by adopting the idols of the Midianites and Amorites. In reviewing God's take on idolatry, Moses is warning the people to get back on track.

READ Deuteronomy 4:23-26; 29, 31

How are these verses both a warning and a prophecy?

As Christians, what are some specific ways we can take these verses to heart in our own lives?

Chapter 5 begins with a re-reading of the Ten Commandments, followed by Moses' warning to follow them closely and well (verse 32) AND a promise of God's blessing (verse 33) if they do remain faithful and obedient to him.

Reading (almost) 11 chapters for one lesson is an unrealistic expectation, so for the sake of this lesson we will be focusing on what are considered key verses. These verses provide insight on why the Law mattered and the consequences of both keeping and not keeping it. As you read the following passages and answer the questions that go with them, keep in mind that while we are no longer under the Law, consequences for obedience and disobedience are still a ‘thing’.

READ Deuteronomy 6:4-9

How would society be different if parents followed these commands?

What can you do in your own home to better live out these commands in our own homes? How would it change your family dynamics?

The next several verses we are going to focus on actions and consequences. In addition to imparting the Law to the people of Israel, Moses describes for them of the consequences they will experience—either good or bad, depending on their actions. It is interesting to note, that the consequences Moses gives the people are different than those God doled out in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. During their time in the desert, consequences came swiftly, and were drastic and extreme. The consequences Moses warned them about were the natural results of working against God instead of with him,

READ Deuteronomy 6:14-17; 7:12-15

Some people say these verses ‘prove’ God’s love is unconditional—that

he is placing the condition of obedience on his love. How would you respond to someone who said this?

READ Deuteronomy 7:7-8

The 'L' word (as in LOVE), is the emphasis in chapters 6 and 7. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 are especially significant in the fact that this is the first time we read the word 'love' in terms of God's feelings toward his people.

Take a minute to let that sink in. Prior to this time God has expressed his feelings toward the Israelites, and mankind in general, using words like 'chosen' and 'mine'. There have also been times when he called them 'a stench' and didn't hide the fact that he was sorry he'd even created the human race. But until Deuteronomy 7:7-8, the word 'love' is not used to describe God's feelings for us.

Why do you think it took five books of the Bible for God to reveal he loves us? Or did it?

What are some specific examples of how you have experienced God's love in your life?

READ Deuteronomy 8:5

Discipline is not abuse or neglect. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. Discipline, when done right, is an act of love. It is 'saying' you care enough about someone to guide them toward being their best self.

Why do you think we tend to categorize God's discipline as uncaring, unfair, and unloving?

Discipline isn't fun for anyone. But a lack of discipline is downright disastrous. God created us. He knows what is best for us, and that when we deviate from his plan, we will flail and fail.

Think about a time in your life you have been disciplined by God. How does this verse help you understand God's mindset?

READ Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Fear, aka respect. Follow. Love. Serve. Obey. It really is that simple. With God there are no hidden agendas. He doesn't say one thing and mean another. He is transparent in his commands and expectations for us. We are the ones who make it difficult by trying to justify our disobedience, reading between the lines, looking for loopholes, or just ignoring God altogether.

Think about this from the point of view of someone in authority, i.e. parent, teacher, employer, supervisor, or coach. How do you convey your expectations to those you have authority over? How do you deal with those who don't comply? How do you reward those who do?

Chapters 11 through 26 are as straight-forward as you can get—Moses' recitation of the Law. Take a few minutes to glance over God's instructions to the Israelites.

Why do you think God went into so much detail when giving the Law?

We don't have the burden of making sacrifices and offerings. Jesus did that for us by becoming our all-encompassing sacrifice and offering. We are, however, expected to live according to God's expectations and commands for worship, tithing, social issues, tithing, relationships, dealing with unbelievers, war, family matters, and morality. The New Testament is just as clear on what is and isn't acceptable to God. It's true that the moral code and God's definition of sin are spelled out to the tiniest detail in the same way the Law is, but there are reasons for that. The people had been living under the Law for centuries. They knew what constituted sexual immorality. They knew the rituals of sacrifices and offerings. And as for the judicial elements of the Law, most of them were not enforceable because they were living under the rule of other kingdoms.

Read Matthew 5:17-20. What are your thoughts about how the Law works in conjunction with Jesus' ministry and act of ultimate sacrifice?

READ Deuteronomy 23:1-6

Chapter twenty-three of the book of Deuteronomy addresses another issue of God's character that some like to take issue with. It is the 'issue' of exclusivity. The first part of the chapter clearly states that there are some people God will not allow into 'the assembly'; meaning they are not welcome into the nation (people group) of Israel. That's right—not welcome.

The reason is both simple and sound. Purity. God was having enough trouble keeping the Israelites on track. *Allowing* them to add to the problem by inviting idol worship into their presence went against everything God is. God cannot be in the presence of sin, so to allow them to bring these practices into the Tabernacle would have completely displaced God from his own house of worship. This could not be. In putting laws of exclusivity into place God was protecting his people.

These laws were also meant as a warning for us today—a warning that has gone unheeded. The results of ignoring God's warnings to not add or subtract from worshipping him and him only can be seen in our society and sadly in many of our churches today. And as a result, we are a society causing considerable displeasure, sadness, and anger in God.

How has ignoring God's instructions affected the present-day Church?

**How do you reconcile this passage of scripture with the following verses:
1st Corinthians 15:33; 2nd Corinthians 6:14-15; 1st Corinthians 6:9-11;
Proverbs 13:20; Galatians 5:19-21; Matthew 10:14; Proverbs 27:17?**

Looking back over your answers to the previous two questions, what do you think God is saying to us in these verses?

READ Deuteronomy 29:2-9, 29
What life-lessons should we take from these verses?

By the time we get to chapter 31, Moses has:

- Read the Law to the people of Israel
- Reminded them of all they had been through, all they had done to dishonor God, and the enormous blessings they had received as a result of God's love and mercy
- Reaffirmed God's promises to bless them for their obedience
- Warned them of the consequences of their disobedience
- Implored Israel to stay faithful and obedient for all time

Now it is time for Moses to announce to all of Israel that Joshua will be the one to lead them across the Jordan River into the Promised Land of Canaan.

Moses was 120 years old at this point. His age, along with the fact that God was not going to permit him to enter the land, meant that his life here on earth was nearing its end. In turning over the role of leadership to Joshua, Moses was alerting the people that the time for entering into the Promised Land was drawing near.

How might you have felt at this point in time had you been:

Moses—

Joshua—

One of the people of Israel—

READ Deuteronomy 31:7-8

The passing of the torch from Moses to Joshua was a big deal. A really big deal. The Israelites had gone from being under the oppressive rule of Pharaoh, to looking to Moses as their sole source of authority—authority given through God, of course. Add to that the overwhelming amount of evidence proving they weren't good at adapting to change, and it becomes easy to see why Moses felt the need to repeat things like, "Don't be afraid" and "Be courageous".

READ Deuteronomy 31:14-18

Talk about bad news! This couldn't have been the news Moses wanted to hear. After all he'd been through and endured from these people, to know they would someday reject it all, had to be a major disappointment.

Why do you think God told Moses what would happen in the future?

If you were Moses, how would you have felt upon hearing this news?

Chapters 32 and 33 are Moses' farewell speech to the people of Israel. Included in this is a blessing for each tribe. Each blessing is brief and expresses Moses' hope that they (all of Israel) will put themselves in the capable, willing, and loving hands of God.

Prior to blessing each tribe, Moses says something that sums up the purpose and intent of the entire Bible. What are these words?

READ Deuteronomy 32:46-47

"They are not just idle words for you—they are your life...." Fewer words are more powerful than these.

What can you do to allow Moses' words to make a more indelible impression on your life? How can you take these words more to heart?

What does this verse say to you about the unity and cohesiveness of God's Word?

READ Deuteronomy 34

God's purpose for Moses' life was both big and unique. No one before or after him has done what God asked Moses to do. But that doesn't mean God doesn't want you to do something special and unique, too. Remember...big and bold isn't what God's after. He's after sincere, faithful, and obedient.

Summing up Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is a love letter from God and Moses to the people of Israel. Every word of caution, promise, and instruction drips with love—the kind of love only a parent can have for a child.

There is much to be learned from Deuteronomy; life-lessons that lead to a life of abundant blessing and intimacy with God.

Key verses in Deuteronomy

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Deuteronomy has to offer.

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. Deuteronomy 4:2

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Now what I am command you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. Deuteronomy 30:11

Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. Deuteronomy 32:46-47a

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Deuteronomy 31:8

The Book Of Joshua

As is the case with the majority of the books of the Bible, those that are named for a person were written by that individual, i.e. Matthew wrote Matthew, Jeremiah wrote Jeremiah, Joshua wrote Joshua, and so forth. But not always. Esther did not write the book of Esther, Samuel didn't write 1st and 2nd Samuel, Moses couldn't have written the last chapter of Deuteronomy (Joshua most likely did), and Joshua did not write the last few chapters of Joshua. Historians and theologians are all but certain Eleazar wrote the last portion of this Old Testament book.

Joshua was written to provide us with the historical account of Israel's entry into the Promised Land and give us proof and reminders of God's miraculous power, his love for his people, and the reliability of his promises.

What proof and reminders of God's power, love, and promises are evident in your own life?

READ Joshua 1:1-9

Be strong and courageous—it's pretty hard to miss what God is telling Joshua in these verses. But isn't it comforting to know that God 'gets' us? He knows what's running through Joshua's mind—that he's got some pretty giant shoes to fill in taking over the position held by Moses. God knows what Joshua needs and he gives it to him.

It is important to understand, however, that the help God promises doesn't come without some expectations on his (God's) part. He expects Joshua to be strong, courageous, bold, and obedient. Without embracing these qualities, Joshua would not have been able to see or experience God's protection and

provision.

Re-read Joshua 1:8. Why does God place the conditionality of obedience on Joshua and the Israelites?

How do we see this in our own relationship with God?

READ Joshua 1:16-17

After receiving the assurance and instructions from God about going into Canaan, Joshua instructs the people to get ready. This is it—they are finally going to do what they left Egypt to do all those years ago.

As you read those two verses, what thoughts went through your mind?

How confident do you think Joshua was upon hearing the people's response to his instructions? Explain.

Chapter 2 recounts the final act of preparation the Israelites were to make before entering Canaan. It was also when God provided a most unlikely assistant. Rahab...the prostitute.

In order to make sure their plan of attack was strategically correct, and to give the people one final boost of confidence, Joshua sent two spies to verify their perception of the city of Jericho was correct.

It is interesting to note that Joshua sent only two spies—not twelve—on this mission. Moses sent twelve—one for each tribe because that is what God had commanded him to do. God wanted to give each tribe ‘equal say’ (even though God knew what that ‘say’ would be). But Joshua didn’t do that.

Why do you think Joshua sent only two spies?

The spies Joshua sent went to Jericho and went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Rahab’s house was close to one of the city’s walls, making it an excellent hiding place/quick getaway. Rahab was knowledgeable of the Israelites’ capabilities in moving toward Canaan, and she, like everyone else, knew her homeland was their final destination. But what Rahab had that most of her countrymen didn’t was faith. She believed in God and recognized him as the one true God. So, when the spies arrived at her doorstep, Rahab readily took them in and hid them from her own people. In return for Rahab’s kindness the spies promised to spare the lives of Rahab and her family.

READ 2:14-16 and 22-24

Why do you think the attitude of these two spies was so different than the attitude of the ten who had been afraid—subsequently causing them

to wander in the desert for 40 years?

READ Joshua 3:1-5 and 14-17

In verse 5, Joshua tells the people to be ready to witness great miracles from God. It wasn't as if they hadn't already seen God in action, but today was going to be special because:

- This was the day they would finally enter the land that would become theirs
- The miracle from God would trigger childhood memories in some of the people.

What messages did God send the people by providing dry ground for them to cross over on...again?

READ Joshua 4:14

What does this verse tell you about the Israelite people?

What does this verse and Joshua 1:17 tell you about human nature? How are these verses relevant to our relationship with God?

READ Joshua chapter 6

What are your observations of this historical event?

- **Joshua's leadership:**
- **The Israelites:**
- **The emphasis and necessity to pay attention to detail:**
- **God putting his unmatchedable 'signature' on things:**

Now let's take a few minutes to think back to Rahab and the deal she made with the two spies—their lives for hers (and her family's).

The Israelites kept their word; Rahab and her family were kept safe. This experience obviously changed Rahab's life because she married a descendant of Judah (the oldest son of Jacob (Israel)). Rahab's husband was Salmon, They had a son they named Boaz. Boaz, as you will remember/learn, married Ruth, the widowed daughter in-law of Naomi. Ruth and Boaz's great-grandson was King David, and many generations later, our Savior, Jesus, was born from this very same family lineage.

What can we learn from God's provisions for Rahab and her obvious relationship with God?

What can you do to be more aware of the possible Rahabs in your life?

Following the victory at Jericho, the Israelites continued taking over the entire land of Canaan. God was with them in every battle; giving them victory over their enemies just as he promised.

Chapters 7-13 describe the various battles between the Israelites and the people of Canaan. We see that in every situation, God kept his promise; bringing the Israelites victory. Sometimes victory came against all odds. At

others it came despite the sin of disobedience. Let's take a look at a few highlights from these chapters and see what we can learn from them—from both a theological perspective and a personal one.

READ Joshua 7:1; 19-26

Oh, how quickly they forgot their promise to obey God and Joshua! They were part of one of the most miraculous and amazing events in history, yet it wasn't enough for some of them.

It is easy to point fingers and shake our head at the Israelites, but how often do we behave the same way? In what ways do your actions and attitude tell God he is not enough?

READ Joshua 10:12-15

God works differently in the world of today, but that is not to say he doesn't do amazing and miraculous things in our lives. What miracles have you experienced in your life? What miracles have you seen or heard about in the lives of other people?

READ Joshua 13:1

God was essentially telling Joshua he was not going to be able to finish what

he'd started. This had to be bittersweet to Joshua. He surely had a desire to be see the entire Promised Land in the hands of Israel, but yet there is no doubt he was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. The Israelites had a way of doing that to a leader.

Even though God told Joshua his days of military leadership were coming to an end, he was NOT telling Joshua he was done. Joshua still had a very important and monumental task ahead of him—one that took tremendous wisdom, patience, and an air of authority. Joshua possessed an abundance of all three.

What was this job? Joshua was responsible for allotting the land to each of the twelve tribes, according to God's instructions. Chapters 13 through 21 are detailed instructions for how the Land of Canaan is to be divided between the tribes of Israel. Once again God puts a great deal of thought into who would live where. He allotted the land based on the skills and talents of each tribe; giving them the land that would be most favorable to their skillsets. Once this was done, it was time for the people to 'rest', i.e. go about living normal lives instead of constantly being at war. What a relief that must have been!

READ Joshua 21:43-45

Summarize these verses in your own words.

Thinking about the battles you are fighting in your life right now, what do you need to do to give them over to God so you can rest in the assurance that he will never leave you and that you can be victorious in him?

READ Joshua chapter 24

Joshua's life was a living, breathing example of what it looks like to be a true and faithful servant of God. He listened and obeyed. He put aside his human doubts and fears in order to allow God to work in and through him. He faithfully and diligently led the Israelites into battle time and time again. But it was coming to an end, and it was time for him to do what Moses had done—give the people one last heartfelt reminder that they were God's chosen people, and that with the privilege of being God's chosen people, came both blessings and responsibilities.

Among the many things we should learn from Joshua and Moses, is the importance of not leaving things unsaid and undone. Keeping this in mind:

Who do you need to talk to about Jesus?

Whose forgiveness do you need to ask for?

Who do you need to say “I love you”, “Thank you”, and “I forgive you” to?

What important family information do you need to share?

What words of wisdom and advice do you want to pass on to your children and grandchildren?

What is keeping you from saying these things?

READ Joshua 24:31

Joshua died at the age of 110 and was buried in the land given to his people by God. No new leader had been appointed; leaving the duties of leadership to the priests and elders of the tribes. During the lifetimes of these elders, the people of Israel followed God faithfully; remembering all he had done for them in bringing them to the Promised Land of Canaan. This is really quite remarkable, considering their history, but it also gives us hope. If Israel can do it, so can we...don't you agree?

Summing up Joshua

The book of Joshua is an exciting historical account from the perspective of Godly men—Joshua and Eleazar(?). It reminds us that no matter what is going on in our lives, God is there. He has a plan. He has a purpose. All we have to do is be open to his leading.

This generation of Israelites seemed to understand this a bit better than their parents and grandparents did. This is largely due to the fact that this

generation knew nothing but God's leadership. Many had been born in the desert of Sinai. The others had been babies or children when they left Egypt, so they essentially knew nothing but God, Moses, and Joshua.

What should this tell us? It should tell us that in order to be a person, family, church, community, nation, and world that gets to experience God at his finest, he needs to be our only source of leadership. We need to stop looking to other people and things for fulfillment and guidance. Just Jesus. Only Jesus.

The book of Joshua says that if we obey God fully, we will be prosperous and successful...and the Bible does not lie.

Key verses in Joshua

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Joshua has to offer.

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go."
Joshua 1:6-7

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." Joshua 1:8

“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.” Joshua 3:5

“Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle.”
Joshua 22:29

“If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”
Joshua 24:20

“And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”” Joshua 24:24

“So be very careful to love the LORD your God.” Joshua 23:12

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day that you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15

“Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!”” Joshua 24:16

The Book Of Judges

It is believed that Samuel wrote the book of Judges. This is a reasonable assumption, since Samuel was the last of the judges, as well as being the one to hold the position longest and was the most revered by the Israelites.

The book of Judges is an historical account of the years following Israel's entrance into Canaan to the time of the first anointed king of Israel, who was Saul.

The book of Judges reveals that the Israelites continued to live with their same pattern of behavior: disobedience, which led to oppression at the hands of their enemies, which led to their begging God for mercy, which led to repentance, which led to God answering their cries for help. It was a cycle that would continue for several hundred years—that continues even to this day!

What does the Israelites' pattern of behavior say about:

- **God's character**

- **Our character**

READ Judges 1:1-2 and 19-36

The people of Israel had lived their entire lives under the leadership of two people—Moses and Joshua. They knew one set of laws (even though they weren't very good at obeying them) and were really had no idea of what it was like to work together to govern themselves. A government by the people was completely alien to them. Yet when Joshua died, God announced that was exactly what was going to happen.

God told the tribe of Judah that he would give them the power to drive out and destroy the rest of the Canaanite people from the land. He didn't expect them to do it single-handedly, but he did expect them to take a leadership role.

What evidences do you see in chapter 1 of a lack of leadership?

Why do you think the Israelites allowed some of the Canaanites to live?

Why do you think God was so adamant about not leaving any survivors among the Canaanites?

What does this tell you about God's character and nature?

Read: Judges 2:6-22

What is the biggest problem you see in verse 10?

Thinking about your own family's history, how well are you passing on the stories of your ancestors to your children and grandchildren?

Why is this important?

Why do you think the Israelites failed to tell the younger generation about their journey from Egypt and all God had done for them?

Use the space below to write a paragraph or two about your own faith journey. What would you say to influence someone for Christ using your own life's story and experiences?

As a result of their disobedience God allowed their enemies to defeat and plunder the Israelites. The scriptures tell us in Judges 2:15 that the hand of the LORD was against them instead of with them.

God, however, would not and could not break his promise to Abraham to make Israel into a great nation. So rather than allow the Israelites to be completely destroyed, he provided them with judges. The judges were predominantly men who led Israel in similar fashion to Moses and Joshua.

Most of the time the Israelites turned back to God when a new judge was provided to them, but time and time again they returned to their sinful ways of idol worship and depravity. Many of the things Israel did in the name of worship to other gods included human sacrifice and horrific sexual sins. The phrases, “Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD...” and “But when they cried out to the LORD...” are repeated over and over again throughout the book of Judges.

The fact that God is both a firm disciplinarian and merciful forgiver towards Israel should come as no surprise, though, because he does the very same for us each and every day of our lives.

The judges

Over a period of 500 + years, God sent a number of judges to rule over Israel.

- Othniel: The first judge. Nephew and son in-law of Caleb (Joshua’s friend and fellow-spy who told the Israelites they should trust God to help them take possession of Canaan).
- Ehud: He was the left-handed judge who killed King Eglon (the king of Moab). When Ehud thrust his sword into King Eglon’s stomach, it ‘disappeared’ (even the handle) because King Eglon was so fat. Ehud left the sword in the king and turned and walked away without anyone knowing what he had done.

- Shamgar: A judge whose name is not a Hebrew (Israelite) name and there is no mention of what tribe of Israel he belonged to. His loyalty, however, is evident in the fact that he killed several hundred Philistines single-handedly.
- Deborah: Deborah was the only female God chose to lead Israel.

Read each of the following verses. How does Deborah's position as a judge compare with each one when thinking about God's plan for women in his kingdom?

Titus 2:3-5:

1st Corinthians 14:34:

Philippians 4:2-3:

Acts 18:26:

Colossians 4:15:

Proverbs 31:10-31:

- Gideon: Gideon was neither bold nor overly confident, but God saw in him the makings of a great warrior and leader. Gideon had a few trust issues, but God didn't let those get in the way of Gideon living out

God's purpose for his life. Instead, he helped Gideon work through his doubts. And as a result, Gideon led an army of only 300 men to fight and defeat tens of thousands of Midianites and Amalekites. Gideon's later life demonstrates the truth that even the most dedicated men and women of God are not immune to the sin of pride and the temptation to make God less than he is.

READ Judges 6:14-40; 7:1-8 and 7:19-21

God asks us to put our full and complete trust in him, yet he allowed Gideon to question his ability more than once. Why do you think God allowed Gideon to do this?

Have you ever asked God for a fleece, so to speak? Why and what happened?

- Tola: Little is known about him.
- Jair: Little is known about him.

NOTE: Little is known about Tola or Jair, yet together, their leadership gave the Israelites 45 years of peace and living under the blessing of God's favor.

What can we learn from Tola and Jair?

- Jephthah: Son of a prostitute, made knee-jerk statements and promises, but mentioned as a hero of faith in the book of Hebrews.

- Izban: Little is known about him.
- Elon: Little is known about him.
- Abdon: Little is known about him.
- Samson: Samson was the only man recorded in the Bible to required by God to take the Nazarene vow for his whole life. Samson's heart was in the right place, but he had difficulty handling the difficult things God asked him to do.

READ Judges 14:

After all the time God spent telling the Israelites to stay away from the Philistines and other idol-worshipping people, why do you think he wanted Samson to marry one?

What do you think Samson should have done or could have done differently to change the outcome of the situation? Or do you think he could have changed it?

READ Judges 16:1-21

What can we learn from Samson's life—the choices he made and the way he responded to the temptations and turmoil in his life?

The remaining two judges of the Old Testament are not talked about in the book of Judges. They are Eli and Samuel. The period of judges from Othniel to Samson lasted a little less than 300 years. During that period of time, they lived under the oppressive tyranny of their enemies for periods of time

ranging from 8 to 40 years, for a total of just over 100 years.

Reading through the remainder of the book of Judges—chapters 17 thru 21—you will find that in the absences of a judge, when the Israelites weren't fighting their enemies, they were fighting among each other, which is something we have never seen up to this point.

Of course they had disagreements and there were those times when the rebellious few (Dathan and ten of the twelve spies, for example) caused chaos among the tribes, but never before had they gone to battle against each other. And guess what started it...a woman.

The account, which can be found in Judges chapters 19-21 is ugly and perverse in a number of ways. It is impossible to imagine how difficult this had to be for God—to see his children behaving so atrociously.

Sum up Judges

Judges is about learning to live within the boundaries of the law and about developing their social and people skills. They failed miserably at times; giving into sin instead of looking up to God. But we also see that when they had Godly leadership, they were able to live more Godly lives.

What does this tell us? It tells us to:

- Choose our leaders carefully—not based on promises they make, but on the character of their heart, soul, and mind.
- Choose your friends carefully. A person really is known by the company they keep, and we really do learn what we live.
- Share your faith. Share it with your children. Your grandchildren. Your friends and neighbors. People come to know God when they meet him through you. They get to know him better and more intimately when they get to know him with you.
- Be faithful and obedient. God didn't desert the Israelites. They deserted

him.

The book of Judges ends by saying, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” (Judges 21:25) Living this way didn’t work for the Israelites and it won’t work for us, either.

Key verses in Judges

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let’s look at some of what the book of Judges has to offer.

The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel. ~Judges 2:7

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ~Judges 2:10

These are the nations the LORD left to test all the Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan. (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience). ~Judges 3:1-2

But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble! ~Judges 10:13-14

The Book Of Ruth

The author of the book of Ruth is not known, for sure, but because of the style of writing, a mention of King David, and the fact that Ruth was David's great-grandmother.

There are two over-riding themes in the book of Ruth: **redemption and loving devotion.**

READ the book of Ruth (4 chapters)

Who was Ruth

Ruth was the widow of one of Elimelech and Naomi's sons. She was also a Moabitess (not an Israelite) and as you just read, King David's great-grandmother.

Ruth's ethnicity is somewhat interesting due to the fact that in the Mosaic Law God had forbidden the Israelites from marrying anyone who wasn't an Israelite, yet both of Naomi's sons did just that. Why? The Moabites were the descendants of Lot—Abraham's nephew who along with his daughters, escaped Sodom and Gomorrah. Theirs was the land that is now the country of Jordan.

The family had moved to Moab to escape the drought. Ruth 1:4 tells us that after they had lived there ten years, both the boys married. Naturally living in Moab, the majority of people, aka available young women, would be Moabites, so from a logistical point of view, it's easy to see why the boys did that. But...

Read Deuteronomy 23:2-6. In your own words, sum up what these verses are saying.

Read Ruth 1:1. What three words in the last part of this verse tell us that they could have waited, so they could marry Israelite girls?

What are some possible reasons the boys did not wait to marry?

Preachers and Bible scholars have pondered these events for many years. Why, when he expressly said not to associate with the Moabites, did he bestow the honor of being in the direct bloodline of Jesus on one of them?

What other examples in the Bible can you think of in which God does something similar? Example: blessing Jacob despite his lies and deceit.

Ultimately, the reasons Mahlon and Kilion married Ruth and Orpah ultimately don't matter. What matters is that it was obviously God's plan for Ruth to become part of the line of Christ.

Throughout the remainder of the book, we are allowed a rather intimate view into the hearts and minds of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

We know who Naomi and Ruth were. But who was Boaz? What made him so special?

- Boaz was a relative of Naomi's deceased husband.
- Boaz was a man of standing (Ruth 2:2).
- Boaz is listed as being a member of the tribe of Judah—eight generations from Judah (Matthew 1:3-5).
- Boaz was not a 'full' Israelite. His mother was Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute that saved the two unnamed spies who went at Joshua's command to spy on the city of Jericho before they took it over.
- Like Ruth, Boaz was chosen by God to be a part of something big—the biggest event in the history of mankind...salvation.

What five words would you use to describe Ruth's character?

What five words would you use to describe Naomi's character?

What five words would you use to describe Boaz' character?

Through Abraham, God generated (initiated, produced, spawned) the Israelites to be his chosen people. The question is, what were they chosen for?

They were chosen to be the nationality and royal people from which the Prince of Peace, LORD of lords, Savior of man, was born. They didn't see it, though. The Israelites wouldn't take off the blinders of selfishness, greed, fear, and stubborn pride long enough to see God for who and what he really is. They wouldn't *let* God be God, so he withdrew his favor from them. **But hear this: It was never God's intention that *only* the Israelites know him. Not ever.**

Ruth and Boaz are just two examples of the truth of that statement. So are we.

Re-read Deuteronomy 23:2-6. What reasons do you believe God had for keeping the Israelites separate and apart from other people groups?

Read: John 3:16; 1st Kings 8:41-43; Luke 19:10; Acts 10. What changed?

Redemption and loving devotion. In a time when selfishness and sin were the ‘in thing’, God once again proved just how holy, mighty, and unbelievably loving and merciful he is. On the surface, Ruth and Boaz’ marriage gave the three ‘main characters’ hope, love, and security. Their marriage also sent a message of unity and peace to all those who knew them. When you look past the obvious, however, there was more. A lot more.

Summing up Ruth

Once again, those three words—REDEMPTION and LOVING DEVOTION. Do you see how Ruth and Naomi’s journey to Bethlehem leads to Calvary? Because of the union of Rahab, a prostitute who chose to fear and honor God instead of fearing the Israelites, married Salmon—a descendant of Judah. Their love resulted in having a son, Boaz. And the rest, as they say, is history—the historical event that changes everything! Jesus our Savior, who gave his life for our sins, died on the cross at Calvary.

Key verses in Ruth

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let’s look at some of what the book of Ruth has to offer.

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be

my people and your God my God. ~Ruth 1:14

Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. ~Ruth 2:11-12

The Book Of 1st Samuel

The author of 1st Samuel is unknown, but due to the events written about, it was most likely written by shortly after the division of the kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah) in 930 B.C.

The book of 1st Samuel takes us through the end of the period of judges and introduces us to the establishment of kingship in Israel with the anointing of King Saul. From there, the book:

- The miracle of Samuel's birth and unusual upbringing
- Samuel's duties as the last judge of Israel
- Details Saul's reign as Israel's first king
- God's displeasure with Saul; causing him to choose another family line for Israel's future kings
- Samuel anointing David as the future king of Israel
- The struggles of David and Saul's relationship
- Battling the Philistines
- Saul's death

As we read through some of the main events and passages of scripture in the book of 1st Samuel, it is easy to see what God wants us to learn from the miracles, historical events, and the character of the people we 'meet' in this Old Testament book.

God wants us to know that:

- God blesses those who are obedient to him
- God is not afraid or apologetic for using extreme measures to accomplish his goals and purposes
- Extreme disobedience calls for extreme disciplinary measures
- God wants us to learn from our mistakes
- Sin and weakness don't have to define us—we can change
- God sees beyond the surface of our exterior appearance—he sees our hearts, and that is what he is most concerned about

READ 1st Samuel 2:12-26

If you were Hannah, how confident would you be in leaving your child with Eli? Explain.

What does this say to you about God's ability to work in and in spite of the worse possible circumstances?

Eli was already an old man by the time Samuel came to him to be raised in the temple. But knowing he didn't have many years left and knowing his own two sons were evil and had no business taking on the role of priest, gave Eli the strength and desire to pour all he could into Samuel. He wanted very much to prepare Samuel to be God's willing servant.

READ 1st Samuel 3:19-21

God did indeed have plans for Samuel. God called Samuel directly late one night while Samuel was in bed. Samuel thought it was Eli calling him, but after going to Eli a third time after thinking he heard Eli calling for him, Eli realized it was God's voice Samuel was hearing. Eli told Samuel to answer, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening". Samuel did what Eli told him to do and from that day on the LORD was with Samuel. (1st Samuel 3)

READ 1st Samuel 4:3-11

The Ark of the Covenant which God had instructed the craftsmen to build back in Exodus 25, had stayed with the Israelites since the day it was placed

in the Tabernacle. It had been carried over the Jordan River before the Israelites crossed over to enter the Promised Land and during the time Samuel was living under Eli's tutelage, the Ark of the Covenant resided in the temple at Shiloh.

While Eli was still the judge and was raising Samuel up to take his place, the Philistines and the Israelites went to battle...again. The Philistines were winning, which led to the Israelite's decision to take the Ark of the Covenant into battle with them. This proved to be a grave mistake because the Philistines stole the Ark of the Covenant and killed several Israelites—including Eli's two sons.

When Eli heard of his sons' deaths, he surely felt some sense of grief, but when Eli learned that the Ark of the Covenant had been stolen, he fell out of his chair, broke his neck, and died (at the age of ninety-eight). The forty-year leadership of Eli had come to an end and Samuel was now the leader of all of Israel.

Read 1st Samuel 5:1-4 and 6-9 and 1st Samuel 6:1-3 and 13-15

The Philistines didn't worship God, but yet they acknowledged and recognized his power and holiness.

What would (or do) you say to someone who admits God is real, but sees no need to honor and obey him?

Today we might refer to what the Philistines did as 'fire insurance'—doing what they need to do to appease God's wrath, aka stay out of hell. Are you ever guilty of just going through the motions—doing just enough to try to stay on God's good side? How does this incident challenge you to go deeper?

Chapters 8 thru 11 detail why the Israelites wanted a king, how they went about asking for one, who God chose, and the circumstances under which he (Saul) was anointed and placed in the position as the first king of Israel.

Why did the people want a king? (1st Samuel 8:1-5)

How did God feel about the Israelites' desire for a king? (1st Samuel 8:7-8)

God gave them what they asked for, even though he knew it wasn't in their best interest. Why did he do that?

When have you ignored God in order to pursue your own desires—even though they weren't in your best interest—spiritually and otherwise?

What happened?

In chapter 12, we read Samuel's farewell speech. It will be several years yet before Samuel dies, but at this point his job is done. Saul is on the throne as king; negating Samuel's authority over the people as their judge. In his speech, Samuel called on Israel to open their eyes and hearts to who God is. He cautioned them to not see their new king as the ultimate authority, but rather he encouraged them to encourage Saul to be a man of God who ruled in accordance to God's will and commands.

In an effort to emphasize the importance of giving God his rightful place, Samuel called on God to give the people a sign. He did. He sent rain and thunder—something that had never happened at that time of year before. Ever.

READ 1st Samuel 12:19

What is so heartbreaking about this verse?

God chose Saul to be king of Israel with the intention of establishing Saul's family as the royal family of Israel for generations to come. There was nothing especially special about Saul from a human point of view. He wasn't skilled in military leadership. He wasn't exceedingly wealthy. He didn't possess above-average intelligence. He was a Benjamite—the smallest of the tribes of Israel. But God saw potential in Saul.

Saul did not remain in God's favor for very long, however, because Saul chose to do things his way instead of God's way. But because God had promised Saul he would be king, he allowed Saul to sit on the throne of Israel for his lifetime (from the age of 30 to the age of 72). Both his reign and his personal life, however, were filled with strife, paranoia, sadness, and general dysfunction. (1st Samuel chapters 13 thru 15).

READ 1st Samuel 15:22-23

What lesson is there for us in these verses?

What character flaws caused Saul's downfall?

How can we avoid these things in our own lives?

Samuel had given his farewell speech, but God wasn't quite done with him. He still had one very important job to do.

READ 1st Samuel 16:1-13

What contrasts can you think of between Saul and David?

Shortly after being anointed the next king of Israel, David entered the service

of King Saul. His primary job was to soothe Saul's troubled mind in an effort to curb his violent outbursts. Saul did not know at this point that David was to be his successor, but David did. This didn't affect David's attitude of humility or respect for Saul, though. David never once lorded it over Saul that he would one day be sitting on the throne.

READ 1st Samuel 16:14

This is one of the most troubling verses in scripture. There are three reasons for the confusion:

- 1: People are looking for an excuse to discredit God.
- 2: A loss of meaning in translation from Hebrew to English—there is no translatable English word for the Hebrew word, 'eth'. It is an accusative; meaning the closest word in English to this is 'from'.
- 3: Our inability (or refusal) to see God as the Holy One; the One to whom all glory, honor, praise, and obedience is due.

What are your thoughts on this verse? NOTE: Please read the comments at the back of the book about this passage of scripture.

Do you understand that ultimately all things either come from God or are allowed by God? Explain.

Chapter 17 gives us the account of David killing Goliath. If you aren't familiar with this miraculous event, read chapter 17. If you are, you will

know that this incident, and the attention David received afterwards, was the beginning of Saul's jealousy, hatred, and fear of David.

READ 1st Samuel 18:6-11.

David was the most popular guy in the kingdom; putting Saul into a jealous rage that resulted in a lifelong grudge against his humble, yet capable and wise successor.

Chapters 18 thru 30 recall numerous events in the lives of David and Saul. These events cover a span of several years—years in which David is either running from Saul or trying to convince Saul he had no intention of taking his job away from him. David was perfectly willing to wait for God’s timing.

Read each of the following passages of scripture from 1st Samuel and answer the questions.

- **1st Samuel 18:17-21; 19:1-6; 19:11-16; 20:28-33** Look at the following words and describe how each of them pertains to the verses you just read:
 - **Steadfastness:**
- **Courage:**
- **Betrayal:**
- **Honor:**

- **Fear:**
- **Integrity:**
- **Read: 1st Samuel 24:1-13** On more than one occasion, David had the chance to kill Saul, but didn't. What does this say about David's character?
- **What can David's response to Saul teach you about getting even with people who treat you badly?**

READ 1st Samuel 25:1

1st Samuel 25:1 makes the simple statement that Samuel died and was buried in Ramah—the town of his birth. That's it. No fanfare. No details about a period of mourning. Nothing other than a simple 'he died'.

The Bible tells us Samuel was a Godly man who led the people down a Godly path for twelve years or so. There is nothing negative written about the man, yet there are few specifics other than his anointing of Saul and David

and his farewell speech.

What does this say to you about the kind of people God is looking for?

**You don't have to be dynamic or flamboyant to effectively serve God.
How can your daily routine and attitude better reflect Jesus?**

The remainder of chapter 25 thru chapter 30 finds David living among Israel's enemies. At times, (chapter 27 and 29) David even fights with the Philistines.

Why do you think David did this?

READ 1st Samuel 29:4-11

"Too good to be true" is the saying that would best sum up the Philistine rulers' attitude toward David. They didn't trust him, and they weren't willing to give him the opportunity to prove himself. At first glance this might seem unfair, but once again (as always) God knows best. He knows what is coming and how to keep us safe—sometimes protecting us from ourselves.

Can you think of similar situations in history, or even your personal life,

when it was necessary to step away from your family or church family, for the safety or benefit of yourself and others? Explain.

The final chapter of 1st Samuel (chapter 31) recounts the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites—the one David was not allowed to participate in. The fighting was fierce, Saul's sons were killed, and King Saul was wounded and captured.

READ 1st Samuel 31:4-6

Had David been there, he might very well have been the one to mortally wound the king or one of his sons—possibly even his best friend, Jonathan. God did not want David to have these things on his conscience. Neither did he want to risk David being killed by the Philistines for refusing to kill Saul or his sons.

Saul's death ended a 42-year period of civil and spiritual unrest. In just a matter of days afterwards, David is called upon to take his promised (by God) position as King of Israel.

Summing up 1st Samuel

While it is fair to say the book of 1st Samuel is highly historical in nature with strong elements of adventure and drama, one should not read the book without taking away the undeniable spiritual lessons God wants us to learn:

- We are to obey God without exception
- God blesses those who obey him and disciplines those who disobey
- God's timing is perfect and when we wait on God's timing, we will never be disappointed
- God expects and accepts nothing less than our whole heart and our best
- If we reject God, we have no right to expect his protection and provision
- If we reject God, we are throwing the door wide open to let Satan into our hearts and minds

Key verses in 1st Samuel

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of 1st Samuel has to offer.

There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ~ 1st Samuel 2:2

Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who know, and by him deeds are weighed. ~ 1st Samuel 2:3

But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. ~1st Samuel 12:25

Does the LORD delight n burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in

obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. ~1st Samuel 15:22

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”. ~ 1st Samuel 16:7

David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with the sword and the spear and the javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” ~ 1st Samuel 17:45

The Book Of 2nd Samuel

The books of 1st and 2nd Samuel were originally thought to be one manuscript. Therefore, the author of 2nd Samuel is also unknown.

The book of 2nd Samuel is a historical account of the reign of King David following King Saul's death. It is a book filled with action, adventure, family drama, victories and defeats. The book also gives us a brutally honest look into the life of the man who was described by God himself as being "A man after God's own heart"—even when the heart of David was marred with sins most of us never deal with in our own lives. So beyond the historical value of the book of 2nd Samuel, the book overflows with the truth of God's redemptive love.

The fact that God is ready, willing, and able to forgive and redeem us back into his loving arms cannot be missed in 2nd Samuel. Time and time again we see David falling victim to temptation followed by remorse, regret, and most importantly, repentance. David makes some pretty big mistakes in his life, but it is worth noting that he never makes the same mistake twice. He sinned—as we all do—but he did not lead a sinful lifestyle. He did not allow himself to fall into a pattern of repeating the same sins over again. He truly desired to be one with God, and he was always thankful for God's forgiving nature.

READ 2nd Samuel 1:1-10

Chapter 1 begins with David learning of Saul and Jonathan's deaths from the man who claims to have killed Saul. But if you will remember, Saul took his own life (1st Samuel 31:1-6).

Why would someone admit to a crime they didn't commit—especially the crime of killing the king?

Have you ever taken credit for something you didn't do in hopes of being rewarded? What happened?

David's actions were very king-like. Why wouldn't they be? After all, he had been anointed as the next king of Israel by Samuel approximately eight years before King Saul died. He had also spent most of those eight years running from Saul. We read, however, that **David's reign over Israel** did not begin right away.

READ 2nd Samuel 2:1-2; 2:8-11 and 3:1

We just reminded ourselves that David spent approximately eight years knowing he was going to be king while Saul was still on the throne. We also know that David was completely respectful of that—he wasn't greedily and impatiently biding his time or trying to hurry the process along.

In the verses you just read, it is revealed that David's time of waiting was not over the day Saul died. He waited seven and one-half years, to be exact, before he was king of *all* Israel.

This period of waiting and warring between the tribes of Israel is not something we've every spent much time on in Sunday school and church. We tend to assume that David stepped into his role after an appropriate period of mourning and that everything was easy-peasy and smooth sailing. It wasn't.

What difficulties and obstacles caused the transition to take so long?

What happens within a group of people when there is a lack of leadership?

Chapters 3 and 4 highlight the problems the Israelites faced in the absence of unity and solid leadership. But in chapter 5, those tribes who had remained loyal to Saul's memory, remembered David's loyalty, his abilities as a warrior and leader, and most importantly, they remembered that God himself had said, "You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler."

READ 2nd Samuel 5:3-4

Why do you think it took so long for the people of Israel to remember what God said and to trust him by making David their king?

How would your life be different if you stopped trying to handle things on your own and remembered God's promises to never leave you, to carry your burdens, and to work all things for your good?

David quickly establishes himself as an excellent and trustworthy king. He puts God first and the people of Israel second. But in chapter 6 we see that David feels called to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem from Judah,

where it had been residing for several years.

READ 2nd Samuel 6

What do you learn about God's character in this chapter?

What are your thoughts regarding David's anger at God? How would you have responded?

We read in verse 8 that David was afraid of God, yet in the verses that follow, we see David praising and worshipping God without restraint and without any concerns for dignity, or proper etiquette. We also learn that by choosing God over his wife, Micah, the relationship between husband and wife was fractured.

What should we take from David's willingness to praise and worship God no matter what other people say or think?

Who or what holds you back from worshipping God with your whole heart, soul, and mind?

What can you do to remove these obstacles from your life?

Chapter 7 recounts the exchange between God, David, and the prophet, Nathan concerning building of the temple. In looking around at all his material wealth, David felt guilty. He wanted God to have a place even more beautiful and amazing to reside in other than the Tent that had been constructed by the Israelites over 400 years prior to that.

God had other plans, though. God had already chosen David's son, Solomon (who wasn't even born yet) to build the temple further on into the future.

The take-away from this chapter should be this: when God says no to our plans—even when those plans are well-intentioned worship and ministry-minded—we need to listen.

Have you ever felt like God was saying no even when what you wanted to do would honor him? How did you respond?

What does this chapter of 2nd Samuel teach you about Christian ministry and service?

What does it say about David's character that a man in his position was so willing to take no for an answer?

Chapters 8 thru 10 record the blessings and rewards that come from making God number one in our lives. Because of David's obedience and humility toward God, he was successful in battle and gained the admiration, love, and respect of his people.

READ 2nd Samuel 8:13; 9:1 and 9:3-7

Three words come to mind when reading these verses: LOYALTY, RESEPECT, and LOVE.

How did David's actions toward Mephibosheth demonstrate each of these qualities toward Jonathan? Toward God?

LOYALTY to Jonathan

LOYALTY to God

RESPECT for Jonathan:

RESPECT for God:

LOVE for Jonathan:

LOVE for God:

What can you do to repay the love and respect shown to you by someone who has loved you as a friend and who has been a positive spiritual influence in your life?

READ 2nd Samuel 11 and 12:1-25

Life gets ugly sometimes—even for those who truly love the LORD. What we need to understand, though, that sometimes life gets ugly because we live in a fallen world, and sometimes it gets ugly because *we make it that way*.

When life just happens...Cancer strikes. Tragic accidents happen. Financial hardships come due to circumstances beyond our control. Spouses cheat and break our hearts and homes apart. These things are the result of the sinful world we live in. But there are also David commits the sins of adultery, fornication, conspiracy, and even murder

When we give in to temptation...Addiction happens. Material possession become our god. Lies become our 'truth'. We justify stealing and cheating. Marriages and homes are destroyed because of adultery. And on and on the list goes.

David experienced both types of ugliness in his life. In this particular incident, the ugliness was the result of David giving in to sin. Sin didn't find David—he pursued it.

David's lust leads to irreversible consequences, which then leads to more

irreversible actions. Not only that, but the repercussions of David and Bathsheba's sin cost people their lives.

Many people see Bathsheba as an innocent victim, too; saying that as a woman and a subject of the king, she could not refuse him. What do you think?

Why do you think God took the life of the child born to David and Bathsheba because of their adultery? Do you think God was too harsh? Explain.

What words would you use to describe God's actions and character by him choosing to bless David and Bathsheba with another child—a son that would become the wisest man to *ever* live?

We cannot ignore or deny the message of forgiveness and redemption in reading about the lives of David and Bathsheba. What do you need to seek and accept God's forgiveness for?

Do you have someone in your life who will hold you accountable the way Nathan did David? If so, thank this person for caring that deeply about you and ask them to continue to pray for you. If not, ask God to send someone into your life to do so—someone you can trust and who will always have your best interest at heart. Who are these people or who might they be?

Chapters 13 thru 22 cover the highs and lows of David's reign over Israel. Among the lowest of these lows is the turmoil in David's own family. Incest, rape, revenge, disrespect, deception, heartache, and death are the earmarks of the dysfunction in David's family. As a parent, David is riddled with sadness and a sense of helplessness over not being able to 'fix what is broken. As a king, however, he knows he has to do what is right in God's eyes and what is best for Israel.

These events are tragic, to say the least, but we know that unfortunately, it is not uncommon to see this same kind of dysfunction (to varying degrees) in families today...both in and out of the Church.

How might things have been different had Absalom been honest and upfront about wanting to see Amnon pay for his crimes?

What do these events teach us about how to 'do' family?

What do you think God wanted David (and us) to learn from these events?

READ 2nd Samuel 21:13-17

Following Absalom's death David continued to lead Israel in standing strong and firm *against* their advisories and *in* the LORD. We also see that David is beginning to grow physically weary. We can estimate David's age at this time to be about 70 years old. Considering so many of the people in the Bible lived to be much older, we look at that number—70—and wonder why he was wearing out so 'soon'. What we need to remember, however, is that:

- By this point in history men (and women) were not living as long as they had in the earliest days of man's existence.
- David had lived a hard and stressful life. He was God's chosen king for his chosen people, but the years of battle, family dysfunction, and the deaths of some of his children had taken their toll.

So yes, David was weary and knew his time as king and here on earth was almost over. In chapters 22 and 23:1-7, David sings one final song of praise to God and records a few final words of wisdom everyone should take to heart.

The second half of chapter 23 is one of David's final acts as king and a time in which his sin had far-reaching effects; effecting people who played no part in his wrongdoing.

READ 2nd Samuel 24

It is important not to skim over this too quickly. If we do, we'll miss the morals of the story, so to speak, and just get the story itself. Not just this particular incident, but the entire message God needs us to receive from David's reign over Israel.

Verse 1 says that God was (already) angry with Israel and that because of his anger, he (God) incited, i.e. *provoked, allowed*, David's anger toward the people. David's anger then led to him order a census of the people of Judah and Israel.

- God was already angry at the Israelites. We aren't told what that something is, but it doesn't take much of an imagination to safely assume it had something to do with worshipping something other than God and living in blatant disobedience to the Law.
- Next we read God incited David to count the able-bodied men. You need to understand that God did NOT cause David to sin, but rather allowed him to be tempted by Satan. This is not an uncommon occurrence or even a trick. ALL temptation by Satan—no matter who it is directed toward—is allowed by God. God is the master and creator of the universe. ALL things happen for no other reason than he *allows* it to happen. David had the same free choice as we do. In 1st Chronicles 21:1 we read the same account. It gives Satan 'credit' for tempting David. This is not a contradiction, but rather an affirmation of the completeness of scripture. It's like an answer to the question that rises to our minds when reading this verse.
- Why was it wrong to count the people? There were several reasons. God didn't tell him to. The army didn't belong to David. It belonged to God. God didn't want David to trust in numbers, but rather in God's power to defeat their enemies. There was no need at this point to know how many fighting men there were—this was a time of peace.
- It is also very interesting to note that God put it upon the writer's heart to separate the two kingdoms (Israel and Judah) before they were actually separate kingdoms...again. This in itself could have caused animosity between the two groups; making them vulnerable to attacks by other people groups.

The lessons to be learned in these verses are that God allows us to be tempted in order to test our faith, strengthen our relationship with him, and to humble our hearts and minds by making us realize how real and powerful Satan is, and how powerless we are on our own against him.

Which of the following words (choose as many as you want) describes how you feel knowing the reasons God allows you to be tempted by Satan? Explain.

- **Frustrated**

- **Resolute**

- **Fearful**

- **Confused**

- **Humble**

- **Determined**

Verses 2-4 tell us that Joab, who was not necessarily a God-first kind of guy, all but begged David not to count the people. It's also obvious that the other military officials agreed with Joab and came with him to make their case to King David against taking the census. David refused to listen.

The lesson in these verses is to realize the importance of prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines that keep us close to God, and our need for spiritual mentors who can and will hold us accountable.

Circle the spiritual disciplines that are a part of your daily (or weekly) routine. Put an X on those you rarely or never practice. Put a line under those you are ready and willing to commit to making part of your life.
NOTE: You might put more than one mark on some of them.

**PRAYER
FELLOWSHIP**

BIBLE STUDY

WORSHIP

**TITHING
CONFESSION**

FASTING

SERVICE

MEDITATION

STEWARDSHIP

Verses 9 and 10 find David feeling guilt, remorse, and asking forgiveness from God for doing such a "...foolish thing".

The lesson in these verses is to never be too proud to confess our sins to God and to repent. There is nothing God won't forgive if we ask him to.

Are you keeping yourself distanced from God because of past or current sins in your life? What do you need to ask God's forgiveness for? Are you willing to accept that forgiveness and move forward?

Verses 13-17 reveals the consequences God brought upon David and the people.

The lessons we should take from these four verses are that our sins affect (hurt) other people, our sin breaks God's heart, and that God takes no joy in punishing us for our sins.

How have your sins affected other people? Have you asked these people to forgive you? Have you done what you can to make amends? If not, will you?

Verses 18-25 are among the most beautiful and impactful passages of scripture in the Bible. They show us why God had no trouble in calling David a man after his (God's) own heart—how despite the sins David allowed himself to commit, he never waived in his heart-felt and genuine desire to be *with* God, *for* God, and *like* God (as much as a man can be).

The condition of David's heart is so evident in these verses. Not only is he ready and willing to fully obey God's instructions, he does so with genuine love for God and humble repentance. David realized what his actions (sin) had cost God (the lives of thousands of his children), and he wasn't about to offer up a sacrifice that didn't require at least some sort of sacrifice on *his* part.

The lesson to be learned in these verses is humility. We owe God everything. We are nothing without him.

In this chapter we see how God sacrificed thousands of his children so that David could grow in his faith. God sacrificed his very own son, Jesus, so that you and I can live forever with him in heaven. Use this space to write God a thank-you note for his selfless sacrifice.

Summing up 2nd Samuel

Drama, dysfunction, sin, faith, repentance, forgiveness, humility, pride, greed, obedience, loyalty, compassion...examples of all of these things (and more) can be found in the book of 2nd Samuel. In reading this particular account of David's reign over Israel, we learn that people then are really no different than people today. Why should they be, though? The same God that created us, created them. They had the same emotions, feelings, and thoughts we have. They were tempted by the same Satan we are. They were loved by the same God we are. They needed a Savior just like we do.

The book of 2nd Samuel is an excellent reminder of how and how not to live

life. It reminds us of the fact that no temptation is too big that God cannot lift us up and over it...if we let him. If we *let* him...not if we expect him to without asking. God sacrifices so much for us, why wouldn't we want to share back with him?

Key verses in 2nd Samuel

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of 2nd Samuel has to offer.

David asked him, "Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?" ~2nd Samuel 1:14

How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. ~2nd Samuel 7:22

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—from violent men you save me. ~2nd Samuel 22:2-3

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. ~2nd Samuel 22:31

But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” ~2nd
Samuel 24:24

The Book Of 1st Kings and 2nd Kings

The author (or authors) of the books of 1st and 2nd Kings is not known for sure, but it is obvious the writer (or writers) is familiar with the Law of Moses given by God to the Israelites.

The 2 books of Kings provides for us with the spiritual and physical history of the kingdom of Israel beginning with the reign of Solomon—the son of David and Bathsheba—and ends with Judah being taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

The first two chapters sets the stage for history repeating itself. Just like David had to compete with Ish-Bosheth to become king of both Israel and Judah, Solomon had to fight his half-brother Adonijah to establish himself as king of all Israel. Also like his father, David. Solomon's reign as king of all Israel did not happen overnight. It took several years for him to establish his credibility and rightful position.

Just like God chose David to be king, he chose Solomon to take his father's place (2nd Samuel 7), so why do you believe history repeated itself?

What examples of split loyalties have you seen in the Church?

When these things happen, what do you believe is the best way to resolve these issues?

A condensed version of Solomon's reign as king is given to us in chapters 1 thru 11. Let's take a look at some of the highlights and see what they have to say to us.

READ 1st Kings 2:1-3.

Why is this advice relevant to everyone—not just kings and other leaders?

READ 1st Kings 3:1-15

What are the dangers of obeying God in everything EXCEPT (fill in the blank)?

Do you believe these verses validate the need for corporate worship? Explain.

READ 1st Kings 3:16-28

What words would you use to describe Solomon's decision and ruling?

Why do you think the people were so amazed at how Solomon handled the situation?

When have you benefitted from taking a few (or a lot) moments to take a commonsense approach to things rather than making knee-jerk reactions?

READ 1st Kings 4:20-34

Who received the promise from God verified by the first sentence in verse 20? HINT: Genesis 22:17

It is nearly impossible to read this passage of scripture without words like 'excess', 'entitlement', and 'overindulgence' coming to mind. Yet we see God continuing to bless Solomon with even more material possessions, intellect, power, and popularity.

Do you believe Solomon's wealth and power were blessings or a test of faith? Or both?

How do you reconcile this passage of scripture to Mark 10:25?

God promised David his son would build the temple David wanted to build for God. Chapters 6 thru 8 detail the events of the building of the Temple, its dedication, and Solomon's palatial residence.

Solomon began building the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, which was 480 years after the exodus from Egypt. (6:1) As excessive as Solomon's daily provisions seem, one cannot miss the obvious—that Solomon's provisions were nothing compared to what he put toward the building of the Temple—the dwelling place of God and the Ark of the Covenant.

Solomon's attention to detail and his 'spare no expense' attitude speak well of the man King Solomon was. But if choosing a single verse that revealed Solomon's heart, that verse would be 1st Kings 6:7.

READ 1st Kings 6:7

What thoughts run through your mind when you read this verse?

What do you think this verse says about the respect and reverence we should show God? How do we balance this respect and reverence with making a joyful noise to the LORD? Repairing the church building? Ministry projects that are noisy?

It is fascinating to read and think about the degree of skill and manual labor that went into such a massive undertaking. We often think the people from that period of history were illiterate and unskilled. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Think about it—can you hand-carve ornate doors or palm leaves that turned in sockets? Or what about carving angels in doors and then overlaying them with gold?

The details are humbling because it serves as a reminder that if God is that concerned about the details of a building, which he expressed his pleasure for, how much more is his interest in each of us—the children created in his image?

READ 1st Kings 6:11-13

How does this verse answer the question of God's interest in who we are?

The pomp and circumstance and the assembly of worship that took place in dedicating The Temple included bringing the Ark of the Covenant to its place of honor in this building consecrated to the LORD. Solomon's prayer to dedicate the Temple is found in 1st Kings 8:22-61. Solomon's wisdom can be seen throughout this prayer.

READ 1st Kings 8:22-61

In what ways do you see this prayer as being relevant to us today?

READ 1st Kings 9:1-9

What does God desire above all else?

Unfortunately, Solomon's wealth, wisdom, and fame pulled him away from God for a period of time. Solomon had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines (mistresses) (1st Kings 11:3). These foreign wives, who worshipped idols and false gods, tempted Solomon's heart away from God and he gave in to those temptations. Solomon began worshipping their gods. Because of Solomon's sin, God came to Solomon and told him the kingdom would not remain in the hands of his family—that it would be ripped from the hands of his son.

True to his promise, near the end of Solomon's life, one of Solomon's officials, whose name was Jeroboam, rebelled against Solomon. Following Solomon's death Jeroboam led the revolt against Israel's new king, Rehoboam (Solomon's son).

The revolt resulted in the division of Israel. Ten tribes followed Jeroboam to form the kingdom of Israel, while two remained with Rehoboam to form the kingdom of Judah.

ISRAEL: Asher, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Naphtali, Ephriam/Manesseh, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun

JUDAH: Judah, Benjamin

You might be wondering why the tribe of Levi is not mentioned. Because the tribe of Levi was not part of Israel's fighting forces or labor forces, they are not mentioned. From all indications, the loyalties of the Levites—the priestly tribe—were split. Some went with the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and some with the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

Beginning in the twelfth chapter of 1st Kings all the way through the end of 2nd Kings we are provided with a listing of sorts of the kings, but more importantly, we are given a glimpse into the hearts of the Israelite people during these tumultuous years.

2nd Kings ends with the fall of both kingdoms—both being taken captive by great empires in history. But it wasn't the strength of the Babylonians or Assyrians that ultimately caused the kingdoms to fall. It was God's plan of discipline and punishment for Israel's unrelenting faithless disobedience that ultimately led to their fall.

The kingdom of Judah had 20 kings over a period of 339 years before being taken over by the Babylonians. Of those 20 kings, 6 were Godly men, 2 started out following God, but ended up falling away from him, and 12 were godless, evil men.

Three of Judah's kings are deserving of special mention: Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah.

Hezekiah's life is interesting in the fact that he begged God for more time on earth and got it. It happened like this...

Hezekiah became very ill and the prophet Isaiah was sent by God to tell Hezekiah that the illness he was suffering from was one he wouldn't recover from. Hezekiah was going to die. King Hezekiah wasn't ready to die, though. We aren't really told why, but in reading 2nd Kings 20:1-11 we are told that Hezekiah prayed and cried out to God; asking God to heal him and give him more time on earth. Hezekiah's plea takes on a bargaining tone: "...O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes..." (Hezekiah 20:3) God granted Hezekiah the desire of his heart by telling him he will add fifteen years to his life. At the end of the fifteen years Hezekiah died and his son Manasseh

became king.

Manasseh was the absolute worst of all the kings of Judah. He rebuilt all the idols his father had ordered torn down. He placed an Asherah pole (an idol to the fertility goddess) in The Temple. His depraved heart, soul, and mind led him to commit all sorts of terrible sins against himself and others (and of course, against God). Manasseh's sins were so great that God's anger could no longer be contained and his patience with Judah was gone. Because of Manasseh's sin, God decided that when the time was right, he would destroy them by handing them over to the Babylonians.

But because God knows the hearts and minds of everyone and because he sees the future that we cannot see, he sat on his anger. Why? Because of Manasseh's grandson, Josiah.

Josiah was the grandson of Manasseh and came to power a little more than two years after Manasseh's death and his own father's death (who ruled after Manasseh did). Josiah was just an eight year-old little boy when he took the throne. He was the youngest king to lead Judah and one of the longest serving kings (thirty-one years). King Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the LORD *all* the days of his life. He was faithfully obedient in all things. During the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign he ordered and oversaw some major repairs of The Temple. In the process of getting the work done, the Book of the Law (the Mosaic Law) was found and read by Josiah's secretary, Shaphan, to King Josiah.

When Josiah heard the Law being read, he was even more committed than ever to bring the people's hearts back to God...where they belonged. Josiah's actions and heart did not go unnoticed or unappreciated by the LORD. Because of Josiah's faithfulness, God allowed Judah to remain intact until after Josiah died.

How Josiah came to know and love the LORD so intently is mind-boggling since he had no positive spiritual fraternal influence. But God had a plan and a purpose for the young king—a plan and a purpose stronger than all the sin and evil in the world.

What does Josiah's life say to you about reaching out to and praying for

people we often consider hopeless or ‘lost causes’?

The kingdom of Israel had 19 kings in the 204 years they ruled themselves before being taken over by the Assyrians. Out of those 19 kings, only 1—Jehu—was not completely godless and evil. At the beginning of his reign, he tried to follow God and lead the people in that direction, but he failed. Instead, he followed the people in their godless choices.

What does this say to you about the importance of choosing the people you trust to lead you (in your home, your church, your community, and our country)?

Despite the godlessness of the kings, not everyone followed in their footsteps. Because of these few, God was not ready to give up on Israel, so he raised up prophets to reach out to the people in an effort to soften their hearts for God. Let’s look at the prophets God sent to Judah and Israel.

Elijah

Elijah was a prophet and faithful man of God who lived in Israel. God used Elijah in some extraordinary and miraculous ways—primarily during the

reign of King Ahab, the worst of Israel's kings.

READ 1st Kings 17; 18:16-39;

God needed to know Elijah would trust God to provide for him during the worst and best of times—that God was never going to leave Elijah hanging out there on his own. To do that, God sent Elijah into hiding during a severe famine; using Ravens to bring him food and to supply water from an otherwise dry creek bed. Because Elijah trusted God during this time, God went on to use Elijah in some very powerful ways including:

- Bringing God's miraculous blessings into the home of a poor widow and her son, and later bringing the son back to life
- Humiliating the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel by allowing God to show himself in mighty, mighty ways in order to prove he is the One True God
- Acting as a mentor to Elisha, who would serve as God's prophet and spiritual leader after Elijah

Elisha

READ 1st Kings 19:19-21

Elisha's call to prophecy is somewhat different than with the other prophets we meet throughout the Old Testament. It is different in the fact that he studies under Elijah, whereas the other prophets did not have a mentor or teacher, other than God himself speaking to them.

Do you have a spiritual mentor? If so, how have you benefitted from this relationship? If not, why not consider asking someone to be that kind of friend and brother or sister in Christ for you? Who might you ask?

Who can you be a spiritual mentor to and how?

The remaining 3 chapters of 1st Kings relates the exploits of some more of the kings of Israel and Judah. It is sad to read over and over, words like, “He did evil in the eyes of the LORD” and a relief on the rare occasions when we read, “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD”. It seems that nothing much has changed since then, doesn’t it? The world is filled with two kinds of people—those who do evil in the eyes of the LORD and those who walk in the way of the LORD.

What can you do to make sure people see Jesus in you?

In the second chapter of 2nd Kings we read about Elijah’s unique exit from life here on earth.

READ 2nd Kings 2:1-12

After Elijah was gone, Elisha became God’s instrument of prophecy and miracles in an effort to win the hearts of Israel.

READ Each of the following

By the power of God, Elisha:

- Made rancid water safe for drinking (2:19-22)
- Gave hope and financial security to a penniless widow (4:1-7)
- Brought a young boy back to life (4:8-37)
- Saved a group of men from food poisoning (4:38-41)
- Fed 100 people with little food (4:42-44)

What miracles did Jesus do that were similar to each of these?

- Healed a man with leprosy (5:1-15)

When have you been guilty of thinking God's ways are not quick enough, flashy enough, or boring?

How would your relationship with God be different if you spent more time seeing him in the simple, quiet things in life?

The remainder of the book of 2nd Kings gives us a summary of all the kings of Israel and Judah until each kingdom falls into the hands of its captor. As you learned earlier in this lesson, despite having the example of men like Elijah and Elisha, none of Israel's kings did right in the eyes of the LORD. This is undoubtedly the reason Israel was the first of the two kingdoms to fall.

READ 2nd Kings 17

While King Hoshea was king of Israel, Assyria captured the capitol city of Israel, which was Samaria, and took the people captive. From there the exile took in the entire kingdom. This took place around 721-722 BC. The ten tribes were scattered throughout the land and to this day have not been 'found'. While there are undoubtedly scores of descendants from these ten tribes, they do not identify as one of the twelve tribes.

Judah, on the other hand, experienced periods of revival, so to speak under

the leadership of Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah. But as you will read in 2nd Chronicles, in 605 BC Judah fell to the Babylonian Empire which was under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar. The exile lasted seventy years—just as God said it would. Unlike the ten tribes of Israel, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin would survive, because from them God would eventually come Mary and Joseph—the earthly parents of our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What does the downfall of ten of the twelve tribes remind us of? HINT: Preparing to enter Canaan

God gave Israel countless opportunities to return to him. He exhibited more patience than any of us could muster.

What are your thoughts on 2nd Kings 17?

Summing up 1st and 2nd Kings

The books of 1st and 2nd Kings are books that provide history from a Godly perspective. But it is history, nonetheless. Both books also serve as a means of validation for the truth and accuracy of the Bible. How? In nearly all accounts given of the kings of Israel and Judah, the Bible tells us that the other details of their time on the throne can be found in the book of the annals

of the kings of Judah or Israel (respectively). These statements add to the credibility of the Bible; proving once more that these people and the things written in the pages of the Bible are not fictitious.

In addition to the historical aspects of these two books, and the warning to choose our leaders wisely, we should not miss the message that says, with obedience comes blessings and protection, but with disobedience comes pain and disgrace.

Key verses in 1st and 2nd Kings

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the books of 1st and 2nd Kings have to offer.

...and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go....
~1st Kings 2:3

In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built. ~1st Kings 6:7

Oh, LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way ~1st Kings 8:23

The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ~1st Kings 11:9

If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants. ~1st Kings 12:7

He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook.... ~2nd Kings 18:6-7

The Book Of 1st Chronicles and 2nd Chronicles

Ezra is the assumed writer of Chronicles. This is based on the style and tone of writing, and the fact that there is obvious concern for the hearts of the people returning from exile from Babylon; much like the book of Ezra.

Chronicles is a historical record written for the exiles who returned after their exile to Babylon 70 years after they were taken into captivity.

Their captivity essentially ended with the fall of the Babylonian Empire and the rise of the Persian Empire. Upon their 'release', the Israelites, which now consisted of only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, were referred to as Jews, and were wondering whether or not God's promises and covenant still hold true since they have no king—no Davidic king, that is.

The book of 1st Chronicles begins with a 'family tree' of sorts. The first eight chapters gives us the names of the sons of Jacob and Joseph for which each of the twelve tribes is named, followed by their descendants and the location of the land given to them when they entered the Promised Land.

Why was it important for the people to be reminded of their heritage?

Why do you think God included the ten tribes formerly known as Israel in this family tree?

Chapter 9 opens with a reminder to the people as to why they were taken captive—why they fell out of favor with God. Afterwards, the final limb of the family tree is given—the lineage of the Levites, and the genealogy of Saul—Israel’s first king.

Chapters 10 thru 21 is a reprisal of the events of David’s reign as king. In these chapters we find that while there are no contradictions with the account of David’s reign in 2nd Samuel, we are made aware of a few different details in some of the events and other details we read in 2nd Samuel are not given.

READ 1st Chronicles 10:13-14; 11:1-2; chapter 13; 15:1-2 and 29
What differences and similarities do you see between these verses and those in 2nd Samuel? Why do you think God chose to share these different details with the returning exiles?

What can we learn from these two different perspectives?

Chapters 22 thru 29 provide record of details about David’s reign over Israel we do not find anywhere else. They are of particular interest, however, because a lot of what we read in these chapters pertains to the Temple—the Temple God would not allow David to build.

READ 1st Chronicles 22:5-16 and 29:1-9
Do you feel David’s preparations stem from a heart that desired to be a part of the building of the Temple in whatever way he could, or do you think it shows a lack of confidence in Solomon? Explain.

What can we learn from these verses about leaving a legacy of our faith in the way of gifts and memorials?

1st Chronicles ends by making note of David's death in a very interesting way. If you will recall from the previous lesson, we read that the events surrounding each king's time in power is recorded in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. But in the case of David, we are told...

“As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet, and the records of Gad the seer, together with the details of his reign and power, and the circumstances that surrounded him and Israel and the kingdoms of all the other lands.”

Why is it not listed in the annals of the other kings and where are these records? The question of why can only be answered by God, but quite frankly, it should be enough for us to know that God says and does everything out of holy perfection. As for where the records of these three men are, we can assume they were either destroyed during periods of battle, or that they are buried deep in the remains of the ancient cities. But does it matter? Isn't it enough that God says these things were so?

Now let's move on to 2nd Chronicles...

The first 5 chapters inform us the interaction between God and Solomon, in which he receives the gift of wisdom. From there, the next four chapters recount the building of the Temple and the detail that went into the building itself and the furnishings, as well as the ceremony of bring the Ark of the Covenant to its new home.

Chapters 6 and 7 record for us once more Solomon's prayer of dedication and the meeting between God and Solomon that follows. Chapters 8 and 9 briefly sum up the splendor of Solomon's kingdom and power and respect he enjoyed.

The last 3 verses of chapter 9 tell us that this rich, powerful man who possessed more wisdom than anyone before or after him, died. No mention is made of a time of mourning or of tributes made to this one-of-a-kind leader. What it does say, however, is this:

- Like his father, David, and even Saul before that, a record of events of his reign are not recorded in the annals of the kings. The events of Solomon's leadership are recorded in the records of Nathan and Ahija (both prophets), and in the visions of Iddo.
- No matter how wise, powerful, and rich a person might be, he is still just a man.
- There was someone ready to take his place.

READ 2nd Chronicles 6:14-42

What is the promise and the condition in verse 14?

What does verse 26 say we are all in need of?

What is the foreshadowed in verses 32 and 33?

We know God okayed the building of the Temple, because he told David it would be built. The Temple's primary purpose was to provide a place for God's glory to reside, i.e. a house for God, **AND** as a place to offer sacrifices to God.

READ 2nd Chronicles 7:12

God was obviously pleased with the Temple.

Our bodies are referred to as the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of God. How pleased is he with the residence you are providing for him?

What could you do to increase the level of attention and care you give to your body to make the Spirit's residence more pleasing to him?

The remainder of 2nd Chronicles does just that—chronicles the reigns of the kings of Judah and the events that led to Judah being taken captive by the Babylonians. As is the case with David and Solomon, there are a few different details given while remaining completely consistent with the rest of the Bible. Let's look at a few of the highs and lows of some of Judah's kings.

- Asa, the great-grandson of Solomon, was the third king, but the first king who loved and obeyed God. He ordered every altar and sacred

stone or monument set up to honor a false god be torn down and commanded the people obey the Law of Moses and seek the LORD.

- Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat and grandson of Asa, did not follow in their footsteps. Jehoram had his brothers (and a few others) executed when he became king.
- Joash, who was a mere 7 years old when he became king, started out on a positive note. He even ordered repairs to be made to the Temple. But Joash's faith did not grow with him and he ended up being murdered by his own men.
- King Uzziah was not only a Godly king, but a wise and progressive one, too. Uzziah was only 16 when he took the throne, but he was what we call wise beyond his years. He built watch towers in Jerusalem, developed a well-trained army, and made improvements in areas of health and productivity in their agricultural and livestock industries.
- Uzziah's grandson, Ahaz did not know God. He worshipped Baals and offered some of his own sons as burnt sacrifices to false gods.
- Hezekiah somehow escaped his father's evil and depraved ways and became king after his father, Ahaz died. Hezekiah repaired the Temple, brought the Levites back to their rightful place of residence in and near the Temple, and called on the people to worship and obey God. He invited all Israelites to celebrate the Passover—something that hadn't been done in a very long time. Hezekiah also stood firm and strong in the LORD with the prophet Isaiah when the Assyrians tried to take Judah captive.
- Manasseh was 12 when he took the throne and was the worst of Judah's kings.
- Josiah took the throne when he was 8. He was the complete opposite of his grandfather, Manasseh. During some of the reforms Josiah instigated, the Book of the Law was found. Josiah then called on all the people to follow the Law and turn their hearts to God. Josiah also celebrated the Passover.
- Four generations and four evil kings later, God decided the time had come for Judah to be punished for their evil ways. Zedekiah was king when the Babylonians took Judah into captivity, where they remained until the Babylonians fell to Cyrus the Great; king of the Persian Empire.

Summing up the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles

The primary difference between the Chronicles and Kings is the fact that the events recorded are from a more spiritual point of view than a factual one.

The reason for this is likely due to Ezra's mindset—if he did, in fact author the Chronicles. Ezra was a Godly man—one of the few who had not turned his back on God. Ezra was mindful of all God had done for his people from the time they had left Egypt and lived to honor God by obeying The Law of Moses.

The author wanted us to know that what happened governmentally to the people affected them spiritually and emotionally. These books are also meant to warn us of what happens when we take God out of the equation of anything...when we put God in any position other than first place in our life.

Key verses in 1st and 2nd Chronicles

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles have to offer.

The people of Judah were taken captive to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. ~1st Chronicles 9:1

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word

of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse. ~1st Chronicles 10:13-14

David said, “My son, Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it.: So David made extensive preparations before his death. ~1st Chronicles 22:5

Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. ~2nd Chronicles 6:40

The LORD appeared to him at the night and said: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.” ~2nd Chronicles 7:12

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pit on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. ~2nd Chronicles 36:15-16

The Book Of Ezra and Nehemiah

Ezra wrote the book bearing his name around 440 B.C., which is during the time the Persian Empire was the dominant world power. The book of Nehemiah was written near the same time—somewhere around 445 and 420 B.C.. There is no definitive proof of who wrote the book of Nehemiah, however most scholars believe it was either Nehemiah himself, or Ezra.

Assuming one of these two men wrote the book is reasonable given the fact that:

- They were written within a few years of each other
- The book of Nehemiah picks up where Ezra leaves off on the historical documentation and account of the rebuilding of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

Before we go any farther, it is important for you to have a clear picture of the sequence of events. If you are like most people, you subconsciously assume that the books of the Bible are put in chronological order. They are not. For example, the books of Daniel and Isaiah are much farther down the line in the order of the Old Testament books, yet both were written hundreds of years prior to these two books. Psalms was written mostly by David, and Proverbs consists primarily of the words of Solomon, yet they, too come after Ezra and Nehemiah.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are a history of the Jew's return to Jerusalem and to God (for a while, anyway). The Persian Empire had become the dominant world power, but King Cyrus has no problem letting the Jewish people return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, along with a few others.

FYI: Among the others was Mordecai, but more on that later.

These two books tell about events that took place over a period of nearly 100 years. This timeline should put things into perspective; making it easier for

you to understand who, when, and what.

After opening the book by telling us how God moved in the heart of the Persian king, we learn that King Cyrus allowed the people to return to Jerusalem to live AND to rebuild their temple.

King Cyrus was the most dominant authority figure of his day. He was also a man who worshipped power, wealth, and false gods, yet he had no problem allowing the Jews to worship their God—the one true God—as they saw fit. He even went so far as to allow the Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple *so that* they could give God the glory and honor he deserves.

Why do you think King Cyrus allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple?

What does this say about the character of this man?

What can we learn from the Jews under King Cyrus' jurisdiction regarding respect for authority, praying for our leaders, and working with them while remaining faithful to God?

In chapter 2 of Ezra, we discover Ezra is quite fond of lists. Within the ten chapters of Ezra, he includes three rather lengthy lists:

- A list of exiles who returned to Jerusalem
- A list of the heads of each family who returned to Jerusalem with Ezra
- A list of members of the priests who had sinned by marrying foreign women

These lists may seem irrelevant to most people, but they are proof God's promise to not completely wipe out those he called his children. These lists also give us proof that at least some of the Levites were part of the kingdom of Judah and had survived the exile.

Do you have a list of your ancestors or a family tree?

**What information do you have about past generations of your family?
How does this information help you better understand yourself and/or
your children?**

By the end of Ezra, chapter 3, the altar has been built so sacrifices and offerings can once more be given in accordance to the Law, the foundation of the Temple was laid, and a celebration of praise and worship to God is held to commemorate the event.

The remainder of the book of Ezra records the following events:

- A decree by King Darius to allow the reconstruction to resume

READ Ezra 5 and 6:1-12

King Darius (not the same King Darius who come to know God thru Daniel) was prompted by Tattenai to get to the bottom of things—to know for sure what had taken place under King Cyrus.

You will notice that in reading, Darius' rein and declaration comes before the reign of Artaxerxes, yet we read about it in reverse order. Why is this???

No, it isn't because the Bible has errors. There are two probably reasons for the conflicting timeline.

Reason one: History records there was a Persian king not mentioned in the Bible whose reign came between Cyrus and Darius I. Cambyses was his name. It was not the least bit out of the ordinary for kings (or other people, for that matter) to go by two different names. Solomon, for example, was given the name Jedediah, by God. So, it is entirely possible Cambyses could also have gone by the name Artaxerxes, which we see later on is clearly a family name. Think about it—we know there was more than one Darius and more than one Herod, so why not?

Reason two: Ezra might easily have been writing by 'theme' rather than chronologically. It might simply be Ezra's way of showing us that the opposition was on-going, but that perseverance pays off—even if your efforts are halted for a while. Ezra is telling us here that just because obstacles block our path at times, doesn't mean God's will is not capable of being fulfilled and we should not give up. Instead, we need to wait for God's timing and the promptings of the Holy Spirit—both in us and in the lives of the people God chooses to use to bring his plans to fruition.

Between King Cyrus and King Darius, there was a period of 8 years when Cambyses ruled. No mention of him is made in the Bible, but history books tells us he was too busy conquering Egypt and murdering his brother to bother with the Jews living under his rule. This lack of involvement made it easy for the jealous agitators to keep the progress halted. But once Darius

took over, Tattenai saw an opportunity and took it.

How can you be more proactive in your local, state, and national government in ways that will honor God and bring glory to him?

What parallels do you see in today's society between non-Christians and Christians in America?

READ Ezra 6:14-15

NOTE: Again, we see that many of the prophets and spiritual heroes of the Old Testament were peers working together.

The Passover was celebrated once more, along with the dedication of the Temple. It was a joyous time for Jews and God was surely pleased.

Now let's fast-forward 80 years to the reign of Artaxerxes and Xerxes. In chapter 7 of Ezra, we read that Ezra returns to Jerusalem with Artaxerxes' blessing, an ample supply of gifts, and a good number of Jews.

READ Ezra 9

It didn't take long for the people to once again turn away from God. Our first inclination is to say something like, "What is wrong with these people?!" But let me ask you this: are we really so different?

What examples in recent history can you think of that reflect the same

hot-cold attitude the Jews had toward God?

What are some current-day examples of how the Church is or has been guilty of this?

Re-read Ezra 9:13. How do you think this verse applies to us today?

Now let's move on to the book of Nehemiah. In addition to continuing to recount the history of the return to Jerusalem by the Jews, Nehemiah is conveying the message God gave him about the importance of prayer.

Given Nehemiah's devotion to the spiritual discipline of prayer, it is only fitting that the book opens with Nehemiah's prayer on behalf of the exiles returning to Jerusalem. In his prayer, Nehemiah asks God to remember his promises to Moses. He asks God to have an open heart and open ears to the people as they recommit themselves to him, to forgive their sinful ways, and to restore them to their 'place of honor' as being called God's children.

Do you find yourself praying for the spiritual health and healing of our society, or complaining and pointing an accusing finger? Explain.

Following Nehemiah's prayer, we find that Nehemiah, who was serving as King Artaxerxes' cupbearer, asked the king if he could return to Jerusalem to oversee the rebuilding of The Temple. Nehemiah was allowed to go on the condition he provided a set time for his return. The king also provided Nehemiah with letters to other kings stating that he should be allowed to purchase materials to be used for the reconstruction.

What can we learn from Nehemiah and his relationship with his unbelieving employer?

READ Nehemiah 3

Great detail is given to the names and responsibilities of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

Why do you think it is important for us to know the details of who did what?

What, if any public recognitions have your family members received? How does this make you feel?

There is one verse in chapter 3 I want to draw special attention to—verse 12.

How does this verse change your thoughts and opinions of how women

were viewed? Or does it? Explain.

Chapter 4 of Nehemiah tells us the opposition didn't let up—not even when the Jews had the blessing of the king. Sound familiar?

Chapter 5 through the end of the book recounts many of the same events we read in Ezra; including Ezra's reading of the Law, the people's confession of their sins, and the lists of the people who returned to Jerusalem, a list of the Levites serving as priests, and a list of those who signed an agreement to follow the Law.

Things we see in this book that aren't in the book of Ezra, but are still part of the account of the people's return to Jerusalem include:

- The people are now called Jews instead of Israelites
- Nehemiah's going to the defense and assistance of the poor. He chastised those who had money for their practicing usury. He reminded them that they were a family—and that family should stick together and treat each other with love and respect.

READ 5

How well do you think you are doing in your own family and in your church family when it comes to living out Nehemiah's words in chapter 5?

What words would you use to describe your thoughts and feelings about having the amount of faith and trust in God's promises of provision Nehemiah spoke of in verses 14-19? Explain.

The book of Nehemiah closes with his personal account of the reforms Nehemiah brought about in the lives of the Jewish people upon his second return to Jerusalem (he had returned to King Artaxerxes as promised after his first trip).

Summing up Ezra and Nehemiah

Ezra and Nehemiah's sense of responsibility in being spiritual leaders to their people is admirable and one we should seek to develop in our own selves today. From these two men we see both the need and the blessings that come from perseverance based on faith and obedience.

From these two books I think it is also fair to say that after reading these two books, God wants us to come away with a sense of pride for who we are—his children...his people. We need to be mindful, knowledgeable, and proud of

our history as children of God and realize what an honor and blessing it is to be called by name as his.

Key verses in Ezra and Nehemiah

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Here are some from Ezra and Nehemiah.

These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ~Ezra 2:62

May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. ~Ezra 6:12a

NOTE: The phrase, "...for the hand of the LORD his God was on him...." appears twice in the first 9 verses of Ezra 7

I was ashamed to ask the King for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the King, "The gracious hand of our Lord God is on everyone who looks to him but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this and he

answered our prayer ~Ezra 8:22-23

What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. ~Ezra 9:13

They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.” ~Nehemiah 5:9

We will not neglect the house of our God. ~Nehemiah 10:39b

Remember me for this also, oh my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love. ~Nehemiah 13:22b

The Book Of Esther

The book of Esther was written by an unknown author, but it was clearly a Jew who lived in the city of Susa, the capitol of the Persian Empire. It was written during the same period of time Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah were living, preaching, and prophesying for the LORD.

If you will remember, I mentioned Mordecai as being one of the men who went with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. While we have no irrefutable evidence that that Mordecai was the same Mordecai who was Esther's cousin/adopted dad, it is likely that they are one in the same. The steadfast faith and devotion to God we see coming from Mordecai throughout the book of Esther clearly made him a person whose faith would be respected and called upon by his peers. Mordecai's unwavering faith is also responsible for giving Esther the nudge she needed to stand on her own two faith-filled feet.

READ The Book of Esther

The book is not a lengthy one, but it is an amazing story of love, courage, and a revealing of God's perfect sense of timing and orchestrating the events that take place in the universe he created and controls.

After reading the book of Esther, use the space provided to record your thoughts on the people you 'meet' in Esther's story and answer the questions asked.

Vashti:

What message was Vashti sending to Xerxes?

Why do you think Vashti refused to come?

Xerxes:

How would you describe Xerxes' ability to select sound counsel? Explain.

Circle the words you think describe Xerxes throughout his reign as king:

**FAIR CONFIDENT UNFAIR WEAK IRRATIONAL
RATIONAL**

COOPERATIVE ARROGANT

Explain your answers.

What can we learn from Xerxes when it comes to relationships with our spouse? Our friends? Our co-workers?

Mordecai:

When was the last time you took a stand for Christ without thinking about the possible consequences or fallout from your words and actions?

When was the last time you stood on opposite sides of popular opinions for the sake of Christ? What happened?

What assurance does Mordecai's story give you when it comes to relying on God's perfect timing?

When have you seen God's perfect timing in your life?

Haman:

**Have you ever been deceived by someone you thought you could trust?
Explain.**

How did you handle the situation?

What are some of the warning signs of a toxic relationship you can take from Haman and Xerxes' relationship?

Esther:

Have you ever been in a situation you didn't want to be in, but later realized you were exactly where God wanted you to be? Explain.

Who are the Mordecai's in your life—the people who are your spiritual encouragers, mentors, and who hold you accountable to your faith?

How have they helped you grow as a Christian?

Have you ever chosen to ignore what you know is right and remained silent? Why?

What happened?

Have you ever spoken up for your faith or for someone too afraid or unable to speak for themselves? Why did you?

What happened?

Use this space to make a list of the people and situations you need to share your faith with.

Use this space to write out a prayer to God; asking him to give you the courage and strength to know when and how to speak his truth.

Summing up Esther

Esther's story is really a lot of other people's story, too. Because of Esther, Xerxes' eyes were opened to the truth and he became a willing participant in God's plan for the Jews. Because of Esther, Mordecai's faith and integrity

were recognized and rewarded, as well as giving him and Esther the ability to share more of their life together as father and daughter. Because of Esther, Haman was revealed for the evil person he was, and in the process, her willingness to speak up saved the entire Jewish race from being assassinated.

Esther is a true story that paints a beautifully clear picture of God's ability and willingness to work in, around, despite, and because of every situation. Esther's story should serve to remind us that we are never in a position or situation where we don't need, or cannot find God.

Key verses in Esther

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of the most memorable words we find in Esther.

But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up. ~Esther 2:20

For a few remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the juice will rise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to Royal position for such a time as this.” ~Esther 4:14

The Book Of Job

The book of Job is the account of the calamity and blessings that made up Job's life. The conversations between Job and his friends, as well as the conversations between Job and God, deliver an enormous amount of wisdom and truth to readers.

No one knows for sure who wrote Job. The only thing we know for sure is that the writer was knowledgeable of the discourses between Job and his friends and between Job and God. This causes many Bible scholars to think that either Job himself, or Elihu (the fourth and youngest friend of Job's to speak) wrote it.

The book of Job is another example of the books of the Old Testament not being in order of time sequence. The prophet Ezekiel mentions Job as a Godly man of old, along with Noah and Daniel. Ezekiel's reference to Job (Ezekiel 14:14) with these other men tell us that he lived after Abraham but before Joseph.

There are also several 'hints' in the book of Job that place him on earth during this period of time. These indicators include:

- The fact that Job made sacrifices to God on behalf of his family; something that stopped with Moses and the Law
- The fact that Job's daughters also received an inheritance from their father; something that also stopped with Moses
- Job and Mrs. Job lived long enough to raise two families and enjoy grandchildren and great-grandchildren from this second family. This means Job would have had to live 200 years or so. This didn't happen post-Joseph.
- References to musical instruments and monetary units are those of the ancient patriarchs.
- Job's wealth is measured in livestock; something that fell out of 'fashion' after the age of the patriarchs.

Why was the book of Job written: To show the holiness of God, the power of God, and the fact that God is just. No one is undeserving of anything we encounter due to the fact that we are not God—we are sinful. But God's infinite love and wisdom can bring us up and out of those times when we keep our hope in him and when we humble ourselves to his holiness.

READ Job, chapter 1 and 2:1-10

What are your initial thoughts when reading these verses?

What are your thoughts on Mrs. Job? Do you see her as someone who is unfaithful, or do you see her as someone who is scared and hurting? Explain.

Everyone experiences difficulties, hardships, and pain in life. Sometimes these things creep in and sneak up on us because we let our guard down against sin. Sometimes they force their way into our lives uninvited—the result of circumstances beyond our control. Sometimes they are unavoidable things that happen because we live in an imperfect world (examples: deception, sickness, natural disasters, death). And then there are those times when we bring these situations on ourselves—things like being an unfaithful spouse, not controlling our spending, choosing to use drugs and alcohol. So you see, it's not a matter of *if* we have problems, it's about how we deal with them.

Among the words most often used to describe a person's thoughts on the first two chapters of Job, is the word UNFAIR. It wasn't fair for God to let Satan use Job like that. It wasn't fair for God to take away everything Job had and to kill his family. It wasn't fair for Satan to be able to get God's blessing

(permission) to do such an awful thing.

You know what? It wasn't fair, but at the risk of sounding unoriginal, life isn't fair. It isn't fair that we regularly sin and break the heart of the God who made us. It isn't fair that we disobey God's commands on a daily basis, yet he still loves us. It isn't fair that Jesus had to endure the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

Whether or not it was fair isn't even the point, though. The point or message of the book of Job is faithfulness in all circumstances. Trusting God, no matter what. Believing his promises are true—the promise that says he will never leave us to our own demise (or Satan's), and promise that says he will work all things for our good if we let him.

Another big question that comes up when reading this passage of scripture is 'why'.

Why do you think God allowed these things to happen to Job?

When studying the various times throughout scripture that God has put his children through the fire, so to speak, Bible scholars agree that it is never without reason. The reason isn't always the same in every situation, but each and every time, one of the following can be seen in these people's lives AND is revealed in scripture as being part of God's plan for instructing us on how to grow in faith and live trusting God completely.

As the book of Job unfolds, and we see Job's despair mixed with respect for God and being humbled by both his circumstances and God's presence, it is obvious that God used Job to prove Satan wrong—to **beat Satan and to**

bring glory to himself as the One True God. He knew Job's heart and that he was up to the task. He also knew exactly what he was going to do to bless and reward Job for his faithfulness.

The other reasons God allows us to suffer are:

- To test our faith. Remember: even Jesus was tempted by Satan.
- To help us mature and grow in our faith. When God is all you have, is often times the only way some people realize that God is all we need.
- To be a witness and evangelistic tool to others. No matter what we go through, we are going to come in contact with people who have gone through the exact same thing, or at least something similar. When we can personally relate and be a living testimony that there is light at the end of the tunnel, AND THAT that light is Jesus and our faith in him, well, that's a powerful testimony, if there ever was one.

When have you been tested by God in any or all of these ways? Did these situations make you stronger in your faith? Weaker? Explain.

How have you been able to use your times of pain and hardship to reach out to others? Explain.

Chapters 3 thru 31 are the running dialogue between Job and three of his friends Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. The conversation takes several twists and turns. Their first response, of course, is to just be there for him. From

there, the conversations include:

- The question of what Job did to cause God to send the calamity on him
- Job declaring his innocence, but wishing he'd never been born
- The reminder that God is God—that he can do what he wants, so he must have had a reason
- The suggestion that Job wasn't as innocent as he said he was, so just come clean and get it over with
- Job's admission of feeling forgotten by God and wondering 'why him?'
- Job expressing his conviction that there is no way out of this other than God's grace
- The three friends digging deeper to try to get Job to accept responsibility for what has happened—that it is because of something he did or didn't do
- The three friends warn Job against trying to go against God
- Job has his fill of their advice and not-so-comforting comfort and essentially tells them if that's the best they can do, he'd rather them not say anything at all

READ Job 27:2-6

Rewrite Job 27:2-6 in your own words.

Have you ever had well-meaning friends whose intentions fell short of giving you what you really needed? How did this make you feel? How

did you respond?

Why do you think Job's friends responded the way they did?

What does this teach you about reaching out to people in need of comfort and advice?

READ Job 32:1-10

Does Elihu's comments about Job's attitude make you see Job in a different light? Why or why not? Re-read Job 1:8 to help you keep things in perspective.

READ Job 34:1-15; 35:1-7; 36:1-4;

The thing we have to remember when looking at the conversation between Job and his friends, as well as the sermon Elihu gives, is that these four are men—just like Job. They have no greater understanding of God than Job does—even though Elihu claims to. A lot of what they say is true, but in many cases, they couldn't be more incorrect. They, like Job, were human. They were also looking at things from the normally accepted philosophy of the day. FYI: We are still somewhat enveloped in that philosophy—that bad things shouldn't happen to good people, that good things shouldn't happen to bad people, and that when bad things happen, we must have done something at some time or another to deserve it.

What would you say to a friend in Job's position (someone hurting and suffering for seemingly no reason)?

What would you want your friends to say to you under those same circumstances?

READ Job, chapters 38-42

This is without question, one of the most beautiful, humbling, and awe-inspiring passages of scripture in the Bible. You cannot help but read it and

feel just like Job when he said, “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more.” (Job 40:4-5)

What are your initial thoughts on what God has to say to Job?

Have you ever felt like situations in your life were God’s way of saying the same thing to you? Explain.

Re-read Job 42:1-4. What differences do you see in Job then, compared to Job 9:14-20?

Have you ever had a humbling wake-up call from God? Explain.

The last verses of chapter 42 reveal that God blessed Job and Mrs. Job with another family, not that it made their loss any less significant, but it they were a source of comfort and allowed them to experience the love of family once again. God also blessed Job once more with material wealth, as well as a long and healthy life.

In reading these last few verses, it should become obvious to us that God doesn't expect perfection from us, and that when he stated that Job was upright, blameless and shunned evil, he wasn't saying Job was perfect. God was stating that Job was in constant pursuit of God. That Job craved intimacy with God. That Job got up every day committed to pleasing God.

Knowing this leaves us to do one thing—ask ourselves the question, “Do we?”

How has Job's story caused you to examine your own life? What changes will you make to become more intentional in your attempt to be upright, blameless, and diligently shun evil?

Summing up Job

The book of Job answers the question of why God allowed Satan to live and work his evil cunning in our lives. The answers can be found in Job's circumstances, Job's attitude and handling of his circumstances and the end-result brought about by God. The answers are:

- Satan exists to show us the difference between good and evil
- Satan exists to give us the option to choose God over sin
- Satan exists to show us just how dark life without the presence of God is
- Satan exists to show the enormity of Jesus' power over death and the victory that will be eternity with God in heaven

Job questioned God's reasoning in all of it. Job cried out in pain and frustration. Job had a bit of a pity-party for himself. Job became discouraged

and depressed; saying he wished he'd never even been born. But Job never questioned God's *right* to take everything from him, and when all was said and done, Job chose God over riches. God over self. God over anger. God over self-pity. Job chose to trust that God's ways are always perfect, always good, and always right. Job's choices were the same as the ones we have to make.

Job's story is heart-wrenching, to say the least, but more than that, Job's story is one that should serve to remind us that God is the all-knowing creator and master of the universe. In reading Job, we should realize that even when we don't understand or agree with God's ways, his timing, or even his methods of revealing himself to us, they are always perfect and right, and when we keep the faith, the blessings that come afterward will always be far greater than the pain.

Key verses in Job

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Job has to offer.

“He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” Job 2:10

“Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty, for he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.” Job 5:17-18

“What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment?”

Job 7:17-18

“Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?” Job 11:7

“To God belong wisdom and power, counsel and understanding are his.” Job 12:13

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.” Job 19:25

“It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.” Job 34:12

Job chapters 38 through 42

The Book Of Psalm

The Psalms were written by several different people as follows: David (73), Asaph (12), the sons of Korah (10), Moses (1), Solomon (2), unknown (50), Herman the Ezrahite and Ethan the Ezrahite (1 each).

The word Psalm means **a sacred song**, which is exactly what this book is. It is a book of songs to God, for God, about God, and because of God. Some of the psalms praise God. Some question his timing and reasons. Some are cries for help—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Some are songs of thanks for who he is and all he has done. Some are cries for comfort in times of pain and grief. Some are encouragements or warnings against sin. All are ordained by God to be included in His Word.

Obviously, the writers of the Psalms were not all living at the same time, but their writings were put together in a collection by a psalter. A psalter is one who compiles a collection of songs or poems. The compilation of the Psalms was probably done around 300 B.C.

To try to put the Psalms in some sort of order of relevance would be both impossible and wrong. The Psalms speak to our hearts and minds depending upon the circumstances we are facing or the situations we are in. The words that bring special meaning today may not be as comforting or empowering as others next month or next year. So rather than try to tell influence your reading of the Psalms, I am simply going to give you a mini-list of those that encompass a variety of emotions and feelings.

As you read through these verses and answer the questions scattered throughout, do it with an attitude of seeking. Seek a more intimate relationship with God. Seek more of God's wisdom. Seek God's will for your life. Seek to hear him speak to you through the Holy Spirit and through the people and situations in your life.

PLEASE: Don't let this list be the extent of your exposure to the Psalms, though. Read the entire book; circling, underlining, and making notes. Let

them sing to your heart, soul, and mind.

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night.” Psalm 1:1-2

Take a few minutes to think about the people, places, and things in your life that could be considered the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners, or the seat of mockers. Possible examples: television shows, video games, people you hang out with, where you spend your free time.

What are you willing to do to change your habits in order to meditate more on God and less on these people and/or things?

“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.” Psalm 3:5

“In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” Psalm 5:3

How would you describe your prayer life? Do you pray believing... firmly convinced God hears and answers? Explain.

“O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” Psalm 8:1

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” Psalm 8:3

What do you find most amazing about nature?

When you look around at all the things God created, what thoughts come to mind?

READ The following Psalms

Psalm 15: A psalm reminding us of the blessings that come from being a faithful and obedient child of God.

What are some of the blessings you’ve received from God because of your faithful obedience to him?

Psalm 18: A psalm of praise and thanksgiving for God’s protection and love

Psalm 23: A psalm of comfort

How has God protected you and your loved ones?

When and how have you felt God’s comfort when you were hurting?

Psalm 22: A psalm that is prophetic in nature; foretelling the pain and suffering of Jesus' death on the cross.

Psalm 32: A psalm reminding us of God's forgiving nature when we come to him in true repentance and confession.

How do these psalms support and validate the truth of God's Word?

"LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." Psalm 16:5-6

What does this verse say to you about God's will for your life and the amount of attention he gives to each of us?

If you don't feel your life is secure and that you are in 'pleasant places', what does this verse indicate you should do?

"A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from

them all.” Psalm 34:19

“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

What are the desires of your heart? Take a few minutes right now to privately share them with God.

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

What sins do you need to confess to God? What doubts are you having about his faithfulness? Take a few minutes to talk to God silently about these things.

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.” Psalm 62:1

“In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.” Psalm 86:7

“LORD, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” Psalm 90:1-2

Choose one of these verses to memorize. Use the space below to write it out two or three times in order to help you do so.

READ The following psalms

Psalm 95: A psalm of praise and worship to God.

Psalm 100: A psalm of thanksgiving for God's love and faithfulness to us.

Psalm 112: A psalm of assurance and hope for those who put their trust in God.

What do you want to give praise and thanks to God for right now?

“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:10-12

Use the space below to write a thank-you pray to God for his unconditional love and his overwhelmingly huge amount of mercy and grace.

READ Psalm 119: This is the longest of all the psalms, but it is also one of wise instruction, encouragement, and spiritual mentorship.

Write down at least six phrases of instruction and/or encouragement you got from reading Psalm 119.

1:

2:

3:

4:

5:

6:

“If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.” Psalm 130:3-4

What does it mean to you to fear the LORD?

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” Psalm 133:1

Who do you need to make amends with, so that you can live in unity with the people around you and in your life?

What will you do to work toward doing that?

READ The following psalms

Psalm 139: A psalm that reminds us of just how personally interested God is

in each detail of our lives. He longs to have a genuine and intimate relationship with each and every one of us.

Psalm 145: A psalm to remind us of God's faithfulness and his desire to be the LORD of our life. It is also a psalm that reminds us of the blessings we receive in having such a relationship with him.

Do you desire a more personal and intimate relationship with the LORD? Lanny Wolfe wrote the song, "Jesus Be the LORD of All". The last line of the second verse says, "For if you're not LORD of everything, then you're not LORD at all."

What haven't you handed over to God? Will you?

The Book Of Proverbs

The word ‘proverb’ means a short, wise saying. This is undoubtedly where the Old Testament book of Proverbs got its name, because that is exactly what it is—a collection of short, wise sayings.

There is no doctrine in the book of Proverbs, as in no “thus sayeth the LORD” statements, no conversations between God and man, or no historical accounts. It is, however, full of Godly wisdom, morals, and ethical instruction. It is a book that puts the commands and expectations of God to practical use; showing us what life looks like when we live according to God’s laws and expectations...and when we don’t.

The bulk of the book of Proverbs was written by Solomon, who took the throne as king of Israel when his father, King David died. Those not written by Solomon are attributed to ‘the wise’ and a man named Agur...with the exception of the final chapter of this book. The final chapter, and arguably the most popular/well-known, is attributed to King Lemuel, who is most likely Solomon (but more on that later).

Most, if not all, of the proverbs were written during the reign of Solomon (10th century BC)—before the division of the Kingdom of Israel.

Like the Psalms, Proverbs is not a book of events or doctrine, per se. While the psalms are a mix of praise, petition, worship, teaching, and warning, Proverbs focuses on teaching, admonishment, warning, and encouragement to grab hold of wisdom and practical knowledge and hang on to it.

Like the book of Psalm, Proverbs contains far too much to try to squeeze into a chapter of a book. So once again I will provide you with a mini-list of some of my favorite verses, along with some questions that will hopefully intensify your craving for Godly wisdom and living.

Don’t limit yourself to these verses, though. I also strongly encourage you to read the entire book. Circle and underline the verses that speak to your heart

and address your personal situations in life. Write notes in the margins of your Bible or prayer journal. Impress these words on your heart, soul, and mind. Live by them to be more of the person God made you to be.

Make These Proverbs Your Personal Mission Statement

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Proverbs 1:7

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.” Proverbs 2:1-5

What advice did your parents give you when you left home?

Who do you go to for advice?

Why do you go to this person (these people)?

“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.” Proverbs 3:3

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”
Proverbs 3:7-10

Do you give to God first? Why or why not?

Do you view these verses as a promise or a challenge? Explain.

“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.” Proverbs 3:11-12

How would you describe the difference between God’s discipline and suffering the consequences for our sin and poor choices?

Proverbs 4: A collection of verses teaching us the benefits and blessings of seeking wisdom and using it to make life choices.

Read Proverbs, chapter 4. Use the space below to summarize it in your

own words.

“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”
Proverbs 6:16-19

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Proverbs 8:10

“The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.” Proverbs 10:9

Proverbs 11: This chapter is filled with Godly and sound advice on living a

life of integrity. The world would be a much better place if we followed this advice.

Read Proverbs, chapter 11. Use the space below to write out three or four verses that speak to you personally. Briefly explain why.

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Proverbs 12:18

What reckless words have you spoken lately? What words should you speak to these people to heal the rift between you?

Proverbs chapters 13, 15, and 16: These three chapters are must-reads for any Christian or anyone seeking to know how to live an upright life of honor and integrity. People whose character reflects these qualities will be respected, successful, and spiritually sound.

Read Proverbs, chapters 13, 15, and 16. Choose a verse from each chapter to memorize. Use the space below to write the verses you choose. Why did you choose them?

“Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife.” Proverbs 17:1

“Many are the plans of a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.” Proverbs 19:21

How often do you seek God’s guidance and direction when making plans for your life?

“Wine is a mocker and beer is a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.” Proverbs 20:1

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” Proverbs 22:1

The world today tries to tell us just the opposite is true. What can you do to set an example to others that will encourage them (and yourself) to live according to these wise words?

“Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown

you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.” Proverbs 30:8-9

Rewrite this verse in your own words.

Proverbs 31: The second half of this chapter is arguably the most popular and most-often quoted from the book. The heading at the beginning of the chapter is this: “Saying of King Lemuel”, which leads us to the comment at the beginning of this chapter regarding the belief that King Lemuel and King Solomon are one in the same.

While there is no hard evidence that King Lemuel is in fact, King Solomon, the probabilities are strong. The reasons for this include:

- There is no other reference to King Lemuel in the Bible other than in Proverbs 31.
- The only historical record of a King Lemuel is one who was descended from Ishmael. This fact would remove him from the likelihood of being a contributor to the Bible.
- Solomon’s mother, Queen Bathsheba, would have had every reason to advise her son in this manner (considering the lifestyle choices he made later in life)
- Solomon’s life and other writings is in line with the message of Proverbs 31—the ‘learn from my mistakes’ mentality

Regardless of who Lemuel is, the wisdom of the words is timeless and priceless. And for women it is an encouragement and reminder that God honors women for using their intellect, heart, and physical strength to be the people he created them to be.

Generally speaking, we tend to believe that women were little more than property during the period of time the Old and New Testament books

and letters were written. Proverbs 31, as well as several other passages of scripture indicate otherwise.

What similarities do you see to the Proverbs 31 woman and yourself (or your spouse)? What differences do you see?

The Book Of Ecclesiastes

Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes during the 10th century B.C. He wrote the book toward the end of his life; after he had experienced the highest of highs and lowest of lows in life.

Solomon's gift of wisdom makes this book both credible and mystifying. On one hand, we can see the value in taking the advice of someone who was gifted by God with the distinction of being the wisest man to ever live on earth. But on the other hand, why couldn't all that wisdom save him from making such catastrophic decisions? The answer is 'sinful nature'. No matter how wise, rich, intelligent, popular, or talented we are, we are nothing without God.

Solomon's transparency is an impassioned reminder that life without God as number one is completely meaningless. Life on earth and life after death is only relevant with God.

Many see the book of Ecclesiastes as negative and depressing. They feel it is full of 'woe is me' and self-pity. But the truth of the matter is that nothing could be farther from the truth. Instead, the book of Ecclesiastes has several valuable life-lessons we all need to hear and follow.

Have you read the book of Ecclesiastes prior to this study? If so, what was your impression?

Few, if any, have surpassed the degree of wealth enjoyed by Solomon, even to this day. But by the time Solomon was nearing the end of his life, he

realized just how temporary and unimportant monetary and material wealth are. Solomon realized (and wants us to realize) that:

- We really cannot take it with us when we die.
- It won't take many generations for our existence here on earth to be inconsequential—no one will know who we were.
- Spending life in a quest to accumulate and amass monetary and material wealth is a life wasted in comparison to amassing a 'fortune' of close, loving relationships.

READ Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Solomon's repeated use of the word 'vanity(ies)' or 'meaningless' (depending on your translation) is the Hebrew word for *vapor* or *breath*. This is, in my opinion, one of those times when the point being made really does get lost in translation.

When you replace the word vanity or meaningless with the word or phrase 'it is a vapor' or 'a mere breath', the point Solomon is making becomes much clearer and one we can relate more easily relate to. Don't you agree? Think about it—how many times have you stopped to think of how quickly time passes by?

Thinking in there terms, what are some examples of things you once thought were a 'big deal', but now seem trivial?

Verses 4 and 11 are especially humbling. They remind us of just how temporary this life is.

Some people see these verses as an 'out' for skating by in life. Others see them as a reminder to do their best to leave a lasting spiritual and emotional legacy. What do you think?

In chapter 2, Solomon tells us that while work and play should be a part of life, they should be kept in check—that we need to keep them in the proper perspective. Without the proper perspective, he warns, we will live frustrated, unhappy lives.

Solomon also emphasizes that we should work at something we can find joy and take pride in rather than spend our lives working in a career we aren't suited for or find fulfilling.

How well are you balancing work and leisure?

What advice would you give your younger self or your children about creating the proper Godly balance in life?

READ Ecclesiastes 2:18

What does this verse say to you?

Ecclesiastes chapter three teaches and reminds us that there is a time and place for everything. From living and dying to keeping and throwing things away, there is a time for it all. There are even times when we should hate and times we should go to war.

READ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

When have you experienced some of these truths?

Solomon had anything and everything money could buy. He was surrounded by people who were happy to do his bidding, which meant he delegated a lot of responsibilities. In other words, he wasn't a micro-manager. Because of this, he could easily have chosen to stay inside the palace walls; never seeing the people and the way they lived. But Solomon chose to look. To listen. To care.

READ Ecclesiastes 4:1, 6, 8-10, 13

Write three words or phrases to sum up what you believe Solomon is saying in these verses.

REMEMBER: By the time Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, he had come full circle. He had gone from a competent, God-fearing, humble prince-maker, to a self-indulgent womanizer riding high on the laurels of his popularity, back to a humble, Godly man who realized what life is meant to be about and what really matters in life has little to do with anything here on earth.

READ Ecclesiastes 7:1

What correlation is there between a good name (reputation) and the day of death?

READ Ecclesiastes 7:5 and 8

Who do you go to for advice?

How often do you turn to the Bible for advice and instruction?

How many unfinished projects do you have in your house, yard, or at work? Why are they unfinished?

How would you feel if you were to complete these projects? Do Solomon's words inspire you to do so? Why or why not?

God is sovereign—this is the ultimate message of Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes and the common thread running throughout the remaining chapters. Again—at this point in Solomon's life, he had lived in a state of total obedience and faith, lived a worldly life on his own terms, realized the futility of living apart from God, and had come 'home'. But Solomon isn't just telling us about his experiences. He is warning us against making the

same mistakes. He is pleading with us to learn from his mistakes so that we don't have to experience the loss, guilt, pain, and ugliness he did.

Words and phrases like 'eloquent', 'inspiring', 'formidable', 'cautionary', 'daunting', 'unsettling', 'put you in your place', 'unpleasant', and 'humbling' are what I feel best describes the book of Ecclesiastes. While God obviously felt the need to include them all, if you were ask me to choose a handful of verses to speak the message of the entire book, these are the three I would choose:

“Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.” (Ecclesiastes 11:9 NIV)

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NIV)

Write your thoughts on these two passages of scripture in the space below.

Summing up Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes is filled with both warnings and a reminders.

- Don't think too highly of yourself
- Don't forget just how temporary this life really is
- Godliness and Godly wisdom are the only things worth pursuing in life
- Fear God
- Relationships are worth far more than anything money can buy
- It's who you are, not what you do or what you have that matters
- God is sovereign
- Stand in awe of God...always
- Fear God
- Life here on earth isn't fair—it can't be because of sin
- Sin destroys
- We will all stand before God on the day of judgement
- Fear God

Key verses in Ecclesiastes

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Ecclesiastes has to offer.

“There is a time for everything, and a season under heaven:” Ecclesiastes 3:1

“I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.”
Ecclesiastes 3:14

“Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.” Ecclesiastes 4:6

“If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” Ecclesiastes 4:10

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” Ecclesiastes 5:2

“A good name is better than fine perfume and the day of death better than the day of birth.” Ecclesiastes 7:1

“Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.” Ecclesiastes 11:9

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

The Book Of Songs Of Songs

The Song of Songs was written by Solomon sometime during the 10th century B.C.

This book (also called the Song of Solomon) is a love story and was written to give insight into the Israelite customs and attitudes on male-female relationships. Song of Songs also reiterates the fact that romance and sexual desire and intimacy are very much a part of God's plan for married couples. He created us to be sexual beings. Everything God created is good. And if you'll recall in Genesis 1, after he created man, he declared everything about us to be very good. Including sex.

The book of Song of Songs is also one of two books of the Bible that makes no mention of God—the other being Esther. Also like the book of Esther, there is no direct commands or teaching from God. No prophecy. No doctrinal statements. But it is valuable to Christians nonetheless, because a) God deemed it worthy to be part of his Word, b) we need to discover or be reminded that emotional, sexual/physical love is beautiful and essential to a healthy, Godly marriage and home.

Be honest—do you avoid this book of the Bible? Does it make you blush?

Do you think Christian marriages would be different if we took this book more seriously? Explain.

The Song of Songs is a three-part story:

- Preparing for the wedding—both the bride (Beloved) and the groom (Lover)
- Professing their love and desire for one another
- The wedding and coming together as one (finally ŏŸ~Š)

READ Song of Songs 2:3-6

What responsibilities of a husband do we see the future bride talking about and giving thanks for?

What should Christian fiancés and wives learn from this?

READ Song of Songs 4:1-7

Solomon definitely uses some pretty interesting analogies here. Guys, I dare you to tell your wife her hair is like a goat's and that her teeth are like clean sheep! Just make sure you are ready to run...and fast when you do.

Seriously, though, Solomon's words were passionately genuine and complimentary. They were (sorry, I can't help myself) the bomb! But in today's society, they would be a bomb of a whole different nature—more like a nuclear attack on your marriage. That doesn't mean both husbands and wives shouldn't take a lesson from Solomon on how to treat your spouse.

You need to compliment each other. Speak endearing and tender words to one another. Express your love, admiration, respect, and desire verbally and physically.

What phrases could be used today to take the place of those Solomon used?

How often do you tell your spouse you love them? How often do you compliment them? Tell them how handsome/beautiful they are? Admire their abilities? Let them know how special you feel to be joined with them?

What can you do...what *will* you do to up your game?

Another aspect worth looking at is the inclusion of “Friends”.

READ Song of Songs 1:4b

It is important to have the love and support of family and friends in a marriage. We know this won't always be the case, and that it can cause serious and even fatal problems in a marriage. But as husbands and wives, we need to remember that we are ONE. Couples must work as a team to make

sure outsiders (including your parents) don't divide and conquer your marriage.

Who do you look to as a model for Christian marriage?

Do you feel you have a strong support system for your marriage—not allies in taking your side in things? Explain.

What outside interference have you experienced in your marriage?

How do you protect your marriage from outside interference?

What could you do to better protect your marriage from outside interference?

Song of Songs stands out from all the rest of the books in the Bible, with Revelation being its biggest 'rival' for being known as the most unusual and most often ignored.

Take the time to read through the book of Song of Songs with your spouse. Laugh at some of the analogies. Switch out the words, 'lover' and 'beloved' for each other's names. Think about your own love story and take the time to remind one another why you chose each other. Renew your vows to one another and make an effort to be more open and expressive of how you really feel.

After reading through some of Song of Songs and answering the questions in this lesson, have you become more comfortable with the content of this book? Have you come to better appreciate the beauty and Godliness of sex and intimacy? Explain.

Summing up Song of Songs

Song of Songs is a love story. Some have tried to make it an analogy or comparison to Jesus' love for his bride, the Church, but quite honestly, I don't think it's there. I don't think that's the point. The point of Song of Songs is to remind us that marriage is to be PURE, EXCITING, INTIMATE, ENJOYABLE, and LAST FOR A LIFETIME.

That's it, but that's a lot. Especially when you look at the failure rate of marriages today AND when you realize that the failure rate in 'Christian' marriages is not much (if any) lower than those of unbelievers. So to say, "That's it" is a bit trite. Marriage is a BIG deal to God, so it should be a BIG

deal to us, as well.

Key Verses in Song of Songs

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Song of Songs has to offer.

“How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves.” Song of Songs 1:15

“How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant.” Song of Songs 1:16

“He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.” Song of Songs 2:4

“My lover is mine and I am his....” Song of Songs 2:16a

“I belong to my lover and his desire is for me.” Song of Songs 7:10

The Book Of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah was written by the prophet, Isaiah. Scholars have determined that the bulk of this rather-lengthy book was written around 700 B.C., but that the last several chapters were most likely written some thirty years later.

The overall message of the book can be summed up in the words, **judgment, salvation, restoration, and love.**

Isaiah's messages from God, to the people of Israel spanned the reign of four Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah).

Other important things to know about Isaiah's prophecies include:

- A great many of his prophecies were about the coming of Jesus and their fulfillment is obviously present in the New Testament as well as in more current history. The New Testament often refers back to Isaiah's prophecies; noting that what is taking place is a fulfillment of what Isaiah said. For example: Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:22-23.
- Several passages of scripture in the book of Isaiah are parallel to those in the New Testament. One excellent example of this is Isaiah 59:17, which is a parallel to the Armor of God in Ephesians 6.

In spite of the fact that Isaiah lived in *Judah*, many of his prophecies were about the kingdom of *Israel* and their fall to Assyria. REMEMBER: The kingdom was divided. He did, however, also prophecy about Judah's exile to Babylon as well as the fall of Babylon that would come years later.

These warnings and references to Israel reveal both God's and Isaiah's heart for all God's children (Israel and Judah). The division of the kingdom of Israel did not divide God's love. It was as whole and sincere and unconditional as ever.

Isaiah had weathered the battles between the two nations who should have been one. He knew their separation from one another and from God caused

God great sorrow and he (Isaiah) wanted very much for the people to listen to the messages God gave him to share with the people. But they would not.

The demise of the two nations of Israelites is tempered by his prophecies of God's promise to restore them to the land he gave them through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The restoration, however, is only for the kingdom of Judah because they found their way back to God, whereas Israel did not. Judah's return and the rebuilding of The Temple had to have been a tremendous source of joy to Isaiah.

Isaiah's prophecies regarding judgement and hope are definitely literal in nature, but they can also be seen as somewhat figurative, as well. The figurative nature of Isaiah's prophecies refers to God's kingdom here on earth—a kingdom that is spiritual in nature rather than physical.

READ Isaiah, chapters 24, 25, 26, and 27:1-13

You cannot miss the fact that God's love is ever-present, but that along with this parental love comes the need for discipline and punishment.

Describe your feelings after reading these chapters.

Do you feel they are relevant today? Explain.

Isaiah's prophecies—no matter what the message—always led back to one thing. The coming of the Messiah. Jesus.

Isaiah was spot-on in his prophecies regarding Jesus—his ancestry, birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and as we will one day see, his second coming.

While secular history undeniably backs up the events of Israel, Judah, Babylon, and Assyria, the fact that a man who lived hundreds of years prior to Jesus' birth could tell us in such detail what was going to take place, well, that could only come from the Almighty God.

The book of Isaiah is filled with valuable lessons for each of us, but because the purpose of the Bible is to proclaim the message of truth that Jesus is God's Son, the Redeemer and Savior of man, we are going to use this lesson to focus on the prophecies concerning Jesus.

READ The following verses and passages of scripture in which Isaiah prophecies about Jesus.

- Isaiah 7:14-Virgin birth of Jesus
- Isaiah 9:6-7-He would be the son of God (he lists some of the names given to Jesus)

Read Matthew 2 and Luke 1 and 2. Is there any error in Isaiah's prophecies?

What names given by Isaiah make an impression on your heart and mind? Why?

- Isaiah 11:1-10-The Messiah would be a descendant of Jesse (King David)

Why was this so important? Hint: What had God told David?

- Isaiah 40:1-5,9-Jesus the Messiah would be preceded by a messenger (John the Baptist)
- Isaiah 61:1-2-Isaiah foretells of Jesus' ministry
- Isaiah 53:1-3-The Messiah would be rejected by the people

Why do you think the people were so willing to believe John, but not Jesus?

What do we learn about John's character in reading about his ministry?

- Isaiah 35:4-6-Jesus would perform many miracles

The Gospels record just a few of the miracles Jesus did during his 3-year ministry on earth. Which of Jesus' miracles stands out to you? Why?

Read John 21:24-25. Explain how this verse makes you feel.

- Isaiah 42:1-9-The Messiah's coming would pave the way for Gentiles to become God's children
- Isaiah 53:4-6-Jesus the Messiah would die for our sins
- Isaiah 53:7-The Messiah would be silent before his accusers
- Isaiah 50:6-Jesus would be spit on and beaten
- Isaiah 53:12-The Messiah would be 'numbered with the transgressors' (die with criminals)
- Isaiah 53:9-Jesus would be buried in a rich man's tomb
- Isaiah 49:6-The message of salvation through Jesus would reach the far corners of the earth

It's all right there. Isaiah knew what was coming. God had given him the privilege and responsibility of knowing the future and sharing it. Can you just imagine how Isaiah felt? Can you imagine how difficult and sad it must have been for him to experience peoples' non-reaction to what he had to say?

When have you tried to warn someone of danger and been ignored? How did you feel?

Have you ever been ignored or made fun of for sharing the message of salvation? How did you respond?

Does fear of rejection keep you from sharing Jesus with others? Why or why not?

Summing up Isaiah

Some feel the book of Isaiah is depressing and somewhat difficult to understand. In some ways it is depressing—to think that we cause God that much sorrow should make us feel ashamed. And while the language or terminology can be a bit old-fashioned, it isn't impossible to understand. It simply takes a heart and mind open to what God has to say. Besides, in reading the book of Isaiah, one cannot help but see the hope that comes from God's love—a love that is shown so clearly through his gift of restoration and salvation through Jesus.

Key Verses from Isaiah

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6:8

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." Isaiah 40:8

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.” Isaiah 40:28

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:31

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me." Isaiah 43:10

“I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.” Isaiah 43:11

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” Isaiah 55:6

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.” Isaiah 55:8

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...” Isaiah 61:1

The Book Of Jeremiah and Lamentation

The books of Jeremiah and Lamentations were written by the prophet, Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah was written sometime between 626 and 586 B.C. and Lamentations was written around 587 B.C. or shortly after that. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of the following kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakin, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—right up to the time of Judah's captivity by the Babylonians.

The book of Jeremiah consists of prophecy or messages from God to Jeremiah to give to the people, as well as Jeremiah's own thoughts. Jeremiah writes to remind us of God's holiness, the need for God to be number one in our lives, and the necessity of *sincere* repentance. Jeremiah's message is also one of accountability—**our accountability to God for our thoughts, words, and deeds.**

The book of Lamentations is Jeremiah's expression of grief over his fellow Israelites (Judah). It was written in the first year or so after Judah was taken captive by Babylon. The book focuses on the results of Judah turning away from God and reminds us of the importance of clinging to God and again, of the necessity of sincere repentance.

Jeremiah's prophecies and the theme of his preaching focus primarily on the following:

- Warning the people of the consequences of their disobedience and faithlessness

READ Jeremiah 2:11, 13, 19

How are these verses relevant to today's society?

READ Jeremiah 3:11

What is God saying in this verse?

- Prophecy of God's rejection of his children

READ Jeremiah, chapters 5 and 12

How would you describe God's attitude in chapter 5?

Do you feel 5:12 is a good description of people's mindset today? Why or why not?

What does 5:18 say about the character of God?

What is Jeremiah's complaint in chapter 12?

Summarize God's response in 12:14-17.

READ Jeremiah 17:22

Jesus came to fulfill the Law of Moses. His death, burial, and resurrection nullified the need for sacrifices and offerings required by the old Law. But Jesus' fulfillment of the Law didn't erase it completely. Many of the Law's commands are still commands God expects us to obey and follow.

While the New Testament Christians and Church are never commanded to keep the Sabbath, many Christians embrace the idea of a day of rest to focus on self-care and spiritual growth and intimacy.

What are your thoughts on observing a Sabbath?

- The message of salvation and the coming of a Messiah—the ultimate King of Israel

READ Jeremiah 23:1-6

Why do you think God waited so long after the exiles of Judah and Israel to send Jesus?

- Prophecy of Babylon's dominance over Judah
- Messages that encourage obedience to Babylon
- Prophecy of Babylon's demise to the Persian Empire
- Deliverance of God's people
- Judgement and deliverance for all who believe and obey God

READ Jeremiah 25:1-6, chapter 26, 29:11-14, 30:14, 31:16

What have you learned about the people of Israel in these passages of scripture?

What have you learned about Jeremiah?

Jeremiah ‘spoke my language’; meaning he liked to use ordinary situations and objects to teach spiritual truths. In other words, he used object lessons. Among the things Jeremiah uses to teach the people the truth of God’s holiness, love, and expectations for us include:

- A yoke around his neck to demonstrate to Judah how they should submit to the rulers of Babylon: Jeremiah 27:1-12
- A messed up clay jar; noting how the potter was able to reshape it into a perfect vessel—just like God would reshape an obedient Judah (and you and me): Jeremiah 18:1
- Jeremiah purchased a piece of land immediately just prior to the siege of Judah by Babylon. His point was to show his hope for the future because of his faith in God: Jeremiah 32:7-15

Chapters 31 thru 51 include of God’s messages to Jeremiah, messages about the idol-worshipping people groups Israel and Judah have joined themselves to, and to the empires God allowed to overpower his chosen people.

Each of these messages is a warning and foretelling of their demise *because they refused to acknowledge and embrace the One True God* and they tempted Israel and Judah away to go down with them.

These chapters also contain accounts of various events in Jeremiahs’ life; including his imprisonment and near-death experiences. That’s right—Jeremiah did not preach and prophecy without risk to his own life. At one point he was thrown into a cistern where he sank in the mud but was rescued before he died.

READ Jeremiah, chapter 52

What things have taken you captive?

Moving on to Lamentations...

The songs and poems Jeremiah wrote to make the book of Lamentations are what garnered him the nickname “the weeping prophet”. In this book he pours out his heart over the plight of Judah because of their faithless acts of evil and disobedience. He is heartbroken over the destruction of Jerusalem and The Temple.

READ Lamentations 1:1-11 and 2:19

Why was Judah in this situation?

Which of the following word(s) would you use to describe the intent and meaning of Lamentations 2:19? Explain.

**DESPERATE REPENTANT HUMBLE CUNNING TIRED
FEARFUL**

READ Lamentations 3:1-6 and 3:22-26, 3:31-33

Make a list of the positive words in these verses.

When have you felt swallowed up by worry and grief?

What do these verses say to you about how you should respond to these situations?

In the book of Lamentations, we also see the severity of God's punishment. In chapter four Jeremiah describes the misery and suffering of the people of Jerusalem during Babylon's siege of the city. Starvation was so severe that they resorted to cannibalism!

But we also see Jeremiah's unquenchable spirit of hope and faith. For example, in Lamentations 2:19 Jeremiah tells the people, "Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the LORD. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children who faint from hunger at the head of every street." Jeremiah knows that all that is necessary to put an end to their suffering is true repentance.

READ Lamentations 5

Summarize this chapter in your own words.

Summing up Jeremiah and Lamentations

Jeremiah was a great evangelist and a faithful and obedient prophet. His words and the words God spoke through Jeremiah, go straight to the heart of the matter—sin is not tolerated by God and discipline or punishment will be pronounced and carried out. Jeremiah’s prophecies and preaching are also encouraging and hopeful. He doesn’t let us forget about our responsibility to be faithful and obedient to God, but he also doesn’t let us forget the bounty of blessings that comes when we are.

Key verses in Jeremiah and Lamentations

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let’s look at some of what the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations have to offer.

“Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me,” declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.” Jeremiah 2:19

“Discipline me, Lord, but only in due measure— not in your anger, or you will reduce me to nothing.” Jeremiah 10:24

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:11-13

“The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In the days to come you will understand this.”
Jeremiah 30:24

“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23

“The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.” Lamentations 3:25

“Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.” Lamentations 3:32-33

“You, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.” Lamentations 5:19

The Book Of Ezekiel

Ezekiel wrote the book bearing his name during the Jewish exile to Babylon. It was written between 593 and 571 B.C..

Ezekiel's words and the accounts of Ezekiel's life recorded in the book declare and describe God's complete sovereignty and the humility with which we should present ourselves to him in complete obedience.

Ezekiel was a prophet during the Babylonian exile—a contemporary of Jeremiah. But what really makes Ezekiel stand out from the rest of the prophets is the way in which God used Ezekiel to get his message across.

READ Ezekiel, chapter 2 thru 3:3

How often do you really feast on God's Word; letting it sink deep into your heart and mind to nourish you?

How would your life be different if you did?

READ Ezekiel, chapter 4

The account of Ezekiel in chapters four *and* five is fascinating and humbling. It is fascinating in the fact that we see just how creative God can get when it comes to getting his message across. It is fascinating in the fact that we see God going to extreme and unusual measures; expecting Ezekiel to obey without question.

What is the most humbling thing God has ever asked of you?

Did you do it?

Would you have done what God asked of Ezekiel...be honest? Why or why not?

Why do you think God used something so bizarre to make his point?

While Ezekiel's reenactment of the siege of Jerusalem is definitely the highlight of this book, it is not the only thing we should take away from the third major prophet in the Old Testament (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel). Ezekiel also speaks to the people about the hope of restoration to God, the proprieties of worship, judgement on the leaders of Israel for their lack of Godly leadership, the promise of restoration, the condemnation of false prophets (then and now), and prophecies against other nations who reject God and his chosen people.

God will not let idolatry pass. He is The One True God. He is a jealous God.

Think of it like this—would you want your children calling someone else Mom and Dad? Following their rules instead of yours? Saying they were part of their family instead of yours?

READ Ezekiel, chapter 8

What are your thoughts and feelings about the people's actions? About God's response?

How is this similar to today's society?

Re-read verse 17. Do you treat what is happening today trivially? Explain.

Chapters 9 thru 24 are harsh. They describe the sinful rebellion and disrespect for God, God's response, and stories (symbolic and true) that describe God's heart—his thoughts and feelings toward his children.

The end of chapter 24, however, recounts what I believe to be the ultimate test of Ezekiel's character and heart for the LORD. And he passes with flying

colors.

READ Ezekiel 24:15-25

Do you think God was asking too much of Ezekiel? Why or why not?

Do you think this is God's way of saying we shouldn't grieve, or was this something specific to Ezekiel? Explain.

Is there something God might ask of you that would prove to be too much? What is it?

Chapters 26 thru 39 are prophecies against specific nations—nations that tempted Israel away from God. Beginning in chapter 40, Ezekiel states that 25 years after the exile into Babylon, they were allowed to begin rebuilding the Temple.

The book of Ezekiel ends with the description of the rebuilt Temple, reminders of how to worship according to the Mosaic Law, and the division of land between the tribes of Israel.

It is interesting to note that while Israel was no longer a whole nation consisting of the original twelve tribes, God divided the land among all the tribes—including the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim (Joseph's two sons). But why? Why did God allot land to the tribes of Israel *and* Judah? Why allot land to ten tribes who weren't represented?

God allotted land to each of the Israelite tribes for the same reason Jeremiah purchased land just prior to the siege of Jerusalem...**hope for the future.**

READ Ezekiel, chapter 37

Nothing is impossible for God. God is patient. He wants no one to perish, yet he knows many will. His patience will finally play out—not because he is imperfect, but because he knows the heart and mind of every single person he ever has or ever will give life to. He already knows when waiting will not matter.

The ten tribes of Israel under Assyrian rule had been scattered and were no longer a nation. They were lost to men, but they were not, and are *still not lost from God*. God keeps his word. He cannot break a promise. His holiness doesn't 'allow' that to happen. One day Israel will be gathered together once again. One day (according to the book of Revelation) all the tribes of Israel will be recognized again by men. Israel will always hold that special place in God's heart, but because of their refusal to embrace their inheritance, God opened up salvation and adoption into his family to the Gentiles (that's us).

Summing up Ezekiel

Ezekiel can accurately be described as one of the most interesting and unusual books of the Bible. But isn't it exciting, intriguing, and even a bit unnerving to see just how far God is willing to go to make his point? Yet on the other hand, wouldn't you love to be able to go to sleep at night knowing you are just as willing to do anything and everything God calls you to do? Like Ezekiel? It's what I'm striving for. Will you?

We also need to remember that Ezekiel's prophecies have not all come to pass yet. God has not yet gathered Israel together again. But he will. Someday he will.

The book ends with the instructions on where to situate the gates of the rebuilt Jerusalem, their size, and what names they are to be given. Again, this is something that is yet to come. But the most significant words of this final portion of the book are found in the last sentence—the name of the city from that time on. THE LORD IS HERE. The LORD is here. Yesterday, today, and forever he is here.

Key verses in Ezekiel

Every book of the Bible provides us with words of wisdom, instruction, comfort, encouragement, admonishment, warning, and promise, and hope. Let's look at some of what the book of Ezekiel has to offer.

"And you will know that I am the LORD, for you have not followed my decrees or kept my laws but have conformed to the standards of the nations around you." Ezekiel 11:12

"Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God." Ezekiel 11:20

"But if the wicked turn away from all the sins they have committed and keep all my decrees and do what is just and right, they will surely live; they will not die." Ezekiel 18:21

"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, house of Israel?'" Ezekiel 33:11

The Book Of Daniel

Daniel is the writer of this Old Testament book by the same name. It was written sometime during the 5th century B.C. after the Persian Empire under the leadership of Cyrus, had toppled the Babylonian Empire.

The book of Daniel is a history of the early years of Babylon's siege of Judah/Jerusalem and the exile that follows—all the way through part of the Persian Empire's rule over Judah. The message Daniel conveys throughout the book is that there is only one God and we are to worship only him.

Daniel is the fourth of the four major prophets in the Old Testament, which explains why it contains a considerable amount of prophecy. But the book of Daniel also contains miraculous and historical accounts of his life and the lives of his three best friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, after the four of them were taken into Nebuchadnezzar's service and the service of kings that came after him.

READ Daniel, chapter 1

Aside from the now-famous Daniel Diet, what do you learn about Daniel from these verses?

What can we learn from Daniel's confidence and faith, and how might you apply these lessons to your life?

READ Daniel 3:13-30

The account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is one that sparks amazement and awe. But it should also instill in us a sense of humility and inspire us to be faithful and obedient no matter what. God has us in his constant care and no matter what happens, he will give us what we need to be victorious over anything this world shoves in our path.

Following this introduction to the character, courage, and faith of Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's display of obedient faith, the next few chapters recount the messages God spoke through Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar. These weren't easy words to speak. Quite honestly, Daniel was risking his life by telling the king what God had to say.

Have you ever had to give someone bad news? How did you prepare for it? What was the reaction of the person you told?

READ Daniel 4:28-37

King Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to the news could have gone any number of ways. But be honest, would you have expected him to take it so well—or for it to be the catalyst for him to acknowledge God as the One True God?

Think about some of the painful and difficult events in your life. Have they made your faith stronger or weaker? Explain.

The remainder of the book of Daniel is devoted primarily to prophecy about

Israel's future, the end times, and the second coming of Christ—the Christ who had not yet made his appearance on earth.

These prophecies are meant to instill in us a reverent faith and awe in the **One and Only God**. Daniel receives these messages from God in the form of dreams and visions. We read throughout the book about Daniel having these dreams and then angels interpreting them for him; revealing the meaning of what he has seen.

One of Daniel's visions foretold the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire, followed by its fall and the rise and fall of Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire and the Roman Empire. History tells us each of these things happened just as Daniel said they would.

Daniel's visions about the second coming obviously have not occurred yet, but we can be sure they will. We can be sure because God's Word is true and infallible.

When have you felt and heard God speaking to you? What or who did he use to speak to you?

How did you respond?

If this book would have been written ten years ago, we wouldn't be talking about this final aspect of the book of Daniel—the **Daniel Fast**.

In chapters one and ten we read that Daniel fasted from rich foods (fatty, sweet, and cream/gravy-laden), wine, meat, and anything else that was not naturally produced. In chapter one his purpose was to prove that our bodies operate best when we eat according to the plan God designed for us when he created man. In chapter ten he did so as an act of submission and complete

dependency on God for clarity and sustenance while he was receiving a vision and its meaning.

Daniel is by no means the first person in the Old Testament to fast his fasting experiences are the only ones that specifically state what he did and did not eat. It is for this reason that over the past few years the Daniel Fast has become popular among churches—almost ‘faddish’. Many see it as the Christian’s diet. But that isn’t what Daniel’s fast was about. It wasn’t about losing weight or even getting healthy. Daniel’s periods of fast were to recognize God’s power in his life and to submit his body, soul, and mind to God.

What does the Daniel Fast say to you about the way we should eat?

What changes do you need to make to feed your body a better diet? Will you?

Summing up the book of Daniel

Daniel...a man who made a difference—this would be a fitting title for a biography of this young Israelite turned royal advisor and prophet. Daniel touched and changed lives. His words continue to do the same even today.

You cannot read the book of Daniel without being both challenged and encouraged. In reading Daniel’s prophecies, his commitment to the LORD, and his faith that God would do what was best for him no matter when and no matter what, we see a man and his contemporaries who weren’t afraid to put

their faith to the test. They knew (and we should, too) that faith without works truly is dead.

The Book Of Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah

Each of these books of prophecy was written by the man whose name is the title of the book—Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah.

Each of these books is small in size but contain enormous amounts of wisdom and insight into who God is. We see his character, his holiness, and his parent-nature, and his unfathomable love for us despite our complete unworthiness.

In this lesson we will be looking at each book individually, but before we do, let's take a quick look at what each one focuses on:

- Hosea was written at the end of the kingdom of Israel (720 to 730 B.C). Hosea's prophecies end with the scattering (disappearance) of the Northern Kingdom, which was the kingdom of Israel (ten of the twelve tribes). The demise of Israel is the fulfillment of many of Hosea's prophecies. The final chapter, however, reveals God's unfailing love for these wayward, disobedient people. All they have to do to receive his blessings is ask his forgiveness and repent (change their ways).
- Joel was written during the reign of King Joash, King of Judah—most likely around 830-840 B.C. Joel calls on the people of Judah to repent and pray. Joel then prophecies about God's restoration of Judah and the second coming of the LORD who has not yet come the first time.
- Amos was written between 760 and 750 B.C. during the reigns of Judah's King Uzziah and Israel's King Jeroboam II. Amos is the champion of the underdog. He is the original advocate for those suffering social injustice at the hands of the rich. Amos' prophecies are against Israel; including the exile. But like Hosea and Joel, God also speaks a message of love and restoration for a repentant Israel through his faithful servant, Amos.
- The date of Obadiah's writing is uncertain. Experts believe it was either during the invasion of Jerusalem by the Philistines and Arabians in the

840-850 B.C. period of time or sometime during the siege of Jerusalem by Babylon. Obadiah's message is different than that of the other three prophets in this lesson. It is different in the fact that the prophecies Obadiah brings are against Edom—a nation of people who gloated over Israel's misery and downfall.

Hosea

Hosea calls God's people to repent. God doesn't just give Hosea words to say, though. He makes Hosea's life one big object lesson—and a most unusual one, at that.

God paired Hosea with a wife named Gomer. Gomer was a terrible wife. God told Hosea she was a prostitute, *and* that she would be unfaithful to him during their marriage. God also went on to tell Hosea to take her back after her affair without resentment and anger...and he did.

READ Hosea, chapter 1

Be honest—how do you think you would have responded to God's call to enter into a marriage like Hosea's?

Think about both the hardships and the times of joy in your life. What have you learned about God from these times?

How have you used these same experiences to witness to others? Explain.

God likened Gomer's treatment of her marriage to Israel's relationship with God. They were unfaithful and promiscuous. They 'prostituted' themselves out to false gods and idols. God could not let this go unpunished, as he cannot condone sin. Yet because he is the ultimate parent, he promises to welcome them back again when they humble themselves to him.

All of us have been hurt by someone we love. It is easy to let those hurts fester and poison our relationships. Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to ask forgiveness from? Spend some time now praying for the wisdom and courage to do so.

READ Hosea 2:8-13; Hosea, chapter 3; Hosea 4:6-7; Hosea 5:11-15; Hosea 7:1-3, 6; Hosea 10:3

Hosea also warns us to worship God only and to get rid of all idols in their life. He explains that the cost of making anything more important than God is not worth God's wrath for doing so. His plea for repentance also comes with the warning of just how fierce that wrath is. Hosea doesn't hold anything back. His messages from God are blunt. But that's not all Hosea has to say.

READ Hosea 11:1-1-4; and Hosea 14:1-2, 9

God, in his ever-loving way, also gives Hosea the tender words to speak to his children, the Israelites.

God's love will always be. And he did fulfill the promise of that ransom through Jesus' death on the cross. But we need to remember that the ransom provides *power* over the grave—not automatic, no-strings-attached rescuing. It is up to us whether or not we accept God's gift of salvation by repenting of our sins and giving ourselves fully and willingly to him.

In your own words, sum up what the book of Hosea says to you.

Joel

Joel was written to warn the people that they were facing God's judgement for their harsh disobedience *but* to assure them of God's forgiveness *if* they repent of their sins and return to him.

Joel's prophecy came over 100 years after Hosea's, yet the message is still the same, isn't it?

What does this fact say to you about God?

Like Hosea, God uses something tangible to get his message across to the people through the faithful man named Joel. But with Joel God uses locusts.

Locust 'invasions' were not uncommon in the land; destroying crops and livestock. But only for a while. A new season meant new growth. God wanted the people of Judah to know that he would destroy their position in the world because of their disobedience and sinful ways. *But only for a while.*

What are some of the ways God has gotten your attention?

What did you learn from these experiences?

READ Joel 1:1-3

What responsibilities do these verses lay on us?

Are you living up to those responsibilities? Explain.

READ Joel 1:6-7, 14; 2:12, 18-21, 27-32

What do these verses say to you about God's ability and willingness to forgive?

The message God sent through Joel is simple and direct: God is saying, "I love you. I want to bless you. I will punish those who lured you away from me, but you must return. You simply must, if you want to know the fullness of my joy. But no matter what you decide, know this: I AM, who I AM, and the whole world will someday recognize this most-important truth."

Spend some time now in prayer; asking God's forgiveness for the failings in your life and to keep his guiding hand upon you as you move forward

with repentance.

Amos

Amos was a shepherd from the tiny town or village of Tekoa. He lived and prophesied during the same time Isaiah did. Both were from Judah and both men were completely devoted to the LORD. But that is where the similarities end. While Isaiah lived among the royal court of the Judean kings and was well acquainted with the kings (especially King Hezekiah). Amos was a social 'nobody'. He was completely unassuming. There was nothing that would draw people to him. He most likely had very little interaction with people in general, due to the nature of his profession and lack of education and social skills.

Whose unassuming nature, yet passionate faith has inspired you? Explain.

Amos may have been 'just' a shepherd, but his heart was heavy because he saw what the sins of his fellow Israelites was doing to God and to them. He understood that God's anger was going to bring his wrath upon them all. And yes, his passion and desire to turn the people's hearts back to God were there before God called him to be a prophet. It was *because* of Amos' heart that God called him.

Is your desire to seek and save the lost messenger-worthy? In other words, if God still relied on prophets to get his message out, would you be a likely candidate? Why or why not?

Amos' prophecies are different, however, in the fact that they address the issue of social justice vs. injustice. This is in contrast to dealing solely with the sin of rebellion and turning away from God and toward sin. Amos issues stern warnings to anyone whose feelings of superiority because of their wealth, leads them to exploit others, or who exploits others in order to become wealthier and more powerful.

What social injustices do we encounter today that are in direct disobedience with God's commands? Example: Environmental neglect, Job discrimination, or Religious persecution

What can you do to bring the will and light of God into these situations?

READ Amos 3:1, 11; 4:1, 9-13

Amos begins by declaring Israel's guilt and warning them of God's anger and the punishment they will have to endure because of their sins. About halfway through the book, however, Amos' message from God takes on a different tone. The people are called to repent.

READ Amos 5:14-15

God is clearly the God of totality. He is completely and totally angry, complete and total in his discipline and punishment, yet completely and totally willing to forgive and move forward in love and merciful and undeserved forgiveness.

Use your own words to describe God's love for us.

READ Amos 5:21-24; 6:1

Which two words best describe what God is warning us against in these passages?

COMPLACENCY IDOL WORSHIP INSINCERITY CHANGE

The later part of chapter 7 is interesting in the fact that Amos is accused of being a troublemaker. Amaziah, the priest, even orders Amos to go to Judah and leave Israel alone. This doesn't stop Amos. He knows God is speaking to him and through him, and he's not about to be disobedient to God's call.

READ Amos 7:14-17

It took a lot of courage and faith to do what Amos did.

Have you ever spoken up for God in a 'hostile' setting or among a group of people where your words weren't welcome? Why or why not? Explain.

Obadiah

Obadiah's prophecies are quite a bit different than the other three books we've studied in this lesson. Rather than focus on the shortcomings of Israel and Judah, Obadiah's prophecies are against Edom—the descendants of Esau.

Who was Esau? Why is there so much animosity and contention between the Edomites and Israelites?

The Edomites were (and still are) in contention with anyone descended from Jacob because of Jacob's deception against Esau which led to Esau losing his birthright (Genesis 25). The contention between the two nations was over 1,000 years old! Yet they still took great joy in gloating over Israel and Judah's demise and their role in luring them away from God.

What are we dealing with still today that is evidence of the grudge between Esau and Jacob?

How have the grudges you've held against someone caused hurt in other people?

What do these verses say to you about holding a grudge?

Obadiah warned them (the Edomites) that when all is said and done they (the Edomites) will be completely destroyed, but Israel will be restored to their place of honor as God's chosen ones.

READ Obadiah, verses 14, 15-18

The prophecies of Obadiah mirror what Joel said (even though they lived in different centuries).

- God is the One True God.
- He will accept nothing less than our all.
- Those who give their all will be blessed. Those who don't will be wiped out.
- God is just, but fair and full of amazing love and grace.
- A day is coming when EVERYONE will know he is God.

Summing up Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah

These four prophets and their messages take up a very small portion of space within the Bible. Altogether, they are comprised of 27 chapters—none of which are very lengthy. Don't let this fool you into believing they don't have much to say that is relevant to our lives, though, because nothing could be further from the truth.

The messages we have received from these four prophets of God should serve to remind us *daily*, that God was, is, and forever will be the Master of

the universe and that his love is something to be treasured, respected, and held in awe and reverence.

Not all of the prophecies in these books have been fulfilled yet, But they will. You can be sure of that, because God is the man whose Word is truth.

The Book Of Jonah

Jonah is the author of this book. It was most likely between 825 and 800 B.C.; during the time the Assyrians asserted themselves as a dominating world power, but before they had taken the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity. Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam.

The accounts recorded for us in this book are an example of the extent of God's mercy on those who repent—even those who were not Israelites. Jonah, like most of us, needed to understand that God loves each and every person he creates and that he will not turn anyone away who wants to come to him.

To this point in the Bible, very little is said about God's desire for people outside of the Israelites to have a relationship with him. While we see references to it in the books of the Law, and again in Solomon's dedication of the Temple, very little else is said which addresses the matter. In fact, it is usually quite the opposite—God warning the Israelites to stay away from those who are different from them.

What we need to understand, however, is that it is not the differences in their skin color, economic status, or their geographical history. It is their culture—the godless religion they embraced that made them off-limits and so undesirable in God's eyes.

Why do you think God didn't want the Israelites to mingle with outsiders?

What does 2nd Corinthians 6:14-18 say on the subject to coincide and concur with God's commands on this matter?

How do you see the wisdom of God's instructions being ignored or carried out today? Explain.

Jonah was chosen by God to go to the city of Nineveh to preach a message of repentance. But Jonah didn't want to go and from what we know from world history, his reasons were most likely a mix of fear and prejudices.

Instead of going where God told him to go, Jonah tried to run away and hide from God. God knew Jonah was the man for the job, though, so he wasn't going to take no for an answer. Instead, God stopped Jonah from going in the opposite direction by sending a storm that resulted in Jonah being tossed over the side of the ship he was on.

Once in the water a great fish swallowed Jonah. Jonah remained inside the fish for three days, during which time he asked God to forgive his disobedience and promised he would go wherever God wanted him to go and do whatever God wanted him to do. The fish then spewed Jonah out onto the shore and Jonah did as he promised God he would do.

What are some examples of times you, people you know, or the Church in general have tried to run away from what God has commanded us to do?

Before we continue with the message and teachings of Jonah, let's take a little closer look at why Jonah was so opposed to going to Nineveh.

Nineveh was an Assyrian stronghold. It was also a HUGE city (even by today's standards) and the people there were about as far from being godly as you could get. The Assyrians and Israelites had been adversaries since the Exodus. They were known for their strength, ingenuity, and ruthless tactics. In Jonah's mind, saving Nineveh was a waste of time.

Be honest—are there those you think are a waste of time? Explain.

READ Jonah, chapter 2

Sometimes God has to do something pretty intense or drastic to get our attention. He doesn't want to have to do this. He would much rather us just listen the first time and obey.

When have you had to discipline your children because they didn't listen the first time?

How did they respond to the discipline, i.e. did they learn their lesson?

What has God done to get your attention? How did you respond?

READ Jonah, chapter 3

The message God wanted Jonah to take to the people of Nineveh was simply this: Repent or else. God gave the people of Nineveh forty days to repent. If they did not, he said he would destroy them and their city.

Jonah's message was well-received. From the lowliest citizen of Nineveh clear up to the king, Jonah tells us that the people repented. They repented (in the words of the king) in hopes that God would have mercy on them and allow them to live.

Their quick acceptance of Jonah's message/warning indicates they were familiar with God's hand against Israel's adversaries—that it was quick, sure, and devastating. It also indicates a belief in God. Granted, they weren't convinced God was the one and only true God, but they recognized his existence and power.

Do you feel like the Ninevites' repentance was more of a case of covering their bases or true repentance? Explain.

The final chapter of Jonah gives us even more insight into Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites, and his relationship with God. We see that Jonah's obedience was somewhat self-serving and that he was still dealing with some prejudices against the people of Nineveh.

READ Jonah, chapter 4

In your own words, what is chapter 4 about?

God was quick to remind Jonah that **none are worthy, but all are loved**. He needed Jonah to understand that it wasn't his place to decide who God should save and who he shouldn't. In sparing the people of Nineveh from the destruction he sent Jonah to warn them about, he also spoke words of prophecy to each of us.

Recording the events of Jonah's life as a prophet is meant to remind us that:

- None of us are worthy of God's mercy but none are excluded from

receiving it if they repent

- Obedience to God should always be our first priority
- Prejudices have no place in the hearts of God's children

Take a few minutes right now to pray; asking God to soften your heart toward those you might be prejudiced against.

Summing up the book of Jonah

The book of Jonah should serve to remind us all that it isn't up to us to decide who deserves to hear the message of the Gospel. Our responsibility, according to Jesus himself, is to make sure as many people as possible hear it. "...to all nations...." He said.

We also need to learn from this book that our responsibility is to take the Gospel and to be an encourager, but that ultimately it is up to each of us as individuals to embrace it and make it who we are.

FYI: Sadly, the people of Nineveh did not stand by their change of heart. Instead they returned their sinful lifestyle—a lifestyle God eventually punished them for. Nineveh no longer exists today, but archeologists have found some remains of the once-opulent city in the present-day area of Mosul, Iraq.

The Book Of Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

The books of Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah were written by the man the book is named for.

Micah was written prior to 685 B.C., Nahum was probably written in the last half of 600th century B.C., Habakkuk was most likely also written around 600 B.C., and Zephaniah was written around 630 B.C..

Micah

Little is known about Micah other than what we read in the book he authored. But when we look at timelines for Old Testament history, we learn that he was a contemporary of the prophet, Isaiah, that he lived in Judah, and that he prophesied during the reigns of King Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

The fact that we know so little about Micah is just one more piece of evidence that popularity, power, and prestige are not necessary in order to do something great for God. All it takes is a genuine and sincere heart and faithful obedience.

The book Micha wrote reflects his simple life of genuine faith. Micah's prophecies are a balance of hope and doom/destruction. He stresses that God has no tolerance for idolatry, rebellion, and empty rituals. Instead, God demands his children to love and serve him with their entire being.

READ Micah 1:2-5 and 2:3

Micha's prophecies take place during a time of prosperity and relative peace in Judah which corresponds to being near the end of the kingdom of Israel. The prosperity Judah was enjoying, however, was not very evenly distributed among the population. The social injustices resulting from the disposition of Judah's wealth was also a matter of great concern to Micah. He stresses that true wealth comes from a repentant heart and relationship with the LORD.

Micah is not the first prophet to address the issue of social injustice. What should this tell us about the relationship between our spiritual lives and the way in which we conduct ourselves on a daily basis?

What should this say to us as Christians, about the issue of ‘separation of church and state’?

The second and third chapters of Micah address the issues of false prophets. There is a warning to not get caught up in their teachings, but the main focus is on warning the false teachers themselves of what will happen to them because of their false teaching.

READ Micah 3:7

Which of the following do you believe best describes what God would have us learn from this verse? NOTE: More than one can apply

- **Know the Word of God and teach it only**
- **You can’t be a leader in the church unless you are fully knowledgeable of the Bible**
- **We need to verify what we hear with what is actually written in the Bible**

- **If you follow the Bible's teachings nothing bad will ever happen to you**

READ Micah 4:1-3, 6-7; 5:2, 4

This chapter speaks of things still to come. Things spoken of in verses 1-3 and verse 7 are referenced in Revelation. He then reverts back a little to prophesying about the coming of Jesus, the Messiah and the peace that comes from salvation.

The remainder of chapter 5 (verses 5b-15) deals directly with the Assyrian takeover and the toppling of Judah's independence.

By the time we get to the last half of chapter 7, however, we see once again that God's love for his people is stronger than his anger and disgust at their sinfulness—just as it is with us. Micah also tells us, as do most of the other prophets, that when all is said and done, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that God is the Holy One and that Jesus is the Lord and Savior of all.

READ Micah 7:16, 18-20

Do these verses encourage you to be more proactive in sharing the message of the Gospel with others? Explain.

Nahum

Nahum isn't one of the most 'popular' books of the Bible, but it is most definitely a book that should be used to show unbelievers its powerful truth. And here's why...

Nahum tells of the coming destruction of Nineveh (in 612 BC) due to their wickedness. His writings speak of Nineveh's enemies waiting for just the right time to take their city, about the waters around them bringing about their demise, and how they would cease to exist. And each of these things happened exactly as Nahum said they would.

Thinking back to Jonah and his attitude toward trying to save Nineveh, do you think he was justified? Why or why not?

READ Nahum 1:1-9

Nahum was given the task of preaching and prophesying in Judah. Because he gives no mention of who the reigning king was, there are two possible time periods for it being written. One was during the reign of Hezekiah. This is based on scholars believing that these verses are talking about Assyria's King Sennacherib's violent takeover of Jerusalem. The other possibility is during the reign of Manasseh—one of the evilest kings to ever live. This possibility comes from the fact that Nineveh was destroyed after Thebes, which had made a comeback after Sennacherib that lasted just a few years.

No matter which of these time periods in which it took place, we know it was before Manasseh's conversion and repentance to God, because no mention of this is made. But Nahum's prophecies are about a lot more than the destruction of Nineveh.

In prophesying Nineveh's destruction, God sends the message that even the most dominant, powerful kingdom and army in the world at that time, which was Assyria, could be reduced to nothing if God wanted it to be so. And he did.

READ Nahum 2:1, 4, 5-10, 13; 3:5-7, 18-19

The Babylonians along with the Medes and other smaller armies joined forces in taking the northern portion of the Assyrian Empire and demolishing it. This was quickly followed by record floodwaters practically swallowing Nineveh (which was a coastal city) whole. What was left of it and the Assyrian Empire was ravaged and burned by the Babylonians and their allies. When it was all said and done, nothing but a few piles of charred ruins remained of what had been the most powerful government and army in the world.

Why? Because, Nahum tells us in chapter one, that God will not leave the guilty unpunished. He is the creator and master of the universe and ultimately his plan for his creation will prevail.

Write three words to describe what you feel when reading these verses from Nahum and why you chose these words.

Habakkuk

The book of Habakkuk is a bit different from some of the other books of prophecy in the fact that Habakkuk not only tells us what God said to him, but also what he said to God. It is their conversation about the people of Israel.

Prayer is our way of conversing with God, but usually we're the ones doing all the talking. What can you do to be a better listener during prayer?

What other ways can we listen to God speaking to us?

What has God said to you lately?

Habakkuk's prophecies took place at the same time Jeremiah and Nahum were prophesying. From his writings we learn that Habakkuk was a man deeply committed to and concerned with the traditions and keeping of the Law of Moses.

READ Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-13

What sins and injustices do you wish God would deal with in a visible and tangible way?

READ Habakkuk 1:5-11; 2:14, 20

When we ask God for something, we need to be mindful that his means and methods of answering our prayers may not be what we expect or even want them to be. But God is Holy. His ways and plans are perfect.

Are there things you are afraid to ask God for because you are afraid of what he might do? Explain.

READ Habakkuk 3:1-2, 6, 12-13, 18-19

After reading these verses, would you answer the previous question differently? Why or why not?

Zephaniah

Zephaniah was a descendant of King Hezekiah and a man with clout and social standing in Judah. He prophesied during the time of King Josiah. He was well-versed in political issues and the social issues of the day. It is his knowledge of these things that gives the book of Zephaniah a heart, so to speak.

What are some ways in which you can use your standing and authority in professional circles, social circles, and in your family to be influential

for Christ?

What keeps you from being a person of influence?

Zephaniah is well-versed in the law; meaning he knows how far off-course the people have gotten from who and what God intended them to be, and his messages from God to the people are messages that:

- Warn the people of the terror of the destruction they are headed for
- Offer hope for God's unfailing mercy for those who repent

READ Zephaniah 1:2-7, 14, 18

These things aren't pleasant to think about. They are, in fact, frightening. When you read these verses, they give understanding and meaning to the fact that we are to have a reverent and awesome fear of God.

READ Zephaniah 2:3; 3:8, 12, 15-17

The message in these verses can be summed up in three words: Hope for redemption.

What is your response to the following statement: While we should be concerned about the condition of the hearts of others, we must first make sure our own hearts are spiritually fit and fine-tuned to faithful obedience.

Summing up Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah

The book of Micah can best be summed up using words and phrases like,

- God is the one and only
- Complete obedience
- Genuine faith
- Reverent humility
- No one can stand against God

One cannot read the three short chapters that make up the book of Nahum without gaining a greater respect for the power and truth of God's existence and the truth of his Word.

The book of Habakkuk is a beautiful book to read—full of promise, hope, and reminders that God isn't offended by our questions. He does, however, expect us to trust him to know the answers and to follow him faithfully no matter what.

NOTE: Part of the book of Habakkuk is repeated in a Psalm.

The events of Zephaniah can be summed up by saying that there is a day of judgement coming; both on Judah for their disobedience, and on all mankind. Zephaniah does make it clear, however, that God will be merciful to those who seek to do God's will in their lives. That mercy, we know, is found in Jesus.

The Book Of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Each of these books was written by the man it is named for.

Haggai was written around 520 B.C., Zechariah was written sometime around 500 to 480 B.C., and Malachi was written in the early 430s B.C.

Haggai

Haggai and Zechariah lived and prophesied at the same time. Haggai was most likely the older of the two men and from what we read in chapter two, he witnessed the destruction of The Temple by the Babylonians. This, combined with his deep faith and intimate relationship with God, was what drove Haggai to preach his message of determination and commitment to God and to the rebuilding of The Temple after King Darius allowed the rebuilding to continue despite the fact that the process had been stopped due to opposition from neighboring kingdoms.

Haggai's message is this: That with disobedience comes punishment and with obedience comes great blessing.

READ Haggai, chapter 1

God's timing—it can be tricky and frustrating to us, but it is always perfect.

How have you witnessed and experienced the perfectness of God's timing in your life, despite any attempts you might have made to ignore or rush it?

READ Haggai 2:20-23

Do you understand that we are all chosen by God to do something? To do several something's?

How diligently are you seeking and asking God to reveal his will for your life? What can you do to become a more willing *servant*?

Zechariah

Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet. His preaching/prophecies begin shortly after those of Haggai, but because he was so much younger, they continue long after Haggai is dead.

Zechariah's main concerns were for the rebuilding of The Temple and the spiritual renewal of the Hebrew nation.

What does a spiritual renewal or revival 'look' like to you?

What can you do to start a spiritual revival in yourself? In your family? In your church?

The Hebrew (Israelite) people had been given a golden opportunity following their release from Babylonian captivity after Babylon fell to the Persian Empire. While the Persian Empire was definitely the power-force in the world, they were not opposed to the Hebrew people worshipping God as they saw fit, nor to them having a city (Jerusalem) or a building (The Temple) for worshipping their God. Because of this, Zechariah's messages to the people are strong and forthright:

- Listen and learn from the prophets before him
- Turn back to God with a heart of repentance and obedience

READ Zechariah 1:18-21; 3:1-7

Today we see so many instances in which the rights of Christians are being stomped on and challenged—even in courts of law.

What do you think Christians should do to be less passive when these incidents occur? Or do you think we *should* take a bolder stand? Explain.

Zechariah's prophecies are Messianic. Chapters 3 thru 8 describe visions God gave Zechariah and the conversations he and God have about what he saw. God explains to him that they are visions of the promise of deliverance for Israel and for all people. It isn't until chapter 9, however, that specifically

talks about the birth of Jesus and the fact that he will be the means of salvation and deliverance.

READ Zechariah 9:9-10; 10:6-9, 12

He predicts Christ's coming to earth humbly and of being a man of 'lowly means'. He predicts his rejection by the religious leaders, his betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, his second coming, and the establishment of an eternal peace and prosperity for those who are saved through him.

When you read these prophecies and know from reading the New Testament that everything happened just as God said it would through the prophets, how does it make you feel, and what would you say to someone who doesn't believe?

Malachi

Malachi was written after the rebuilding of The Temple. During that time many of the people had experienced a time of spiritual revival. The hands-on experience of rebuilding The Temple and restoring their city had been a tangible reminder of who God is and what they meant to him.

What sort of experiences have you had that resulted in spiritual 'highs'?

Did you find yourself 'falling' back into your former pattern of taking God for granted, indifference, or even doubt? Explain.

What are some things we can do to maintain the closeness to God we experience during these times of refreshing and renewal?

Unfortunately, the people's time of renewal didn't last. After The Temple was rebuilt the people experienced hardships due to famine and drought that ruined their crops. Instead of turning to God for help, the people blamed God for their troubles and once again treated him with disrespect. They turned once more to foreign gods and idolatry.

The idols and false gods did nothing to help their situation—just like our idols and false gods do nothing to help ours.

READ Malachi 1:10-11; 2:10-16

What are some things people commonly mistake for the peace and release that can only be found in God?

We've all been guilty of this at times, but what lessons have you learned from the erroneous belief that satisfaction and happiness can be found in something or someone other than God?

READ Malachi 3:6-10

What an amazing promise from God! But it's more than just amazing—it is true! The God who will not tolerate sin...the God who doesn't think twice about letting his anger burn against those who are disobedient, is the very same God who will shower blessing after blessing on those very same people when they repent and give themselves back to him. Amazing...simply amazing.

Do you trust in the promise of God for eternal life through Jesus?

Do you trust in the promise he made in the verses you just read?

Summing up Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

The message that obedience and faithfulness gives us the privilege of hope is the common thread running throughout these last three books of the Old Testament. Along with that message also comes these messages:

- God deserves and expects to be our number one priority
- God is unshakeable
- God has a plan and his plan is perfect

Every prophecy made by Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (along with the rest of the prophets) that has already been fulfilled has done so with precise accuracy. Therefore, we have no justifiable reason to doubt the things that have not yet happened *will happen* with the same precise accuracy.

From Malachi to Jesus Christ

Malachi's prophecies take place after the rebuilding of The Temple during the reign of King Darius the Great of Persia. It is at this point that God ceases to audibly speak. No more conversations in a garden. No more burning

bushes. No more parting of the waters, manna, water from a rock, or striking people dead because of their disobedience. No more miracles involving non-carnivorous lions, bones coming back to life, or spending a few days inside a fish's belly and living to tell about it. No more coming to people in dreams and visions. No more "Thus sayeth the LORD"'s. It was **as if** God had disappeared.

Following God's messages through the prophet Malachi, the Jews live under the rule of Persian Empire until 330 B.C., followed by the 160 + period known as the Hellenistic Period—the time in which the Greeks and their culture and philosophies rose to heights of popularity and forever changed the world. The Greek mindset about truth was advantageous, however, because it allowed the Jews to worship and observe their culture practices without any interference or opposition. In fact, the most powerful world-figure of the time, Alexander the Great, who was actually Macedonian, not Greek, even granted them exclusion from paying taxes during the Sabbath Years. It was also during this time that some of the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language.

But just like every other major power to date, when Alexander the Great died, society basically imploded upon itself. The Greeks had never really been unified in their support of Alexander the Great. He was basically in charge because of his prowess, personality, and perseverance to be the world's most dominating figure. His death led to several years of power struggles, ego trips, and chaos. The switch in power led is called the Hasmonean Period. During this time Jews were severely persecuted and copies of the scripture were destroyed.

Many theologians have questioned whether or not some of the original scriptures were destroyed in their entirety (no copies left) during this time of persecution. While it is possible that letters, manuscripts, and other documents of a *Biblical nature* were permanently erased from existence, it is important to remember that **everything God wants us to know is contained in the Holy Scriptures.**

The brief period of persecution ended with the revolt of Jews led by Judas the Maccabee and the entry into Jerusalem by Pompey, the Roman general. Pompey's march into Jerusalem and the surrounding areas officially began

the period of time in which the Jews were under the leadership and rule of the Roman Empire (as was most of the rest of the known world at that point in time).

The Roman government was not particularly opposed to the Jews worshipping God or observing their laws (the Mosaic Law) regarding holidays, festivals, etc., but the Emperor made it very clear that everyone's first allegiance was to Rome.

The Roman government appointed procurators to rule over the provinces of their vast empire. And it was the procurator over the entire land of Palestine, Herod the Great, who was in control in the year 30 A.D.—the year Jesus was born and the year we once again begin hearing from God.

Why do you think God chose to stay silent during this time?

Does silence equal indifference or rejection? Explain.

When have you felt like God was being silent in your life?

How did you respond or react to this silence?

The Book Of Matthew

Matthew who was the most unlikely candidate for being one of Jesus' select twelve (other than Judas Iscariot in afterthought), is the author of the first of the four Gospels. He wrote his eye-witness account of Jesus ministry in 70 A.D., which is approximately forty years after Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and return to heaven.

I say that Matthew was such an unlikely candidate because he was a Jew *and* a tax collector in Capernaum. In other words, he was working for the Romans; extracting unfair and excessive taxes from his own people. Tax collectors had the distinct reputation for being stealing from the Jews by demanding more taxes than what they actually owed. And if they didn't pay up...it wasn't pretty. Matthew's position as a tax collector also indicates that he was highly educated, due to the fact that in order to hold that position, you had to be able to read and write Latin, as well as Hebrew (his native language) and be proficient in math.

Jews considered tax collectors to be traitors because they were working for the Roman government against their fellow Jews. When Jesus called Matthew to be a disciple—one of his closest friends and confidants—it *might* have been difficult for Peter, Andrew, James, and John to accept him into their inner circle. Matthew was a tax collector *and* more highly educated than they were. And later on, when Bartholomew, who was a direct descendant of King David, joined the group, he might even have felt somewhat offended that a 'traitor' was part of their group.

Or would they...

READ Matthew 9:9-13 and Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-28
Jot down the facts we learn about Matthew in these passages of scripture.

No where does it say that Matthew was a dishonest tax collector—that he was guilty of stealing from his fellow Jews (or anyone else, for that matter).

What does this say to you about jumping to conclusions and assuming the worst about someone?

When have you been guilty of this? Have you been correct or incorrect in your assumptions? Explain.

What does Matthew's responses (immediate and secondary) say about him?

Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus is detailed and verbatim (Jesus' own words) throughout much of the book. Some might wonder how this can be since a) some of the incidents in Matthew took place prior to Matthew's being called and b) Matthew didn't write the book until long after the incidents had taken place. Given Matthew's social status (well-educated and prominent), his attention to detail and his 'target audience' in writing, it is only reasonable to assume he would have spent a considerable amount of time talking to Jesus; asking him what he said. And because Jesus is Jesus, he would have had no trouble recalling his own words.

We must also remember that the Bible is the *inspired* words of God. Everything thing in its pages is just as God needs and wants it to be.

Matthew's purpose in writing

While all four gospels, which record the ministry, miracles, and messages of Jesus are in harmony with one another and none of them contradict the others in any way, they are written by different men, so they each have a different perspective or emphasis. Matthew's target audience was the general Jewish population.

Matthew's primary objective was to prove to his Jewish peers and readers that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied about by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and all the other prophets of the Old Testament. Matthew's use of Old Testament prophecies, references to the Law of Moses, and repeated use of phrases like "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are his way of

relating the Gospel to the Jewish community in a way that coincides with their teachings and history rather than contradicting or opposing it. He knew they were waiting for and expecting a king, and he was genuinely passionate and committed to letting them know the King had arrived.

What does Matthew tell us about Jesus

Matthew's recordation of the Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus—something that would definitely speak to the Jewish community he was writing for. In reading through chapter one, we should understand that it is more than 'just' a bunch of names. From this record we should come to understand:

- The significance of numbers to God. Fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile of Judah to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to the birth of Jesus. (Matthew 1:17) The fourteenth day of the first month was the day to celebrate Passover and it was on the day of Passover that Jesus was crucified.
- God doesn't use perfect people to bring about his perfect plan. In the lineage of Jesus we have:
 - Tamar, whose father in-law, Judah, slept with her thinking she was a prostitute.
 - Rahab, another prostitute who saved the spies sent to check out the Promised Land. Rahab was the great-great grandmother of King David.
 - Ruth, a Moabite widow of an Israelite whose love and devotion to her mother in-law resulted in love and marriage a second time around.
 - David, the man after God's own heart, who also committed adultery, murder, and blatantly disobeyed God...but was always repentant and learned from his mistakes.
 - King Manasseh, the son of King Hezekiah, and said to be the most wicked of Judah's kings.
 - Josiah, the youngest and most Godly king of Judah.
 - Several generations of lowly tradesmen all the way down to Jacob and Joseph—Jesus' earthly grandfather and father.

I am also certain that it is no mistake that Jesus' earthly grandfather and father shared the names of two of God's most faithful servants. Jacob was the father of the sons from which the twelve tribes of Israel came. Joseph was the second to the youngest of Jacob's sons. He was the young man God used in mighty ways after his brothers sold him into slavery and the man who saved his family from starvation by bringing them to Egypt.

Following the record of Jesus' lineage Matthew gives the basic, but most important details of Jesus' birth, the visit by the Magi, the family's escape to Egypt, and their return to Nazareth some three years later. These events are given to prove they are fulfillment of prophecy—something the Jewish people put great stock in. But again, Matthew's goal in writing was to prove Jesus is who he claimed to be while here on earth.

Genealogy is important. What does Jesus' genealogy say to you?

What might people learn about you from your genealogy?

Matthew then jumps from Jesus' 'toddlerhood' into his ministry; beginning with his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Jesus' baptism is significant for the following reasons:

- His baptism was by immersion to set an example for those who choose to follow him in faith and obedience. While our baptism is for the forgiveness of our sins and receipt of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), Jesus is sinless and is part of the trinity. He didn't need those things. But Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything he has not done himself.
- Following Jesus' baptism, God is audibly heard for the first time in centuries when he says, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Read: Matthew, chapter 3

What words do you feel best describe John the Baptist?

John the Baptist was able to embrace the ministry and purpose of Jesus' life here on earth before it (his ministry) even started. Prior to God speaking to John the Baptist (John 1:6 and Luke 3:1-3), John only knew Jesus as his cousin. He didn't know when they were kids that Jesus was the Messiah. But when God revealed this to him, he willingly and in full faith, believed God and obeyed.

What can we learn from John the Baptist's character? How can you apply these things to your personal life?

Following Jesus' baptism, he enters into a 40-day period of fasting, followed by some hard-core temptation by Satan. Jesus was brought to the lowest

levels this side of death humans can experience—starvation, dehydration, extreme exhaustion and fatigue, isolation, and exposure to the elements.

READ Matthew 4:1-11

Why do you think Satan waited until after Jesus had fasted for 40 days to tempt him?

Does Satan seem to tempt you when you are most vulnerable, or when you are experiencing periods of calm, success, and contentment? Explain.

What about fasting—what are your thoughts on the subject?

READ Matthew 6:16-18

What is the first word in verse 16?

Now what are your thoughts on the matter of fasting? Are they the same or different? Explain.

Describe any fasting experiences you have had. Why did you fast? What did you do during this time of fasting?

How can we become more spiritually disciplined in our fasting?

The Sermon on the Mount is recorded in chapters 5 thru 7 of Matthew. We are not going to look at them now, but rather devote the entire next lesson to this concise, yet comprehensive message for our Savior.

Following the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 8 thru 25 are a record of several of Jesus' miracles and parables. In addition to those two things, we are also given several glimpses into the heart and mind of Jesus when he refuted and chastised the Pharisees, invested his heart and truth into the disciples on a deeper level than he did with other followers.

Jesus' miracles included healing those who were blind, deaf, mute, crippled, racked with seizures, and demonic possession. He raised people from the dead, fed thousands with a mere handful of food, and did many other supernatural divine acts. But Jesus' miracles weren't just for show, or to command an audience. Their only motive was love. Yes, they also served to validate his identity, but they came from the heart—a heart aching for *his* people. He cannot help but love us that deeply—just like a parent cannot help loving their child.

Skim over Matthew, chapters 8 thru 25; paying particular attention to the miracles he performed.

What particular miracles stand out to you and why?

What miracles have you experienced in your own life?

How are they different from those recorded in Matthew; meaning what are some of the ways God works now, since Jesus is no longer with us in the flesh?

Jesus didn't want people to come to him based on the 'wow factor' of a miracle. He wanted (and still does) people to commit themselves to his truth because they genuinely believed it was (is) the truth. But Jesus knew centuries of living under the Law of Moses wouldn't be easy to set aside. He also understood that many of the people were not literate or knowledgeable of the Law beyond what the leaders told them. To counteract those issues, Jesus spoke in **parables**, which are earthly stories with heavenly or spiritual meanings. Matthew and the other gospels record a good number of Jesus' parables—all of which are relevant still today.

READ Matthew 13:24-30, 44-45, 20:1-16; 21:33-46; 25:14-30

Use the space provided to write two or three sentences to sum up *each* of these parables.

Jesus was well-received by the general public in the early stages of his ministry. Who wouldn't want to get in on one of those miracles, right? His popularity ebbed and flowed, however, depending on where he was at and how much he 'stepped on the toes' of the people he was preaching to.

This was always the case with the Pharisees. They, along with other religious leaders, never welcomed Jesus. They saw him as a threat to their position of power and sway over the people. Sadly, religious leaders of the day had gotten off track from who and what they were supposed to be according to the Mosaic Law. They were more about ritual, power, and ceremony than faith and obedience. They refused to see the truth of Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy because they didn't want to.

In what ways is the world like the Pharisees?

In what way is the Church like the Pharisees?

In what ways are we, as individuals, like the Pharisees?

Jesus dealt with this opposition in a number of ways depending on the particular circumstance. He:

- Ignored it and went on about his business
- He put the religious leaders in their place by exposing their piety and ignorance to the true law
- He avoided them

Why do you think Jesus dealt with this problem in various ways?

What does this teach you about dealing with non-believers and those who are unreceptive to your witness?

The book of Matthew records a number of incidents involving Jesus' response to the Pharisees and other non-believers. The one we are going to focus on for this lesson is found in Matthew 23. It is called, "The Seven Woes" and is found in Matthew 23:13-39. Before he begins, however, Jesus gives a brief, but no-nonsense message to the religious leaders, his disciples, and the general public (23:1-18).

He states the fact that the Pharisees and teachers of the Law are in positions of authority. But he immediately followed up by telling the people not to listen to them. He called them out for not practicing what they preached, so to speak, for distorting the Law, and for being men who were prideful, arrogant, and full of false religion.

As you can see, He doesn't hold anything back—calling them vipers and snakes (an obvious reference to Satan disguising himself as a snake when he tempted Eve and Adam).

READ Matthew, chapter 23

What are your thoughts and feelings on Jesus' message in this chapter?

What questions would you ask Jesus if he were speaking these words to you himself?

You aren't the only one to have questions. Once Jesus and the disciples left the crowd and were alone, they asked him when all of those things (the seven woes) would take place. "What would be the signs of their coming?" they asked. Jesus answered by telling them what they wanted to know. Matthew 24:4-51 records Jesus' description of the end times and his second coming. Many of the things Jesus speaks of have been happening for years—generations, even. The fact that this is so only backs up the words of the Bible that tell us how patient God is and that he wants as many as possible to have time to choose him. But just like God's patience ran out with Israel and Judah, it will run out with us, too. Jesus' words are simply a reminder that we shouldn't take that chance.

READ Matthew 24:4-51

What words describe your thoughts and feelings during and after reading this passage of scripture?

Are you frightened by the thought of the second coming of Christ? Explain.

What would you say to someone who doesn't believe it will happen?

What would you say to someone who is frightened at the thought of it?

The remainder of the book of Matthew primarily deals with the final days of

Jesus' life, here on earth, his death, burial, resurrection, and return to heaven. The key points of these final days include:

- The plot to kill Jesus put into action and Judas betrays Jesus: Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests and arranged to set Jesus up—revealing when and where he would be so that he could be arrested. Arrested for what? For being Jesus.
- The Last Supper: The Last Supper was the name given to the Feast of the Unleavened Bread—the Passover meal. It is called the Last Supper because it is Jesus' last meal. Prior to this day/evening Jesus had entered Jerusalem amid shouts of praise. But in just a matter of those few days the tide had shifted. In a few short hours many of the same people who had welcomed him to Jerusalem would be shouting, "Crucify him!" It was also during the Last Supper that Jesus instituted the practice of communion, where he washed the disciples' feet, where he told Peter he (Peter) would deny him three times before the next day, and where he revealed that one of their own (Judas) would betray him that very night.
- Jesus arrested, 'tried' and crucified: After finishing the meal in the upper room, Jesus took his core group (Peter, James, and John) with him to the garden to pray. Following his time of prayer Judas, along with a group of armed men sent by the high priests came to the garden and arrested Jesus. The rest of the night happened just as Jesus said it would. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times prior to the rooster's crowing to signal the start of a new day. Judas hung himself in shame and remorse for what he had done. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin was a farce and nothing more than a means by which to humiliate and try to discredit the Savior. Following this mock trial Jesus is handed over to Pilot, the governor for Rome. Pilot finds no fault in Jesus but bending under the 'weight' of pressure from the Jewish leaders and people, he sentences Jesus to death on the cross. Even if Pilot would have stood his ground, ultimately Jesus would have received the same sentence. He had to die.
- Jesus crucified and buried and resurrected: The details of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection recorded in Matthew are agonizingly real. Little is left to the imagination. Matthew very much wanted the Jewish community he was writing to and to know...to *feel* what on the surface appeared to be what *they* had done to the Messiah, but was in truth, what the Messiah had done *for* them (and us).

READ Matthew 27:27-61

What do you think it would have been like to be there—to be an eyewitness to Jesus’ death and the events immediately following?

READ Matthew, chapter 28

Matthew gives fewer details following Jesus’ resurrection than the other three gospels. He basically provides only two detailed accounts of what happened after Jesus was raised from the dead. The first one he records is how Jesus spoke with the women who had come to the tomb; putting the religious leaders to shame. He revealed the fact that they tried to buy the silence of the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were willing to do anything to save face rather than accept the truth of Jesus’ holiness.

The other event Matthew records is Jesus’ last act on earth and the words he spoke. His last act was to gather his disciples around him so that they could give them one last final set of instructions. We know this ‘set of instructions’ as the Great Commission. It was not only given to them, however. It is the duty and responsibility of everyone who accepts Jesus as Savior.

Rewrite the Great Commission in your own words; making it personal to you. EXAMPLE: John, I expect you to tell your neighbor, so-and-so, your coworkers (list their names) and...about me. You are to raise your children to know and obey my commands....

Get the picture? Use the space provided to do this.

Spend some time in prayer now; thanking God for Jesus, thanking Jesus for his willing sacrificial act of love, asking forgiveness for apathy and the other sin in your life, and renewing your heart for service, worship, and faithful obedience.

Sermon On The Mount

Matthew chapters, 5 thru 7 are Jesus' first recorded and most extensive (as far as we know) sermon. We refer to it as the Sermon On The Mount. While no exact location is given for the telling of this message, historians tend to think it was just outside of Capernaum along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Matthew 5:1 begins by setting the scene. The end of chapter 4 tells us that Jesus had been traveling throughout Galilee preaching, healing...loving, with his disciples following along listening, watching, and learning more and more about the man they had recently committed their lives to (and staked their reputations upon). It begins by telling us that Jesus saw the crowds following after him and his disciples, so he went up on the mountainside to sit down and began speaking.

One thing has always amazed and stymied me about Jesus' ability to speak to the masses numbering in the thousands...and being heard. How? How were they able to hear him?

The answer: the miracle of acoustics. By going up on the mountainside, which was near the water, two things were working in his favor to amplify his voice. One: He was higher than rest of the people, which would allow his voice to carry and 'stretch' out over the audience. Two: Sounds are amplified as they travel across the water.

Pretty cool, huh? And just in case you are wondering, neither of these things is coincidental or 'just' nature. They are all part of God' ginormous picture

and unfathomable sense of creativity.

Okay, so once Jesus was situated and the disciples were all gathered closely around him, it says he began speaking “...to them....”. This brings up the question of whether or not anyone else was there, and who the sermon was given to.

In the beginning, it seems somewhat obvious that the disciples were the only ones there, because in other passages of scripture, we read that the crowds were there listening. But by the time he is finished in chapter 7, we learn for sure and for certain that there were others, aka, a crowd there, as well.

If you go back and read Matthew 4:24-25, you will learn that large crowds followed Jesus wherever he went. So whether he started speaking just to the disciples and possibly a handful of others, we know that by the time he was finished, he had a much larger audience.

How large or small the crowd was doesn't really matter. What matters is that we read Jesus' words as if he were speaking directly to us...because he is. This sermon is for us. It is a simple instruction manual for life—one in which Jesus makes it abundantly clear that his way is the only way to live life to the fullest and in the manner for which you (and I) are created to live.

As you complete this lesson, keep this simple, yet profound truth first and foremost in your heart, soul, and mind: **Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We will not experience heaven unless we are faithfully obedient to his Word.**

READ Matthew 5:1-12

What does it mean to you to:

- **Be poor in spirit:**
- **Mourn**
- **Be meek**
- **Be hungry and thirsty for righteousness**
- **Be merciful**
- **Be pure in heart**
- **Be sons of God**

- **Be persecuted for the sake of righteousness**

Why do you think Jesus considers these qualities admirable?

How often do you evaluate your spiritual health based on the beatitudes?

Take a few minutes to do so right now. Record your thoughts and observations below.

READ Matthew 5:13-16

What point is Jesus making in these verses?

READ Matthew 5:17-20

Why are these verses so key to Jesus' ministry among the Israelites?

What do these verses say to you about the meaning of a true relationship with Jesus vs. ritualism and superficiality?

READ Matthew 5:21-48

	Jesus' Instruction	World
View	Your View	

Anger:

Murder:

Grudges:

Forgiveness:

Lust:

Divorce:

Oaths/pledges:

Revenge:

Lending:

How you treat others:

Take a few minutes to carefully examine your answers. How in-tune with Jesus are you? What changes do you need to make to become more like him?

What are you willing to do or not do, to make those changes?

READ Matthew, chapter 6

**Jesus' Instruction
View**

World View

Your

Service projects:

Random acts of kindness:

Giving and offering:

Praying:

Praying in public:

Forgiving others:

Fasting:

Material possessions:

**Sources of entertainment
and our priorities**

Worrying:

Needs vs. wants:

Life goals:

**Jesus' Instruction
View**

READ Matthew, chapter 7
World View

Your

Judging others:

God's provisions:

The Golden Rule:

Who will be saved:

False prophets-who:

False prophets-what will happen:

Our response and responsibility:

Now let's go back and take a little closer look at a few of the things Jesus talked about. Record your thoughts in the space provided below each bullet point.

- **The worldview is often contrary to Jesus' views.**
- **The Law of Moses is not completely obsolete and useless.**

- **Grudges and unforgiveness separate us from God and can keep us from spending eternity in heaven.**
- **Judging someone is not the same as making someone accountable. If a person is sinning against God, according to what is written in the Bible, we have a responsibility to encourage them to change. This is not judgement. Judgement is 'pronouncing' someone more of a sinner than you are or making a statement only God is qualified to make.**
- **We need to evaluate our own standards against those of Jesus.**
- **When we ask for something, we need to ask only for those things that are God's will for us?**
- **The Golden Rule is still the golden standard.**

- **It's not enough to just be a nice person. Salvation is about more than that.**
- **False prophets are a real threat and danger to us.**
- **We can't earn our way to heaven, but at the same time, the privilege of heaven comes with responsibilities.**

Re-read: Matthew 5:48

The word 'perfect' used in this verse is the Greek word, TELEIOS. It means **complete, full-grown, and mature.**

When read in its proper context with the literal meaning of the word, we can see more clearly what Jesus is calling us to do...who he is calling us to be. Jesus is calling us to grow up. To follow in our Father and Creator's footsteps. To simply do as he does, say what he says, and think as he thinks (as far as is possible, anyway).

Take a few minutes to skim back over the Sermon on the Mount. How would your life be different if you took each of his sermon points to heart on a deeper level than you currently do?

Will you do that starting now?

The Book Of Mark

Mark wrote the book bearing his name. He is also one of two of the Gospel writers who was not one of Jesus' chosen twelve. The book was written around 55 A.D.

So if Mark wasn't one of Jesus' disciples, who was he, and how did he come to know so many of the intimate details of Jesus' time with the disciples and about the miracles and teachings of Jesus?

Some theologians believe Mark may have been the son of Peter, as in Simon Peter, the disciple. Peter is the only disciple whose marital status we know (Mark 1:29), but there is never any mention of this specifically or directly, so it is just a theory. What we do know about Mark, however, is that he was the son of one of the women named Mary who faithfully followed Jesus throughout his ministry and beyond. This fact makes it highly probable that Mark (aka John Mark) would have first-hand knowledge of Jesus' teachings. He was obviously a boy rather than an adult, since the reference to him and his mother in Acts, states that it was the "...house of Mary...". Had Mark been an adult, it would have read, "...the house of John Mark....". Because he was just a boy at the time, and Mary was obviously a widow, logic tells us he would have been with her on several occasions when she went to listen to Jesus.

The Bible also tells us that several women contributed to Jesus' and the disciples' provisions of food, clothing, and other necessities. This means it is not too big of a stretch of the imagination to think that Jesus may have eaten dinner with Mark and his mother, and the rest of the family.

We also know from reading the book of Acts, that Mark traveled extensively with his cousin, Barnabas, and Paul, as well as being mentored by Peter and serving with Peter in Rome, Jerusalem, and other parts of the known world. It is commonly believed among theologians and Biblical historians that it was during their time spent together that Peter, a former fisherman who probably couldn't read or write, dictated his Gospel message to Mark.

While there are a few missing pieces of the puzzle surrounding who Mark was, we do know this:

- God's Word is just as God intends it to be—every word is inspired by him, ordained by him, and meant to be read, believed, and obeyed.
- Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels.
- Mark wrote his Gospel account earlier than the other three Gospel writers.
- The book of Mark focuses on the ministry and miracles of Jesus and is written to attract Gentile readers. He takes great care to explain the Jewish laws and customs and their relevancy to Jesus' life and the controversy surrounding his ministry. He realized that Gentiles—believers and non-believers—would not understand why many of these things mattered so much.
- Mark also makes an effort to show how Jesus' life was a fulfillment of many prophecies, so that the deity of Jesus is revealed and recognized.
- It is also important to note that Mark devotes one-third of his writing to one week in Jesus' life—his last week on earth. This makes a powerful statement as to the depth of Mark's gratitude for the gift of salvation through Jesus' death on the cross. It also demonstrates Mark's desire to live out the Great Commission (Matthew 28)—to take the message of the gospel to all nations.

I want to go back for a few moments to address the question of whether or not Mark was Peter's son. Ultimately, we don't know. We will never know, because it isn't something God felt necessary to reveal to us. But for the sake of argument, let's look at some of the reasons why some people think this to be true:

- Mark's style of writing and his 'voice' are very similar in nature to Peter's.
- We know from scripture (Matthew 8:14 and Mark 1:30) that Peter was married, so it is likely he also had at least one child.
- Peter refers to Mark (also known as John Mark) as his son. Other facts about John Mark mentioned throughout the New Testament make this the least-likely reason to consider the possibility that the two were father and son, because John Mark is said to be from a different town than

Peter was.

- Mark's mother is Mary—not Jesus' mother, but another woman named Mary (Acts 12:12). Her house was the first place Peter went after the angels miraculously removed him from prison. It would make sense that he would go to his wife's house, which was, of course, his house, as well.
- Mark was active in the ministry—both with Barnabas, his cousin, and Paul. This, coupled with the fact that we know he was considerably younger than Paul and Peter also makes it a logical assumption.

Why do you think Mark's full identity is not revealed to us?

Does it make his writing any less credible to you? Why or why not?

Unlike Matthew and Luke, who begin their Gospel accounts with Jesus' birth and the events surrounding his entrance on earth as a human, Mark begins his account of Jesus' life with John the Baptist's role as forerunner and foreteller of why Jesus was here. After introducing John, the Baptist, we read Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, the audible voice of God acknowledging Jesus as his one and only son and the promised Messiah, and a greatly condensed mention of Jesus' time of fasting and his encounter with Satan.

Mark's intent was not to make light of what happened to Jesus in the desert. But quite frankly, the people Mark was reaching out to didn't understand the concept or reasoning behind fasting and they certainly didn't comprehend the power of Satan and sin in our lives. They didn't even see sin as sin. In other words, expounding on these events wouldn't have promoted Mark's efforts to convince the non-Jews he was writing for that Jesus is the Messiah.

READ: 1st Peter 2:2

This verse, which ironically was penned by Peter, neatly sums up Mark's motives for writing this book of the Gospel and serves to explain why he chose not to spend as much time on Jewish history and law.

The book of Mark is not one you would consider a 'hell, fire, and brimstone' book, or even one that steps hard on the toes. Mark kept it simple and direct; emphasizing the sonship of Jesus, his holy and divine nature, and that he was (and is) the only route to salvation. Mark presents an airtight case for the validity of Jesus' ministry and his identity. He gives one simple XXXXXXXX and reveals to us the essentials of salvation; the need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16) and faithful obedience to his commands and expectations (Mark 1:15).

Why do you think Mark's account of the Gospel emphasizes that Jesus is who he says he is, rather than the fulfillment of prophecy?

Early on in the book, Mark, like the other gospel accounts, informs readers of the calling/selection of the first disciples and the fact that Jesus wasted no time in preaching, teaching, and healing.

With that being said, we are going to take an abbreviated look at what Mark felt was most important for his targeted audience to know about Jesus and his ministry:

One: Jesus wasn't content to stay in one place. Verse 1:38 expresses Jesus' desire and commitment to reach as many people as possible.

Why do you think Mark made a point to share this 'purpose statement' from Jesus?

READ Mark 2:13-20; 3:1-6; 7:1-8; 11:27-33; 12:28-34

Two: Mark wasn't shy about letting readers know the Jewish religious leaders were greatly opposed to Jesus. He was also not shy about letting readers know that Jesus was not concerned about gaining their approval.

After reading the passages of scripture listed, how would you describe the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees?

From the very beginning, the Pharisees were looking for ways to trick Jesus, catch him in a lie, or some other offense. But they couldn't, so they resorted to name-calling and threats. Their attempts were both useless and baseless. No matter what they said or did, Jesus had an appropriate answer that exposed their pride and ignorance to the truth.

In Mark 3:1-6, we read that the Pharisees decided to conspire with the Herodians in an attempt to shut Jesus down. To understand the weight this statement carries, you need to know who the Herodians were. They were a Jews who aligned themselves with the Herod family of rulers. They supported Roman leadership and willingly submitted to the whims and rules of Herod Antipas in exchange for being treated favorably and peacefully. In today's verbiage, we would say they were brown-nosers...sandal lickens...kowtowers.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were highly opposed to Roman Rule and Herod's power trips. These things were the primary reasons why they so desperately wanted the Messiah to come rescue them and restore them to their former place of prominence and respect.

In the eyes of the Pharisees, the Herodians were traitors. The Herodians were in favor of everything the Pharisees and other Jewish sects opposed, which is likely why they are mentioned only three times in the New Testament—once in Matthew, and twice in Mark. And all three times it is in this context;

stating that the Pharisees were willing to join forces with them to get rid of Jesus.

That's how badly they hated Jesus. They were on two different sides of the political fence, but willing to go bipartisan to get the job done.

Can you think of any examples of how our current society is doing the same thing—consciously or subconsciously? Explain.

Each time the Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the Law of Moses or blasphemy (claiming to be God's son), Jesus countered their accusations by asking questions that would only serve to expose their true motives for calling him out. Jesus wasn't antagonizing them solely for the purpose of 'picking a fight'. He wanted...he needed to expose them for who and what they really were. These men were the religious leaders of their day. They were highly respected (and feared) by the Jewish community.

What should we learn from Jesus' steadfastness in holding the religious leaders accountable for their teachings and actions?

Jesus didn't think twice about calling them out for their wrong teachings and attitudes, but he never verbally attacked their value as people or their worth in God's eyes as his creation.

What does this say to us about how we should approach controversy and persecution of the Christian faith and our values?

Jesus' desire both then and now was/is that all would be saved. But he knows that won't happen, because of our sinful nature and the allure it holds. But that was all the more reason Jesus wasn't willing to be in a popularity contest between him and them. He was there to seek and save the lost, to be the fulfillment of the Law (thus ending the sacrifices necessary in the Law of Moses), and to establish the Church as God intended it. He also knew his time was limited, so rather than spend time trying to win the hearts and souls of those who should have known better, but were calloused against him, he focused on those whose hearts and minds were hungering and thirsting for his righteousness.

Do you think there are times when we should walk away from (stop trying) someone we've been trying to bring to Christ? Explain.

Do you believe there are some people who you shouldn't even bother praying for? Explain.

READ: Mark 3:8

Three: Mark is the only writer to mention the fact that people came from Idumea to see and listen to Jesus. This is especially relevant due to the fact

that Idumea is the Greek name for Edom, the land of Esau's descendants.

Why is this relevant to Mark's intended audience?

In addition to mentioning the fact that at least a few Edomites came to investigate Jesus, in Mark 7m we read about a Syrophoenician woman boldly approached Jesus requesting he drive the demons out of her daughter. The term 'syrophoenician' could have denoted a) she was Phoenician but living in the Roman province of Syria instead of Africa, or b) she was biracial—part Syrian and part Phoenician. Either way she was a Gentile who was unafraid to approach Jesus and unashamed to admit her faith. And that was exactly the point Mark wanted to make—that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind.

Who would you consider (individuals or people groups) to be the 'descendants of Esau' in your life?

Four: Mark records nine of Jesus' parables. Only two of those nine are not recorded in any other Gospel. These are found in Mark 4:26-29 and Mark 13:32-37.

READ: Mark 4:26-29 and Mark 13:32-37

Which of the following phrases best sums up these parables?

Mark 4 Spiritual growth

Value of giving

Mark 13 God's wrath

Watch and wait

The other parables Mark records are those also recorded by Matthew and Luke. They are found in chapters 2, 4, 12, and 13.

Read the following parables. Using your own words, write the lesson you believe Jesus is teaching in each of them.

Mark 2:22

Mark 4:1-9

Mark 12:1-12

Five: Mark also records nearly two dozen miracles Jesus performed. Some of the other miracles Mark records include Jesus walking on the water in Mark 6, Jesus calming the storm (and the disciples' fears) in Mark 4 and sending evil spirits out of a man and into a herd of pigs in Mark 5.

READ Mark 4:35-41 and Mark 5:1-20

Isn't it sad that Satan's demons knew who Jesus was, while others refused to believe him? Isn't it sad that Satan's demons, in their own perverse way, even respected Jesus' holiness and authority, while others did not?

**This is possibly the most serious question you will answer in this study:
How does your belief and respect for Jesus compare to that of Satan and his demons?**

READ Mark 7:1-23

Six: These verses reveal yet another example of the dangers of allowing doctrine (or in this case, the Law) to become ritualistic and twisted to suit personal preferences and needs instead of a matter of the heart. Jesus summed it up best in verse 8 when he said, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

How have you been guilty of this same thing?

What will you do to make the changes that need to be made?

Part of making these changes requires confessing your sins AND confessing your faith in Jesus and pledging obedience to him. This confession of faith is the foundation on which the Church is built—figuratively speaking. It is the same confession of faith Peter made when Jesus asked the disciples who they believed him (Jesus) to be.

Spend a few minutes in prayer thanking Jesus for who he is, for his life-giving sacrifice, and for his constant love, mercy, and grace.

Seven: On several different occasions, Jesus warns someone he heals and the

disciples not to tell anyone what he did or to repeat something he said to others. These incidents are troubling and seem highly contradictory to many. Why shouldn't they tell people? Hadn't Jesus been preaching and doing miracles in order to get people to believe he was God's Son and their Savior? Hadn't he sent the disciples out to do the very same? Hadn't Jesus said he was there to seek and save the lost? Wasn't he traveling around teaching the masses? Weren't his miracles life-changing and in some cases, life-restoring in ways that couldn't be hidden or excused away?

Yes, to all of those questions. But Jesus knew things were about to change. He was in the final months of his ministry and life here on earth. He still had lots to do and little time left to do it, so he needed as little opposition as possible. He knew more and more of the attention coming his way was going to be of the negative kind, so instead of focusing on large crowds, he focused his attention on small groups of people and individuals who were sincere in their desire to know him.

Have you encountered individuals or people groups whose objective is to cause conflict, try to discredit you, or harass you for your faith? Explain.

How did (or do) you handle these situations?

Eight: Mark provides insight into the conversations Jesus has with his disciples—conversations about how they are to present themselves and conduct themselves while going about the business of ministry. He reminds them that they shouldn't be concerned with power and popularity, but with speaking and holding to the truth in bold humility...no matter what.

What situations require you to exhibit bold humility in matters of faith?

The final chapters of Mark give us the account of the Last Supper, Jesus' arrest and trial before the high priests and Pilot, his death on the cross, his burial and resurrection, and a couple of references to his post-resurrection appearances to the disciples.

READ Mark, chapters 14, 15, and 16

What details of Jesus' final days here on earth (both pre and post death, burial, and resurrection) does Mark focus on?

How does his recounting of these events lend itself to Mark's intended audience?

We cannot study the Gospel of Mark without addressing an issue concerning the final verses in the book of Mark—Mark 16:9-20. Some scholars say these verses are not found in the earliest manuscripts; causing questions to arise as

to whether or not they should actually be part of the Bible. These comments, however, are not completely accurate.

Yes, the verses are missing from *some* of the early manuscripts, but not all—not by any means. While verses 9-20 are not present in less than a half-dozen early manuscripts (fourth to twelfth century), they *are* present in several hundred others dated from the second to thirteenth century; including the old Latin (second century), Armenian (fifth century), Ethiopian (seventh century), and the Byzantine (450 A.D.) just to name a few.

It should also be noted that the history and doctrine contained in these verses is repeated without any hint of contradiction in multiple other places in the Bible, *and that* ALL scripture is God-breathed. It is all there because God wants it to be.

The Book Of Luke

Luke wrote this account of the Gospel sometime between 59 and 63 A.D. Like Mark, Luke was not one of Jesus' disciples, nor an eyewitness of his ministry. Evidence even points to the fact that Luke never even saw Jesus. What's more, Luke was not even Jewish. He was a Gentile by birth—the only Gentile who authored books of the Bible (he also wrote Acts).

So how and why? How did Luke come to know so much about Jesus' ministry? Historians and Bible scholars tell us that Luke most likely got most of his information from Mark. These suppositions are based on the close similarities to the books of Mark and Luke and the fact that both Mark and Luke are writing to Gentile readers. But wait! Mark wasn't a disciple either! So, why would Luke go to Mark for information? The similarities between these two books and their joint effort to reach out to Gentiles, added to what we *do* know about Mark, serves to solidify the probability that Mark was a boy who spent a lot of time in the presence of Jesus and his disciples. This fact also adds to the 'stack of evidence' that Mark's Gospel is an 'as told by Peter' account.

Read: Luke 1:1-4

Luke's introduction explains and proves everything in the previous paragraph as to how and why he came to know the truth about Jesus.

How did Luke gain the respect of the disciples and other early leaders of the Church? With a sincere heart that radiated from the inside out. Quite honestly, though, it shouldn't have even been an issue. It had been over twenty years since Peter went to Cornelius, a Gentile army officer, to share the news of salvation. Likewise, it had been several years since the disciples, Paul, and other early Church leaders had struggled with the issues of circumcision and what to eat vs. what not to eat. Therefore, it is safe to assume that both Luke's genuineness and the passage of time worked in his favor—that and the fact that God chose Luke for this task.

What prejudices do you struggle with as a Christian?

Have you ever been guilty of having an attitude that says, “You have to prove yourself to me” before I accept you as my brother or sister in Christ? Explain.

Other facts you need to know about the Gospel of Luke include:

- The gospel of Luke is the most orderly and complete telling of Jesus life and ministry.
- Luke is the only one of the four gospels that tells us the parable of the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and the post-resurrection encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.
- Luke gives us the most detailed account of Jesus’ birth.
- He was a highly educated individual, a doctor by trade, and a keen historian and stickler for details. Many call him the first apologist, which is a person who makes reasonable ‘arguments’ and justifications for religious teachings.

Luke’s intentions and desire to reach other Gentiles is understandable. He wanted them to embrace the truth and experience the love and grace of salvation as he had. Luke’s joy in Christ is almost tangible and his hope for eternity in heaven is contagious.

Hopefully you will catch some of Luke’s excitement and joy as we take a bit of time to think about some of the highlights of this book of the Bible.

READ Luke 1:5-24, 52

Luke is also the only one of the gospels that gives us the account of the

miraculous birth of John the Baptist.

Why is it important for us to know John the Baptists' background?

Should we take the time to learn more about the preachers and teachers we listen to (or read their books) today? Explain.

The second chapter of Luke provides us with the most-often recited/read account of Jesus' birth because it is the most complete and most beautifully told. Not only does it capture the facts, but the feelings of those involved. The details encompassed in Luke's account of Jesus' birth are an excellent example of the extent of Luke's interviews and research. Even secular scholars agree that Luke was a historian among historians—the best of the best.

READ Luke 2:41-52

What does this passage of scripture tell us about Jesus' knowledge and understanding of who he was?

What does this passage of scripture tell us about Mary and Joseph?

NOTE: One particularly interesting verse is Luke 2:50: “But they did not understand what he was saying to them.” This verse is in reference to Jesus’ reply to Mary’s question of why Jesus had run off from her and Joseph. Why had he worried them so? Jesus’ reply was that they should know he needed to be in his Father’s house.

Why didn’t they understand? After all, they’d learned of Jesus’ conception and impending birth from an angel. The arch angel, no less!

Their lack of understanding could have resulted from a number of things.

- To that point, on the outside, Jesus was just like every other kid—including his siblings. It is quite possible that Mary and Joseph had allowed the passage of time to dull their depth of understanding as to who Jesus really was.
- They may have been focusing more on the fact that Jesus had been missing for a few days—something any conscious parent would do. Their misunderstanding may have been more about what he had done rather than why he had done it. After all, we don’t always think very rationally when we are frightened. We tend to react rather than respond.
- They may have been unprepared in their hearts and minds to realize Jesus knew who he was. It is obvious they didn’t discuss the matter. They could have just been shocked to see Jesus suddenly going from their normal acting son to the Messiah.

Why do you think Mary and Joseph responded the way they did?

Does their response trouble you in any way? Explain.

Following the accounts of Jesus' pre-ministry life, Luke gives us the account of Jesus' baptism, the period of fasting, and the temptations from Satan. Included in the fact that Jesus was about thirty years old when he started his formal ministry and a genealogy of Jesus from the side of his earthly father, Joseph.

READ Luke 4:16-30

Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth, but it was not the homecoming one would expect the Messiah to receive. Or was it? When Jesus first read from the scroll of Isaiah, everyone was proud of their 'hometown boy'. They were also amazed because as far as they knew, he was just Joseph and Mary's son. When they questioned how he, the son of Joseph, could be so knowledgeable, Jesus warned them about the dangers of not accepting him for who he was. This angered them and they drove him out of town.

In all honesty one would have to admit that the confusion in the minds of the people was somewhat justified. They had watched him grow up. Their children had played with him. They had celebrated the Passover with him and his family. He was just another member of their community as far as they were concerned, so who was he to all of a sudden be telling them... He was Jesus?

Why is it so hard to share your faith with people you are closest to, yet who don't share your faith?

Who is it you have trouble sharing your faith with? Why?

Take a few minutes right now to pray for these people and your ability to let them see Jesus in you.

READ Mark, chapter six

The first portion of this chapter reiterates the contention between Jesus and the Pharisees that we've read about in Matthew and Mark. Following these accounts, verses 12-15 provide for us a list of the twelve men Jesus chose to seriously invest in—to teach and train up to carry on his ministry fulltime after he was gone.

Carefully re-read verses 12-15. Pay special attention to the word 'disciples'. What do you see?

What does this verse reveal about our responsibilities as Christians?

Luke records bits and pieces of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. From this we see that Luke's account of Jesus' ministry is not necessarily chronological, but rather topical; meaning he inserted sections of the Sermon on the Mount where they fit with some of the other things he was writing. This doesn't make the Bible any less accurate, though. It is simply telling the story from a different perspective to a different audience.

The ministry, parables and miracles of Jesus make chapters seven and eight.

READ Luke 9:1-6, 22-27, 37-43

Being the thorough, detail-oriented person that he was, Luke felt the need to present the cost of being a disciple of Jesus along with the benefits. This is important because a) we need to know that because of sin, we will face opposition, and b) we need to know we aren't facing it alone—that God has

provided a means of defense, aka the Holy Spirit.

Do these verses encourage or discourage you? Explain.

What has being a Christian cost you?

READ Luke 9:28-36

The transfiguration is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and is referenced in 2nd Peter. The transfiguration is one of those things that cannot be fully understood. And you know what? That's okay. If we had God all figured out, faith wouldn't be a 'thing'. Our hearts and souls wouldn't seek or crave his love, comfort, and strength. We wouldn't believe we need saving.

The transfiguration also gives us a peek inside a more intimate side of Jesus and his need for closeness.

Why do you think Jesus chose only Peter, James, and John up on that mountain?

What are you doing to get to know Jesus better?

Chapter ten begins with Jesus sending out seventy-two followers in pairs. Seventy-two—not just twelve. There is nothing mystical or exclusive about the number 72. He simply chose from among those who were following him.

Where is Jesus sending you? Who has God placed in your life for you to witness to?

How have you been equipped to serve God? To share your faith with others?

There is one verse I want to call particular attention to in this passage—verse 20: “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Jesus’ words were words of warning against pride and arrogance—of falsely believing that what they were able to accomplish was of *their* doing rather than God’s. It is a warning we need to heed today, as well.

What can you do to guard against this kind of pride?

The next several chapters primarily consist of Jesus’ parables. The parables Luke records for us are those that illustrate God’s forgiving and merciful

character, the fact that God is personally interested in each of us, the importance of forgiving others and treating them as we want to be treated, the power of persistent prayer, and the importance of standing firm in the truth.

The book of Luke contains more parables than any of the other books of the Gospel. Eighteen of the parables are only recorded in the book of Luke. Among those are:

- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
- The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)
- Building a tower and a king making war (Luke 14:25-35)
- The Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)
- The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Read each of the following parables. What does each one mean? What lesson is it teaching?

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Building a tower and a king making war (Luke 14:25-35)

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

As we come to the final chapters of Luke, we find:

The account of Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). This event is also found only in Luke. Zacchaeus' conversion is a positive reminder of the fact that none of us are beyond saving or unloved by God.

Chapters twenty-two through twenty-four are devoted to the end of Jesus' life here on earth. Luke begins his account with Judas' agreement to betray Jesus and ends with the ascension to heaven. Luke's account is completely in line with those of the other three gospels, but just like Matthew, Mark, and John, Luke includes somethings the others do not and vice versa. The following is a list of some of the things Luke tells us that the other Gospels don't.

- We learn that an angel from heaven comforted Jesus while he was praying in the garden just prior to his arrest.
- Luke shares the fact that Jesus put the soldier's ear back on his head after Peter cut it off with a sword (while Jesus was being arrested).
- Luke tells us that Peter and Jesus made eye contact right after Peter denied Jesus the third time.
- We learn that a friendship was formed between Herod and Pilate as a result of Jesus' arrest and death sentence.
- We are made privy to more of what Jesus said on the day he was crucified.
- Jesus' post-resurrection encounter with Cleopas and someone else on the road to Emmaus. NOTE: We don't know for certain who Cleopas was or who was with him, but we know whoever the two men were, they were faithful followers Jesus trusted enough to share his resurrected presence with.

Luke ends his book with a simple statement that Jesus blessed the disciples

before returning to the father in heaven. He says nothing about the Great Commission, but true to Luke's attention to detail, he tells us how the disciples responded to Jesus' departure. They worshipped him.

This simple statement is extremely powerful, though. The disciples' response of worship is all the proof anyone should need that Jesus *is* the Messiah Savior, that the hope of heaven is real, and that a life of faith and obedience is a life of joy, contentment, and peace.

The Book Of John

John, who was one of the twelve disciples, and known as ‘the disciple Jesus loved’, i.e. best friend, wrote the fourth Gospel. It was most likely written toward the end of John’s life, around 85 A.D., which is over 50 years after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and return to heaven.

Like the book of Matthew, the gospel of John is an eyewitness account of the events in the life and ministry of Jesus. John was one of the first four disciples Jesus called into full-time ministry; making him privy just about every moment of Jesus’ three-year evangelistic crusade.

John’s gospel was written for the non-Jewish community—especially the Greeks. His purpose for writing is clearly for evangelistic purposes. John was there when Jesus gave the Great Commission and he wasted no time in doing just that—taking the message of the Gospel to as many people as possible. His passion for seeking and saving the lost is evident in the way he writes. John doesn’t focus on presenting evidence of the truth, but rather the spiritual *necessity* of believing. He wants us to know our address for eternity hinges on our belief.

READ John 1:1-4

John wastes no time in getting to the point. John begins his writing by establishing the fact that Jesus is part of the Trinity and that he has *always been*. This would have been especially important for witnessing to the Greeks due to their attention to, and extreme interest in philosophy. They would have wanted answers not only to who Jesus was and why he came, but also where Jesus came from and who sent him.

How do you answer questions about how Jesus came to be and the Trinity?

Do you find yourself avoiding conversations like this because you don't want to have to answer those type of questions? Explain.

FYI: Rather than try to come up with words of your own, you can never go wrong by using scripture like the ones you just read, to answer these questions for you. And remember, ultimately, it comes down to faith.

Following John's introduction of Jesus and his statement of why he is writing, John delves into the ministry of Jesus by telling us about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.

Jesus' baptism is at or near the beginning of all four of the Gospels—and for good reason. Actually, for a few good reasons.

- Jesus did not enter into ministry before being baptized in the Jordan River; signifying that our union with him (becoming part of God's family) does not begin until we are baptized.
- The Spirit resting on Jesus after his baptism is the visual aid proving to us that we receive the Holy Spirit upon baptism.
- Jesus doesn't expect us to do anything he didn't do himself.
- Being buried in baptism symbolizes dying to self so that we can have a new life in Christ.

READ John 2:1-12

Chapter two of the book of John opens with the account of Jesus' first miracle—changing the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. John is the only one to record this miracle, but we know it is Jesus' first miracle (in contrast to the miracles the other disciples recorded in conjunction with the calling of the first disciples) because John states that it is Jesus' first miracle. You must also remember that John's credibility in being the only one to

record Jesus' first miracle is valid due to the fact that because he was one of the first called. He was there for it all.

The book of John is also the most chronologically organized of the four gospels. John's use of the phrases, 'the next day', 'after that', 'after these things', 'a while later', 'on the third day', 'two days later', and a few others, clearly indicates a progression of time. For example, when John uses the phrase, 'after these things....', we can be confident that everything written after that phrase did indeed take place at a later time than what he had previously written about.

Keeping that in mind...

What do you find most interesting about Jesus' first miracle?

What do you think Mary's reasoning was behind ignoring Jesus' comment about it not being time yet?

READ Matthew 12:48; Mark 3:33; Luke 8:21

John is the only one of the four gospel writers who doesn't record the hesitancy of Mary and her other children in accepting Jesus' life of ministry. Yet we know from reading further, that she later becomes one of his most ardent followers; following him all the way to the foot of the cross. Two of his brothers—James and Jude—also become passionate about the Church and both authored a book of the New Testament.

What do you think happened to cause this periodic change of heart?

Describe how you think you would have responded to life as the mother or a sibling of the King of Kings...the Savior of all mankind.

Re-read: John 2:13

Sometimes this statement leaves people wondering how this is different from them leaving everything behind to follow Jesus. Why had they started following Jesus if they hadn't yet put their faith in him?

The best way to explain this is to share something from the blog, "A Bit of Salty Grace" <https://abitofsaltygrace.blogspot.com/2016/06/faith-is-like-chocolate.html> . The writer compares faith with eating chocolate by saying that the first time a child eats chocolate they do so on the advisement of someone they trust. In other words, their faith is in the person. But after they taste the chocolate, their faith is transferred to the chocolate—to always taste as sweet and yummy as it did the time before.

The disciples initially went with Jesus because they were willing to take him up on his offer when he told them to come and see for themselves who he was and what he was about. But when they saw what he had done at the wedding feast, as well as the signs they had seen and heard about prior to that (God speaking after his baptism and the unexpected catch of fish, for example), their desire to follow Jesus went from a desire to confirm their belief that he might actually be the Messiah, to full-blown faith and conviction that that is exactly who he was.

Use the space below to describe your conversion experience. When and how did you come to realize that Jesus is real—the one and only way to

God?

READ John 3:1-17

Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and leader of the Jewish council, came to Jesus in the night because he believed, but feared the repercussions he would face from the other Jewish leaders. Jesus explains rebirth through immersion to Nicodemus, followed by some of the most beloved and ‘famous’ words Jesus ever spoke: John 3:16.

Nicodemus’ ‘secret faith’ saved Jesus from the Pharisees a couple of times prior to his arrest and crucifixion (God’s timing rather than man’s) and it was Nicodemus that worked with Joseph of Arimathea, another secret convert, to properly care for Jesus’ body rather than allow it to be mauled and broken.

While this doesn’t excuse us from hiding our faith or not sharing it, we should learn from Nicodemus that there are times when a quiet but resolute faith is more effective and appropriate.

What are some examples you can think of when a quiet faith is more effective than speaking out boldly?

READ John 4:1-3

Why do you think Jesus didn't baptize anyone; giving this privilege to his disciples?

John 4:4-44 is the account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well solidifies the truth that Jesus' gift of salvation is for everyone, yet once again, he adamantly states that while he loves people no matter who they are, he won't settle for letting them stay there—a lost sinner. His goal is to save them and he has declared that that is to be our goal, too.

If you are not familiar with this event in Jesus' ministry, take a few minutes to read it before answering the following question.

How does this event in Jesus' ministry demonstrate the truth that we are to love the sinner, but not the sin?

How well do you think the Church is living up to Jesus' teaching on this matter? Explain.

John is the only one of the four books of the Gospel that doesn't record any

of Jesus' parables. He chose, instead, to focus on Jesus' more direct teaching to the disciples and the miracles he did among the people.

In chapters 5 and 6, John records three miracles which are primarily acts of compassion and mercy. In doing so, he validates his identity *in order to help* his disciples understand him more fully. The miracles John records in these two chapters are:

- Healing the man at alongside the pool of Bethesda
- Feeding the 5,000
- Walking on the water

READ text-decoration:underline underline wavy;color:#1f497d">READ
John 5:13-15

What do these verses say about our responsibilities in receiving God's blessings?

Do you think Jesus' words were a warning or a threat? Explain.

What do these verses lead you to believe about the man who was healed?

READ : John 5:16-18

Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. This enraged the Pharisees and other Jews who doubted and opposed Jesus; making them all the more determined to kill him. The remainder of chapter 5 and most of

chapter 6 are Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders. Instead of speaking in parables or bluntly telling them they aren't capable of understanding what he has to say, Jesus takes the time to try to reason with them using the Law and the prophets they should have known. In other words, he uses what they consider to be the basis for their accusations against them to prove them wrong.

We should follow Jesus' example by using God's Word as our primary source of reference to seek and save the lost.

Chapters 7 through 10 contain several of Jesus' sermons and John's recollections of how adamant the Jewish leaders were in getting rid of Jesus. We also gain insight to Jesus' earthly personality. Yes, he was still the perfect, flawless, sinless Son of God, but as we read in chapters 5 and 6, he didn't hesitate to put the Pharisees on the spot by putting their false accusations back on them. Jesus showed no patience for those who were bent on trying to malign him or God the Father.

Have you ever talked to someone who was more interested in arguing with you about God than hearing or talking about him? If so, how do you respond?

READ : John 7:37-52

Explain why the following phrase is an appropriate and accurate description of John's words in verse 39.

READ : John 9:1-34

Write your thoughts on why each of the following words could be used to describe this event.

Superstition:

Misguided belief:

Guilt by association:

Jealousy:

Insecurity:

Joy:

Faith:

Naïve:

Chapter 11 opens with the death and resurrection of Jesus' friend, Lazarus. Jesus used Lazarus' death to display God's power and glory. Jesus *allowed* Lazarus to die for the purpose of being able to resurrect him *so that* those present would know there was nothing he and God cannot do.

The subject of death ends the eleventh chapter, as well, by telling us that after hearing about the miracle of Lazarus being brought back to life, the Jewish leaders joined forces with their enemies, the Roman government, to take Jesus down. They would stop at nothing to kill Jesus. Jesus knew what was happening, so at this point he withdrew from the ministry and the general public. Instead, he spent most of his final days with the disciples; preparing them for the time he would no longer be with them.

In chapters 12 through 16, Jesus was preparing to die. More specifically, he was preparing his disciples for his death. Part of that process included spending one last Passover meal with them in Jerusalem.

He tells them he is going to die soon and that one of their group will betray him. He humbly washes the disciples' feet, predicts Peter's denial, comforts them in their sadness over their grief of losing him, promises them the Holy Spirit, talks extensively on the subject of remaining faithful, and explains to them that their grief will turn to joy when they see and understand all that is about to take place.

READ : John 12:1-8; 13:2; 13:36-38; 15:15-17

Do you tend to be busy in the church vs. being about the business *of* the Church? Explain.

What things in your life are you keeping for yourself instead of sharing them *back* with Jesus?

How do you think Jesus felt knowing both Judas and Peter would turn on him in a matter of a few hours?

Have you ever been deceived or rejected by someone you love? How did it make you feel? What is the situation between you and that person now?

Use your own words to describe the transition taking place in John 15:15-17.

The one thing noticeably missing from John's account of the last evening he spent with Jesus before the cross is the institution of communion. He is the only one of the writers of the four gospels to leave it out. Why? No one knows, but all the other details of the evening are there and in perfect harmony with the other three gospel writers.

Of course, we have no way of knowing for sure, but why do you think John omitted the Last Supper from his book—especially after recording Jesus' alluding to it in 6:53-59?

Chapters 17 and 18 record Jesus' final hours—his time of prayer in the garden, his arrest, his so-called trial before the high priest and Peter's denial

of knowing Jesus three times (just as Jesus said it would happen).

READ : John 18:10-11

Explain why this verse is the living, breathing example of Ephesians 6:12.

In chapter 19, we read that Jesus was handed over to Pilate, an official of the Roman government. Pilate found no reason to convict Jesus. He'd done nothing wrong in the eyes of the Roman government. But not wanting to appear weak in the eyes of the people, Pilate caved to them and sentenced Jesus to death on the cross. Pilate only thought he was ultimately responsible.

REMEMBER: We know that whether it was Pilate or Caesar himself who sentenced Jesus, it was only because God said it was to be so, that Jesus died on the cross.

Do you think the fact that it was God's plan for Jesus to die makes those physically put him there any less guilty? Explain.

The events leading up to the cross and the actual time Jesus spent on the cross is recorded by John in a way that only Jesus' closet friend could tell it. John's account of those final hours is filled with emotion. He reveals that some of Jesus' last thoughts are about his mother, whom he asks John to watch out for.

READ : John 19:25-27

Why do you think Jesus wanted John to look out for Mary instead of her

other children—Jesus’ half-brothers?

The physical details surrounding Jesus’ death and burial are naturally the same in all four books of the Gospel. Each one has something they choose to highlight, but the facts surrounding the sequence of events, those who were present, the details of the events that took place, and the outcome are all the same. Jesus is alive!

The final chapter of the book of John, chapter 21, is arguably one of the most inspirational and life-changing in the Bible. John is the only one of the gospel writers to record this particular incident that includes the miracle of breakfast Jesus gave to seven of his disciples following his resurrection. But more importantly, John gives us the intimate details of the conversation that took place between Peter and Jesus—the first conversation following Peter’s three-fold denial of Jesus.

READ : John 21:1-19

Describe how you would have felt if you were Peter that morning?

In most Bibles, the sub-heading for these verses reads, “Peter’s reinstatement”. More simply and affectionately put, “Peter’s homecoming”. Following Peter’s denial of Jesus three times, he was deeply grieved and ashamed. How could he do that to Jesus? To the Son of the living God?! You

know his excitement over seeing Jesus had to be coupled with embarrassment and anxiety over what Jesus would say or do. But Jesus didn't say a word about it—not directly, anyway. Instead, Jesus asks Peter three times if he (Peter) loves him (Jesus), to which Peter always responds by saying, “Yes”. Jesus then counters by telling Peter to feed his sheep; meaning to take the message of the gospel of salvation to anyone and everyone who will listen. What a beautiful testimony of God's mercy and forgiving nature!

Spend a few minutes right now telling God how much you love him and how much you want to be at home with him.

The book of John ends eloquently and powerfully. I say this not because it is some great command or 'secret' to great faith. No, I say this because the words of John 21:25 sum up the magnitude of who Jesus was while he was living here on earth.

READ : John 21:25

Let these words soak into your heart and mind so that you can try to grasp the truth of just how amazing, big, and wonderful our Savior, Jesus, is: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

What has Jesus done for you that will never be recorded in God's Word? Just think—for all those things, he has done countless more for those he loves and created.

FYI: The remainder of the New Testament consists of:

- Acts, which provides us with a glimpse into the history of the early

Church, which started on the Day of Pentecost

- Paul's letters to the various churches in the known world, as well as Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (13)
- Letters written by other leaders of the early Church—Luke, Peter, John, James, and Jude (8)
- One book of prophecy, which is Revelation, and was written by John

In order to study each of these books as efficiently and effectively as possible, each lesson will consist of a brief introduction, followed by key passages for you to read, and questions which will hopefully cause you to grow in Godly wisdom, develop a more spiritually disciplined life, and equip you for the life God created for you and is calling you to live.

The Book of Acts

The book of Acts was written around 63 A.D. and was written by Luke—the same Gentile convert who wrote the Gospel of Luke. The book of Acts is the historical account of the beginning of the Church and the spread of Christianity following Christ’s death, resurrection, and return to heaven. The book of Acts also provides the **foundation of doctrine for the Church as God and Jesus intend it to be.**

In reading the book of Acts we learn that the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples and others chosen by God to do great and miraculous things as they disbursed themselves around the world to take the message of the gospel to any and all who would listen. But none of these actions takes place solely for the purpose of wowing the crowd or to make a point. The miracles done or experienced by early leaders of the Church are done in conjunction with the teaching and acceptance of Jesus as Savior.

These miracles are what I often refer to as ‘transitional’ miracles. Jesus’ departure from earth to return to heaven was the Holy Spirit’s entrance into the hearts and minds of everyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior in compliance with the commands Jesus put forth for doing so. These miracles were God’s way of transitioning the people from seeing/hearing about the wonderful things Jesus had done in the name of love, mercy, and grace.

From that first Day of Pentecost after Jesus’ return to heaven, to Paul’s time in Rome under house arrest, you cannot read the book of Acts without coming away with the truth that it isn’t easy to be a Christian here on earth. It never has been and never will be. There are going to be times of ridicule and persecution. Your faith is *will* be tested. But you will also experience the joys and blessings that come from standing firmly on the truth and holding tight to the loving hands of God who will never leave your side. And yes, the blessings far outweigh the hardships. Every time. No exceptions.

READ : Acts 1:1-9

What instructions did Jesus give the disciples above and beyond the Great Commission?

What *doesn't* Jesus tell the disciples?

READ : Acts 1:12-14

What important information do we learn about Jesus' biological/earthly family in these verses?

All indications point to the fact that none of Jesus' brothers believed he was the Messiah until after his death and resurrection. How do you think they felt once they realized how wrong they had been?

Have you ever been wrong about someone? What did you do to correct the situation and make any necessary amends?

READ : Acts 2

What does Jesus, through Peter, tell us we must do in order to be saved?

Notice what happens after the first Christians accepted Jesus as their Savior. They were DEVOTED to spiritual growth and to building their relationship with him.

What can and will you do to become a more DEVOTED Christian?

READ : Acts 4:8-22

Who does God use to spread the message of salvation?

True or False: According to these verses, our actions and attitudes should always be like that of Jesus, because we never know who is watching.

The Jewish leaders were obviously scared of God's wrath. Nothing could be farther from the truth today. Why do you think people have stopped fearing God?

READ : Acts 4:32

Make a list of some ways you can step out in faith by sharing more of what God has blessed you with.

READ : Acts 5:1-11

Sum up what happened in your own words and write a sentence or two describing what you believe God wants us to learn from this husband and wife.

READ : Acts 5:29-42

Look at the following list of words used to describe Peter and the other

apostles. Next to each one, record how you will exhibit this character trait in your own life.

PERSEVER:

BOLD:

UNASHAMED:

FAITHFUL:

READ : Acts 6:8-11, 13-15; 7:51-59; 8:1-4

Did you know 11 Christians are killed each and every day for no other reason that their love for Jesus and their refusal to deny him? How does that make you feel?

Does it change your perspective on what it means to be faithful and obedient to the end? Explain.

How are Christians being persecuted in supposedly Christian nations today, i.e. the United States, Canada, and Great Britain (as well as others)?

Do you feel you are personally experiencing persecution? Explain.

READ : Acts 8:9-25

Summarize this incident in your own words. Don't insert your opinion—stick with the facts.

This is the only time this man is mentioned in the Bible. Luke tells us that this sorcerer believed and was baptized, yet in verse 24, we read that he didn't even believe his prayers would be heard; leaving the impression that his belief was superficial at best.

What is your impression of Simon? Why?

If you had to write a title for this incident, what would it be?

READ : Acts 9:1-22

The conversion of Saul, later known as Paul, is a miracle—what we refer to today as ‘a God thing’. How else would a murderous, Christian-hating man be completely and utterly changed from the inside out?

Who are the Saul’s in your life—people you believe are too far gone to turn their lives over to God?

How does reading about Saul’s conversion change your way of thinking...or does it?

READ : Acts 10

Who would you feel uncomfortable sharing the Gospel with (individuals or people groups)? Explain.

READ : Acts 13:4

God is our Father, Jesus is our Savior, and the Holy Spirit is our Guide. How fully do you appreciate the Spirit's presence and accessibility in your life?

Do you depend on the Holy Spirit to speak words of wisdom and direction to you? Explain.

How would you respond to the statement, "Christians today typically embrace a watered-down Spirit."?

The remaining chapters of Acts recount for us the missionary journeys of Paul and his various companions. They are rich with detail, wisdom, and events that should humble us, while at the same time propelling us to actively and joyfully share the Good News of salvation through Jesus.

READ : Acts 13:47

Who does God want you to be a light to?

What are you going to do to make your light shine brighter?

READ : Acts 15:19

When and how have you been guilty of making it difficult for others to see and experience Jesus?

READ : Acts 16:25-34

What does this passage of scripture say to you?

READ : Acts 17:17 and Acts 18:28

In order to be able to reason with people and refute their unbelief, you have to know God's Word for yourself. How much time do you spend in Bible reading and study each day?

What resources tend to be most beneficial to you for gaining wisdom and understanding of God's Word?

READ : Acts 20:24

Use the space below to write your brief, but concise testimony of when and why you accepted Jesus as your Savior.

READ Acts 20:28

Write down the names of two or three people you will commit to pray for, encourage them in their faith, and fellowship with.

READ : Acts 24:24-26

Why was Felix scared?

Do you think fear is a catalyst for a lot of the opposition Christians face today? Explain.

READ : Acts 26:28

Who convinced you to give your life to Jesus? If possible, call them or send them a hand-written letter thanking them for their investment in your life.

The book of Acts is the history of the early Church, but in many ways, it is meant to be a pattern for your history, too. Like the early Christians we should have an intense desire and commitment to:

- Following God's direct imperatives for salvation: believing, repenting, confession, and baptism for forgiveness of sins and the
- Giving generously
- Sharing the good news of the Gospel
- Being bold and steadfast in our faith
- Be willing and ready to go where God sends us and do what he calls us to do

Will you leave your own personal imprint on the history of the Church?

The Book Of Romans

Paul wrote the book of Romans—most likely while he was in Corinth on his third missionary journey. The date of writing is approximately 57 A.D.

God's simple, profound, and sacrificial plan of salvation is the focus of his letter to the Christians in Rome—both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Not only does Paul lay out the plan of salvation, but he does so from the viewpoint that we are all sinners in desperate need of the one and only Savior.

READ : Romans 1:8, 16-17

Is your faith obvious to those you come in contact with? Would they be shocked to find you in church on Sunday if they walked through the door? Does your life reflect someone who claims Jesus as Savior?

What changes do you need to make to be able to give a resounding 'yes' to the previous question?

Read Romans 1:18-32

Who are 'they'?

How does God's Word contradict the popular world view?

What does this passage say about how we should view the things God declares to be sin?

Do you struggle with this passage in any way? Explain.

READ : Romans 2:1-3 and 6-8

What do we learn about calling attention to someone else's sins?

What do these verses tell us regarding the difference between judging someone and holding someone accountable?

READ : Romans 3:23-26

Rewrites these verses in your own words.

READ : Romans 5:1-5

How have you experienced the truth of these verses in your own life? Be specific.

How have you seen the truth of these verses in the lives of others? Be specific.

READ : Romans 6:1-4

This is a message that speaks clearly on the subject of responsibility. While we cannot save ourselves, and while we cannot earn our salvation, it is a gift that comes with the responsibility to treat it with respect and extreme gratitude.

What would you say to someone who is taking salvation for granted?

READ : Romans 6:22-23

Do you see being a slave to Christ as a bad thing? Why or why not? Does it seem contradictory to being called God's child? Explain.

READ : Romans 8:3-4

Why was it impossible for the Law to save people from their sins?

If the Law couldn't save people, what was the purpose(s) of it?

READ : Romans 8:26-27

Have you ever not known what to pray? Did you ask the Spirit to pray for you?

Do you agree or disagree that we do not give the Spirit the opportunities he deserves to work in our lives as powerfully as he can and wants to? Explain.

What do you need to give up in order to give yourself over fully to the Spirit?

Are you willing to do that? To at least take baby steps to get to that point? Explain.

READ : Romans 9

This is a difficult passage of scripture to digest. It is hard to think about God as one who hardens hearts or who withholds mercy. Yet we must understand that God has his limits when dealing with sin. He gives us opportunity after opportunity to turn away from sin and toward him, but we don't have the right to expect him to wait forever. He has already said the day of judgement is coming.

How would you respond to the following statement: Rather than worry about incurring God's wrath focus on being faithful and obedient in all things.

READ : Romans 12

How can you make yourself a more pleasing sacrifice to God, your Creator?

In what ways are you conforming to the world instead of conforming to the will and commands of God? Are you willing to change? Explain.

What do you consider to be your God-given talents and abilities?

How involved are you with your local church family? In what ways do you serve; using the talents and abilities God has given you for his glory and the good of others and yourself?

How do you define spiritual zeal for the LORD?

How do you define being patient in affliction?

Bless those who persecute you? Wow! That's not easy, is it? Have you ever actually done what God commands us to do in verse 13? Explain.

How is blessing those who persecute you different from putting yourself out there to be a doormat?

Who do you need to make peace with? What steps will you take to do so?

Verse 18 says, "If it is possible....". What situations might make it impossible to live at peace with someone?

Memorize Romans 12:21

READ : Romans 13:1

In your own words, explain what this verse says to you about the current political situation in our country and our world.

READ : Romans 14:1

How do we determine what is and isn't a disputable matter?

What are some examples of disputable matters and what are some scripturally based ways we can deal with them?

How are we to deal with those matters that are not disputable? Give some examples of such matters and how you and your church family has/does/would deal with them.

READ : Romans 16:1-16

While there is nothing doctrinal or instructive in these verses, they have much to say about what it means to be part of God's family.

What do these verses say to you about being part of God's family?

How can you be a more active and loving member of God's family to your brothers and sisters in your church? Your community? All around the world?

Paul's letter to the church in Rome doesn't leave anything to the imagination. His instructions for conduct and his teaching regarding what God finds pleasing and acceptable, as well as what he finds sinful and unacceptable are clear. There is nothing disputable about it.

In your own words, sum up what you learned in this brief study of the book of Romans.

The Book Of 1st and 2nd Corinthians

The books of 1st and 2nd Corinthians were written by Paul. Both are letters written to the Christians in Corinth—a city known throughout the Roman Empire for its depravity and wickedness.

The Christians in Corinth had a lot to overcome. Not only were they faced with changing their lifestyles and way of thinking on just about every matter, they had to do so in the midst of constant turmoil, temptation, and persecution by their friends, neighbors, and often times, their own family members.

Paul's letters are meant to encourage the Corinthian Christians to stay strong in their faith and not give up, and to increase their knowledge of God so that they could mature in Christ. His letters were both necessary and timely. The struggles these people faced were intense, but they weren't all that different than the struggles we face today; meaning the content of Paul's letters are just as necessary and timely today as they were all those centuries ago.

How sad is that? How sad is it that the spiritual maturity of mankind (generally speaking) is essentially no different today than it was back then? But God, in his all-knowing holiness knew that Paul's letters to the Corinthians would be written in such a way that they would be timeless. So as you go through this speed-study of 1st and 2nd Corinthians, do so with a readiness to:

- Be made more aware of God's definition of Christian character
- Embrace some hard truths about sin and to run away from it—straight into God's protective arms
- Love others because you are loved by God and to love others the same way God loves you
- Hold tight to the hope of eternity with God the Father and Jesus the Son and wait with joyful expectation for the second coming of Jesus and the

day of judgement

- Stand firm in the doctrinal teachings, commands, and expectations of God instead of living down to the world's standards

READ : 1st Corinthians 1:10

We know it's impossible to always agree with everyone, but it is possible to peacefully co-exist and to agree to disagree...especially when everyone involved gives God first place in their lives. The exception to this is on matters of doctrine—those things the Bible speaks of with indisputable clarity.

What are some examples of things we might find ourselves agreeing to disagree about among members of our church family?

How can we work to be unified on such matters?

READ : 1st Corinthians 1:22-25

What do these verses tell you about the nature of God?

What do these verses teach us about faith?

READ : 1st Corinthians 2:9-14

Paraphrase these verses in your own words.

How well do you feel you know the Holy Spirit? What are you doing to deepen your relationship with Him?

READ : 1st Corinthians 3:1-2, 5-8

Spiritual maturity is the goal we all need to aspire to. We also need to recognize that spiritual maturity doesn't happen overnight—that it is a process that takes time, a willing heart, and an open mind to the truths of God.

What are you doing on a regular basis to mature in your relationship with Jesus?

What are you doing to help others grow and mature in Jesus?

READ : 1st Corinthians 5:1-7

How would you define SINFUL NATURE?

Explain the comparison between yeast and sin.

What other incidents in the Bible do we see this comparison being made?

READ : 1st Corinthians 6:9-11 and 18-20

List some of the ways the world deceives us into believing sin is not sin?

Would you agree or disagree that the Church as a whole has become desensitized to some of the sins addressed in these passages of scripture? Explain.

Why is sexual sin such a touchy subject for us? Why is it so important to God?

READ : 1st Corinthians 7:10-15

Paraphrase this passage of scripture in your own words and as briefly/concisely as possible.

Why does Paul's letter address the issue by making what appears to be exceptions or exemptions to Jesus' teachings in the Gospels about marriage and divorce?

How do these verses support God's instructions for us to not be joined (married) to an unbeliever in 2nd Corinthians 6:14?

What are some of the issues and problems couples face who don't share the same religious beliefs?

Do you believe religious differences should keep people from dating? Marrying? Why or why not?

READ : 1st Corinthians 8:8-9 and 10:31-33

Eating or not eating certain foods is not something our society is too concerned with when it comes to viewing someone as being a Christian or not. There are, however, other actions we might take or places we might go that could cause someone to doubt the sincerity of our faith. What are some of these things and how do you feel about them?

Example: Going to a casino.

READ : 1st Corinthians 10:13

Memorize this verse.

What are some of the ‘outs’ God provides to us?

READ : 1st Corinthians 11:3, 11

Share your thoughts and feelings about these two verses.

Do you feel they are meant for another place and time? If so, how do you justify that without negating the relevancy of the entire Bible?

READ 1st Corinthians 11:23-29

Do you feel we sometimes take communion for granted? Why or why not?

What are some things you do personally to prepare your heart and mind for communion? Or do you?

What do you think your church family could do to make communion more meaningful in general?

Do you feel communion should be more celebratory or worshipful? Explain.

READ : 1st Corinthians 12:12-26

Describe how you fit into your local congregation? What ministries are you involved in? How are you using your talents to serve your congregation? Your community?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is okay to say no when you feel you are not equipped or possess the abilities to do a certain task? Explain.

How would you approach someone in your church who is clearly out of their element, yet desires to serve the LORD and others?

READ : 1st Corinthians 13:1-13

These verses are among the most popular and well-known in the Bible. Don't let familiarity cause you to skip over them, though. As you read them now, picture the people you love most and think about how you can do a better job of loving them in this way.

What are some practical things you can do to be more patient with people and situations?

Are you holding a grudge against anyone? Why? If so, how is it affecting your relationship with this person? With others?

Who do you have difficulty loving and why?

How will you allow these verses to give you the courage and strength you need to move forward in love toward this person (people)?

READ : 1st Corinthians 16:5-24

Once again, there is no specific instruction or teaching in these verses. Rather, they are another reminder of the importance of encouraging one another and the need for us to recognize and embrace our brothers and sisters in Christ within our local congregation *as well as* all around the world.

Spend some time right now praying for the Church around the world.

Take some time over within the next couple of weeks to fellowship with some of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Host a dinner or dessert for three or four other couples (or singles). Visit some of the elderly people in your church and ask them to share some of their faith experiences over a snack you bring with you.

Write an encouraging letter or email to the missionaries your church supports or those you know personally.

Purity, reverence, perseverance, respect, and of course love, are the words that could easily and aptly be used to sum up the book of 1st Corinthians. These attributes of Christian character are what allow us to be who Christ calls us to be and what give us the distinction of being different (set apart) from the world. It is important, however, for us to understand that while the Spirit supplies these things in abundance, he will not force them upon us. We have a choice to make and the responsibility to choose rightly.

The question is, will we?

In what ways have you been challenged from this study of 1st Corinthians? How will you rise to meet these challenges so that you can become more mature in Christ?

Theologians and historians agree that Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was written just months after the first one. The reason for this second letter was to continue to encourage and warn the Christians in Corinth. In giving their lives to Christ, they had given up everything they knew regarding their former way of living, and it wasn't easy. The desire was there, and they really were trying, but Satan was working overtime; trying to drag them back to their lives of sin.

In 2nd Corinthians we see that Satan resorts to planting false teachers in the church whose goal was to discredit Paul and his teachings. But God is faithful and truth will always win over sin. Every. Single. Time.

The book of 2nd Corinthians is a highly emotional book. Paul's feelings are raw and exposed. Ranging from despair to utter joy, Paul pours his heart out to the people he loves so dearly. As you go through this study, consider how you might be more in tune to the needs of your fellow Christians and the responsibility we all have to be a positive influence and partner in growing together—not a stumbling block or enabler to sin.

READ : 2nd Corinthians 1:3-4, 8-9

One of the most-often asked questions among Christians as well as non-Christians, is “Why?”. “Why would God do this or that? If God is really all that loving, why....?” “Why didn't God....” And, “Why does God let bad things happen to good people?”

The answer to all of these why questions is found in these verses. Write the answer in your own words.

How have you experienced the truth of these verses in your own life?

How did you respond? What did you learn?

READ : 2nd Corinthians 1:12-14

Beginning with these verses, all the way through chapter 4, Paul defends his ministry to the people of Corinth. He assures them that the matters of doctrine and moral conduct he taught and preached are God's truth—that everything he said from the Holy Spirit.

It was important, no, essential to Paul that the Corinthians know Paul was a messenger of God and for them to be able to discern the difference between him and the false teachers sent by Satan. It was important because Paul cared so deeply about the people's salvation, and because he was adamant that he would never stray from the purpose God bestowed upon him as a missionary and messenger of the Gospel. In other words, Paul needed a clear conscience.

What is your conscience telling you about the way you conduct yourself in the world? At work. With your friends. In the safety and secrecy of your own home? With your money?

READ : 2nd Corinthians 4:10

How does your life reflect these words from Paul? What is it about you that reflects your faith and the fact that you belong to Jesus? Be specific.

READ : 2nd Corinthians 4:18

What five words best describe your thoughts and feelings about death and heaven? Explain.

READ : 2nd Corinthians 5:9-10, 17

Paul's goal was to please God. Is that your goal, too? Spend a few minutes praying about this. What people or things stand between you and God? How can you rearrange your life so that this is not so?

READ : 2nd Corinthians 9:6-8

Chapters 6 thru 9 focus on giving and support for ministry. All too often we view giving as an optional activity or one that is a bit of a last resort—to give what is left over (if there is any leftovers).

What has been your habit for giving in the past? Why?

Have you ever given even when you didn't think you had anything to give, or that by giving first, you would go without? If so, what were the results of your giving?

Why do you think God commands and desires us to give to him first?

Describe the difference between wants and needs in your own life.

What are some of your needs that others may see as wants? Explain.

READ : 2nd Corinthians 11:3, 13-15

How is the Church being deceived today?

In what ways have you been deceived by Satan?

What are you doing to safeguard your thoughts and feelings from Satan's deceptions?

READ : 2nd Corinthians 12:7-10

The word that best sums up this passage of scripture is the word, humility. How have you been humbled and what has been/is your response and reaction to these situations?

Why is humility important in the life of a Christian?

READ : 2nd Corinthians 13:11

To constantly strive to be more like Jesus and to be unified with other Christians as a family, for the sake of serving one another, serving others, and winning lost souls to Christ—these are the goals of every true Christian.

Spend time in prayer right now asking God to humble you, make you a ready and willing servant, and to give you the courage to take the opportunities he gives you to be fully his.

The book of 2nd Corinthians is about putting into practice the character traits Paul wrote about in his first letter. Why? Because putting on the character of Christ is not meant to be worn in secret. We are to be bold and unashamed of whose and what we are.

What have you learned from this lesson regarding the reality and relentless nature of Satan? How will you use what you have learned to guard your heart more closely?

The Book Of Galatians

The book of Galatians was written by Paul. As is the case with most of Paul's other letters, Paul's purpose in writing was to address a problem in the Church. The primary problem is an internal one. Some of the Jewish Christians (called Judaizers) are having a very difficult time letting go of some of the ways of the Old Law—especially circumcision.

Their resistance to letting go of the old to embrace the truth that Jesus was/is the fulfillment of the Law, caused serious problems. Its divisiveness among the Jewish Christians was bad enough, but the problems it caused between Jewish and Gentile Christians threatened the viability of the Church in Galatia. Their insistence that the Gentiles adopt these rituals bordered on bullying.

Paul had given much of himself to teaching and encouraging these new Christians and helping them establish their new family of believers. But because Paul adamantly opposed the Judaizers, they (the Judaizers) accused him of watering down the truth for the sake of adding numbers to the Church. The book of Galatians is Paul's response to these accusations and additional doctrinal teachings meant to strengthen their resolve.

READ : Galatians 1:6-9

The world we live in is a fallen world—full of sin that can easily tempt and entrap us if we are not dedicated to knowing and living the truth of God's Word. One of Satan's most cunning methods of deceiving us into sinning is what we often refer to in today's society as 'fake news'. The Church is full of fake news 'reporters' and we must constantly be on guard against them.

What are some examples of fake news (false teachings) in the Church today?

What means do you use to identify false teachings?

What would (or do) you say to someone who brings false teaching into your congregation? How do you handle the issue of false teaching you come into contact with in books, the internet, and other media sources?

READ : Galatians 1:12-17

This passage of scripture is Paul's testimony about how he came to Christ. Giving his testimony was not done out of prideful ambition or in an attempt to win a popularity contest. Paul's testimony re-established his credibility and re-emphasized the fact that salvation was as much for the Gentile Christians as for Israelite (Jewish) Christians.

Use this space to write your testimony in five or six sentences.

READ : Galatians 2:4-5

Do you think the local church should have classes designed for new Christians and/or a mentoring program to help people grow and mature in their faith? Explain.

Have you ever been affected by false teachers? How did you deal with the situation?

READ : Galatians 2:11-13

As Christians, we have a responsibility to set an example for others—especially those who are less mature in their faith. Have you ever been disappointed or feel like you’ve been misled by someone whose Christian character wasn’t as evident as they professed? Explain.

How did it affect your faith?

In what ways might you misrepresent Christ to someone? Are you willing to make the changes necessary to be a better ambassador for Jesus? Explain.

READ : Galatians 2:20

Memorize this verse.

Take a few minutes to think about the ways you need to die for self so that you can live more fully in Jesus? What would your life look like?

READ : Galatians 3:1-3

Rewrite these verses in your own words.

READ : Galatians 3:10-13 and 5:1-4

Read James 2:26. How would you explain the balance between living under the grace of Jesus and expressing your faith through good works?

READ : Galatians 4:15-18

What is Paul warning us against and reminding us to do?

Do you think you are guilty of complacency? Why or why not?

Why is complacency a dangerous 'place' for Christians?

READ : Galatians 5:14-15

Pride, selfishness, and all the 'baggage' these things bring with them are poor substitutes for love. Are you experiencing conflict with anyone? Will you take the first step toward reconciliation?

READ : Galatians 5:19-26

Memorize verses 22 and 23.

Next to each fruit of the Spirit, list at least three ways you can exhibit each one more fully in your life:

LOVE

JOY

PEACE

PATIENCE

KINDNESS

GOODNESS

FAITHFULNESS

GENTLE

CALM

SELF CONTROL

READ : Galatians 6:1-2

What are some examples of sins that someone would need to be restored from?

What are some examples for things that are matters of opinion that should not be addressed?

READ : Galatians 6:7

List three words that describe how this verse makes you feel. Explain.

READ : Galatians 6:9-10

Make a list of people you want to reach out to in kindness over the next month.

Make a list of ways you can do that.

If you were asked to sum up the book of Galatians in fifty words or less, it might go something like this:

There is one truth only and it is this: God sent Jesus to fulfill the Law. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection offers salvation. Salvation brings with it the responsibility to become like Jesus in all things so that we can spend eternity in heaven.

The Book Of Ephesians

Ephesus was the hub of what is now Turkey during the time Paul was writing these letters to the early churches. In fact, it would be fair to say that Ephesus was one of the most important cities in the known world—right up there with Rome and Athens.

Paul spent nearly three years living in Ephesus in order to win people to Christ through his teaching, preaching, and mentoring. During his time there he developed a deep love for these people and built strong relationships among his Ephesian brothers and sisters in Christ. Because of this, it is no wonder he wrote a letter to them after leaving the area.

Bible scholars date the letter to the Ephesians somewhere around 60 A.D., while Paul was in prison in Rome. Paul's imprisonment prevented him from being there in person, but it didn't take away his desire to make sure the people of Ephesus understood that the Church is not a building or a home where people meet, or even a single group of people. Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand that the Church is a family consisting of all those who accept Jesus as their Savior according to what the Bible says, and who live a life of faith and obedience to God. Paul also wanted the Ephesians to understand that God creates each and every person to fulfill specific purposes, and with the talents and abilities to fulfill those purposes.

What Paul wrote to the people in Ephesus is equally true for us. We, too, have been created by God to accomplish certain tasks here on earth, and we, too, were designed with all the qualities and capabilities necessary to do those tasks well. Very well.

READ : Ephesians 1:4-5, 11-14

That word—*predestined*—has been the focus of a lot of theological arguments over the years. It is even a primary doctrinal sticking point in some denominations. But this should not be! The problem is in the misunderstanding of the meaning of the word 'predestined'. But once you understand its actual meaning, you will be able to have a clear and accurate

understanding of these verses.

Let's take it a piece at a time. The 'pre' in predestined means before. The word 'destined' means planned; intended for; certain. So, when we put the two together, the word predestined means planned or intended for *before* it (or in this case, we) happens...was born.

In other words, even before God created us, he had a plan for us. He created us with specific purposes in mind. He knew since the beginning of time who he would create and why. *That's* what it means to be predestined. And we all are. There's nothing mystical or exclusive about it—not on his part, anyway. God chose us all. The problem comes when we don't choose him back.

Prior to this lesson, did you have a problem understanding predestination? Why or why not?

Do you feel you now have a better understanding of what it means?

Read Psalm 139:13-16. How do these verses coincide with the actual meaning of predestination?

READ : Ephesians 1:19-22

What does this passage tell you about Jesus? About God?

READ : Ephesians 2:8-10

Paul is telling us we cannot earn our way into heaven, but that when we accept the gift...the free gift of salvation, we have a responsibility to show our appreciation and gratitude by doing good works.

What is the difference between good works and trying to earn our way into heaven?

How do you differentiate between the two?

READ : Ephesians 3:16-18

According to these verses, what do we have to have to be able to even try to comprehend the vastness of God's love for us?

What does God's love surpass? Explain what this means to you.

READ : Ephesians 4:2-6

Verses 2-3 instruct us to be humble, patient, and to be willing to go the extra mile to resolve differences of opinion and conflict. When have you had opportunity to do this?

Did you?

What are you willing to do to more fully live out these words of instruction?

Verses 4-6 remind us of the oneness and deity of God. They remind us that hope and salvation are ours only because of him.

Read verse 1 (4:1). In your own words, tell why you think Paul tells us to strive for unity in the same paragraph in which he reminds us of who

our hope and salvation are found in?

READ : Ephesians 4:22-24

What parts of your old self are you having trouble getting rid of? Why?

In your own words, explain what putting on a ‘new self’ means.

What are some necessary changes we must make to put on a new self?

READ : Ephesians 4:25-32

Rewrite these verses in your own words.

What part of these instructions do you struggle with the most? Why?

What are some things you can do to lessen that struggle?

READ : Ephesians 5:1-2

Jesus died for you. When you let yourself really think on that, it should change you.

Briefly record a normal day's activities—the things you do and the people you interact with. How well do they reflect the personality and character of Jesus?

What changes do you need to make? What steps will you take to make these changes?

READ : Ephesians 5:3-4, 6, 15-18

The character of God—the same character he expects us (his adopted children) to have—is in opposition to that of the fallen world we live in.

What habits and practices do you have to fight against the world and its attacks on your Christian character?

What would (or do) you say to someone who refutes the truth of what Paul says in these verses?

READ : Ephesians 5:22-33

What is your definition and explanation of submission of a wife to her husband?

Do you feel Christian wives are guilty of ignoring these commands? Why or why not?

What do you think the Church can/should do to help husbands and wives better understand the value and merit of doing marriage God's way?

READ : Ephesians 6:1-4

What changes in society have bled over into the Church; affecting the way parents raise their children?

What can/should the church do to better equip parents to raise their children like this?

READ : Ephesians 6:7

Memorize this verse.

How will making this verse part of who you are change you?

READ : Ephesians 6:10-18

Do you realize what verse 12 is telling us? Your struggles and conflicts are not against our coworkers, ex-spouses, grouchy neighbors, rebellious teenager, abusive parent, or whoever else is inflicting pain, conflict, and turmoil in your life. Your struggle is with Satan. Satan is the enemy. The attacker.

You need to be equipped, armed and ready to fight back and you need to fight to win.

List each piece of armor and explain how it protects and saves you physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The book of Ephesians is one of the most practical books in the Bible. Paul lays out the who, what, and why of Jesus in a way that is applicable to believers in every way possible. But he doesn't just leave it there. Paul also tells us how and why Jesus should impact every aspect of our lives.

The Book Of Philippians

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippian Christians during his first imprisonment in Rome. The letter was a thank-you note of sorts, for the gifts the people in Philippi sent Paul. These gifts were deeply appreciated by Paul, and as you will read, his gratitude to and for the givers of these gifts was even greater.

The word most commonly used to describe the theme of the book of Philippians is 'joy'. Over and over again, Paul reminds us of the meaning of, source of, and benefits of joy. But no church is perfect, and Satan has an arsenal of weapons he constantly fires against it. The dangers Paul warns the Philippians against are pride, selfishness, and divisiveness. We need to be on guard against these things, as well.

READ : Philippians 1:3-6

Who are you thankful for? Spend a few minutes right now thanking God for these people by name.

Who are your Christian mentors—people whose faith and spiritual maturity you admire and learn from? Write them a (handwritten) note thanking them for being an example and let them know you love them and are thankful God placed them in your life.

READ : Philippians 1:9-11

What are you doing in an effort to grow and mature spiritually on a daily basis?

How can you improve these efforts?

What, specifically, do you do to discern between right and wrong when making decisions and choices in your life?

What do these verses tell us should be our goal as Christians?

READ : Philippians 1:20, 27

Rewrite these verses in your own words.

READ : Philippians 2:3-5

Make a list of things/ways you can look to the interests of others first over the course of the next week or two. Refer back to this list on a daily basis and mark off the ones you do and record your thoughts and feelings for having done them.

READ : Philippians 2:9-11

These three verses are among the most powerful and awe-inspiring words in the Bible. EVERY knee and every tongue...that means *everyone*. For those of us in Christ, that will be a glorious day, but for those who have ignored or denied the Almighty I AM, it will be a time of fear, dread, and deep remorse.

Do these verses stir inside you a desire to fulfill your God-given mission, which is to seek and save the lost? Explain.

Who in your life needs Jesus as Savior? In addition to prayer, what are some things you can realistically do to show them who Jesus is and to try to instill a desire in their hearts for him?

Spend a few minutes in prayer praising Jesus for being Jesus.

READ : Philippians 3:7-8

Thinking back to your pre-Christian life, what things/actions/friends/habits did you give up? What changes did it bring to your life?

What old habits/actions/attitudes/things are you still holding on to, or still tempt you? Explain.

READ : Philippians 4:4-7

Memorize these verses (if you haven't already).

What are some things you are anxious about right now? Spend a few minutes praying about them and genuinely give them over to God to handle for you.

READ : Philippians 4:8

Write three or four relevant words next to each character quality God

desires you to possess and focus on.

TRUE

NOBLE

RIGHT

PURE

LOVELY

ADMIRABLE

EXCELLENT

PRAISEWORTHY

READ : Philippians 4:13

Memorize this verse.

Describe some of the times you have accomplished things with God that you wouldn't have been able to do on your own.

READ : Philippians 4:19-20

Sing or say The Doxology.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above, you heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The joy of the LORD truly is our strength. It is also the power that sustains us, protects, guides, and directs us. But the joy of the LORD is also something we must desire, pursue and nurture. Without deliberate and consistent attention, joy will not be present. Our sinful nature will see to that, so pray for, strive for, and embrace joy.

The Book Of Colossians

Paul is the author of this letter to the church in Colossi. Evidence shows that it, too, was written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome.

The reason for this letter is to address a serious problem facing the early Church—the problem of heresy. Heresy is a dangerously wrong interpretation of doctrine, which in the case of the Church, usually stems from either a person's pride or traditions that become more important in the hearts and minds of people than the truth.

The problem among the Colossian Christians was the insistence among some of the leaders to hold fast to rituals in an effort to 'ensure' their salvation and bring them closer to God. Paul's letter adamantly refuted this heresy by reassuring his brothers and sisters in Christ that Jesus is enough. Jesus is all we need. That his sacrificial death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins, and that faithful obedience to HIS words is all that is necessary to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

READ : Colossians 1:3-5, 9-14

Even though Paul needed to scold or chastise his brothers and sisters in Christ, he in no way wanted them to think the things he was about to say were not said out of deep love and concern for them. Paul spoke the truth firmly and unashamedly, but he always spoke it in a way that conveyed his love and concern for their spiritual wellbeing.

Do you know anyone who has wandered away from the faith? How do these verses encourage and instruct you in reaching out to them?

What are you doing to put yourself in the position to be filled with the

knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of God?

What can you do to improve in this area of your Christian life?

READ : Colossians 1:15-20

Write down the phrases from this passage that stick out to you and explain why.

READ : Colossians 2:4, 6-8

Who and what have tried, or are currently trying to deceive you and the Church in general?

What do you believe are the most dangerous hollow and deceptive philosophies we are being faced with today? Why?

What can/do/will you do to remain firmly rooted in the Word?

READ Colossians 2:20

What worldly principles or rules do you struggle with?

READ : Colossians 3:1-2, 5-9

What are your favorite hymns and praise choruses? Sing a couple of them now.

What are your favorite Bible verses? Why?

What miracles of nature bring you close to God? Why?

What books, television shows, music, websites, etc. do you need to get rid of so that you won't be tempted with the sinful things Paul warns us against in these verses?

How can you create a more God-focused environment in your home, your workspace, your social life?

READ : Colossians 3:13-14

Memorize these verses.

Who do you have difficulty ‘bearing with’? Why? What can you do to have a more Christ-like attitude toward these people?

READ : Colossians 3:16-17

Describe how you can make these verses evident in your life.

READ : Colossians 3:18-21

Pray for your marriage, your role as a mother/father, and for your children. Ask that God engrave these words on your heart and mind and that you will genuinely desire to live as he commands us to.

READ : Colossians 3:23

Do your neighbors know you are a Christian? Your boss and coworkers? The people you do business with? The people who serve you in restaurants, the bank, the mall....?

How do they know? What sets you apart from unbelievers or those who are lukewarm in their faith?

READ : Colossians 4:2

A healthy prayer life isn't measured by a stopwatch or one of those hourglasses with sand in it. A healthy prayer life is measured by your level of faith and your attitude as to what is and isn't prayer worthy. FYI: If it matters to you, it matters to God.

If you take this verse to heart (which I pray you will), your life will be changed for the good in ways you can't even begin to imagine. No, that doesn't mean all your problems will disappear, but it *does* mean you will face them with confidence that nothing will defeat you. What's more, the good things in life will be even 'gooder' because you will recognize them as blessings and gifts from the loving Father, God.

Look at this list of suggestions for developing a stronger, more intimate prayer life with God. Which of these are you currently doing? Which of these will you make part of your prayer time with God?

***Start your day with prayer—even before you get out of bed. When you start the day communicating with God, you are more likely to continue to talk to him throughout the day. Remember: When God is your first go-to, he is the first ‘thing’ you see and hear.**

***Get a prayer partner or two. Pray for and about one another.**

***If it won’t frustrate you, journal your prayers. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy, just write. Once a month, look back over what you’ve written and acknowledge how God has worked (or is working) in your life to answer your prayers.**

***If writing frustrates you, spend time once a week thinking back to the things and people you have prayed for/about. How has God answered your prayers?**

***Pick a distraction-free time and place to pray. If you don’t think you have one, create one.**

***Share the joy of answered prayer with family and friends. Give God the glory and praise for working in your life.**

READ : Colossians 4:5-6

What does it mean to you to ‘be wise’ about the way you interact with outsiders (unbelievers)?

How do you become equipped to give right answers?

Do you avoid situations that might result in a conversation about faith and God with someone who doesn't believe? Why or why not?

If not, how do you approach the situation and what do you say?

READ : Colossians 4:7-15

These verses are Paul's "tell everyone I said hi" speech. Paul often closes his letters like this. Why do you think he does this?

What does this say about Paul? About the early Church?

What should it tell us about our relationship with other Christians?

Colossians is one of the most positive and upbeat lectures on Christianity ever given. Paul is direct and makes it clear there is no wiggle room. Being one of God's heirs through Jesus is an all or nothing way of life and it must be done God's way...or else. But the way Paul presents these essential truths overflows with love and concern. It's not about winning the argument or proving he's right. It's about keeping a group of fellow Christians from putting their salvation at risk by adding to and watering down the Gospel.

We, too, must be careful not to do this, or else the same thing that Paul warned the Colossians would happen to them, will happen to us. We will become separated from God. May it never be so!

The Book Of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians

Paul wrote both letters to the Christians at Thessalonica, one of the most prominent cities of the ancient world, during his second missionary journey. In reading these letters, we get the distinct impression that Paul wishes he was there to teach and mentor them in person. Because of intense opposition by the Jews for being there, Paul spent only a few short weeks in Thessalonica evangelizing and winning people to Christ before being forced out.

This church was very new and very young, i.e. the people were baby Christians. They had only a basic understanding of God and Jesus, and of the message of the Gospel. The Thessalonian Christians were most likely converts from Greek paganism. Because of the lack of mentorship and thorough teaching, the Christians at Thessalonica were confused about when Jesus would return for the final judgement. They genuinely believed it was going to happen at any moment. They were so sure, in fact, that they quit doing life to wait. Paul's letters serve to explain to them (and us) what little we do know about the second coming of Jesus, and to encourage the people not to live in fear dread, and to live lives of worship, service, fellowship, and evangelizing.

READ : 1st Thessalonians 1:2-4

Works done because of faith, out of love for God and others, and with hope for what lies beyond the grave. It doesn't get much simpler than that.

How does your life reflect these three simple, yet powerful truths?

READ : 1st Thessalonians 1:6-7

Who are some of the people who first modeled Jesus' love and character to you? What made you notice their love for Jesus?

Who are your current spiritual mentors and why?

Who might be looking to you as an example of faith and Godliness?

What are you doing to make sure you are setting an example worthy of Jesus?

READ : 1st Thessalonians 2:13

How would you answer the question, "why do you believe God is real and that the Bible is true?"

READ : 1st Thessalonians 3:12-13

Who do you have trouble loving (individuals and people groups)? Why are these people so difficult for you to love?

What do these verses teach you about your need to try harder?

READ : 1st Thessalonians 4:11-12

Is your life—your attitude, actions, habits, and speech—setting an example for others?

What about your life would make being a Christian attractive to a non-believer?

READ : 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:1-2, 5

FACT: Death is one of the most mysterious, un-talked about subjects... among Christians and non-Christians, alike.

Why do you think death is so difficult to talk about?

What, if anything, scares you about death?

What have these scriptures taught you about human death?

How do these verses contradict the common assumptions many Christians have about death?

Did these verses change your perspective on death? Explain.

READ : 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18

Memorize these verses.

What does it mean to you to give thanks in all circumstances? How is that different from giving thanks *for* all circumstances?

When has it been difficult for you to give thanks? How was the situation made better or worse by your attitude and faith?

READ : 2nd Thessalonians 1:6-7

What do these verses tell you about getting even and taking revenge?

Spend some time in prayer; asking God to give you a heart to wait on God.

READ : 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-12

The only subject more feared and avoided by Christians and non-Christians is the second coming. The mystery surrounding the second coming, however, shouldn't scare you. It is, after all, what we are living and waiting for. Without the second coming, heaven won't become our home.

How would you respond to this statement: We shouldn't spend time trying to understand the second coming. Our efforts should be spent on living in such a way that we will be sure of our judgement.

What concerns or fears do you have about the second coming?

Have you ever been made fun of or persecuted for your belief in the second coming? Explain.

You might be surprised at the number of people who say they believe in God, but don't believe in Satan, and who believe in heaven, but not hell.

How would you respond to someone who doesn't believe in the second coming and the day of eternal judgement?

READ : 2nd Thessalonians 3:5

This verse should be your prayer for every day of your life.

Spend time in prayer asking God to direct your heart. Make this your prayer for every day.

The letters to the Thessalonian Christians cover two very important and essential doctrinal truths—life beyond the grave and Jesus' return and final judgement of all mankind. Paul addresses both of these subject matters the way they should be addressed—with an attitude of gratitude that God considers us worth saving, and with hopeful expectation.

The Book Of 1st and 2nd Timothy

Paul wrote two letters to Timothy while Timothy was teaching and training the Christians in Ephesus. Paul very much wanted to be there with Timothy but couldn't, so these letters was his way of acknowledging Timothy's spiritual maturity and dedication to the ministry, to encourage him to keep up the great work, and to provide important instruction and teaching Timothy needs to pass on to the Christians in Ephesus.

Establishing a new Church consisting primarily of new Christians who are making radical changes in their lives for the sake of Christ, isn't easy. They were battling heresy, Judaizers who were insisting that several Old Law practices continue to be part of the Church, Gnostics, who were people that believed the spirit is all good and all matter is completely evil. And Ascetics who practiced self-mutilation and deprivation because they felt it made them holy and brought them closer to God.

Any of those things would be difficult enough for a mature Christian, so can you imagine what it was like for new Christians having to battle all of these things at once? Plus, they were undoubtedly facing serious opposition from friends and family members who didn't share their new-found faith.

READ : 1st Timothy 1:3-4,7

Have you ever been in a situation where you have encountered someone in the church teaching false doctrine or stirring up controversy? If so, how did you respond?

How can you tell someone's teaching is false?

What would you do if you were faced with this situation?

READ : 1st Timothy 1:12

Do you feel appointed to serve Jesus? Why or why not?

How can you continually be strengthened to serve Jesus?

In what ways do you serve? In what ways would you like to serve?

**Thinking about the ways you would like to serve, what is stopping you?
What will you do to remove those obstacles?**

READ : 1st Timothy 2:8

What does this verse mean to you?

Spend some time right now lifting your hands in prayer for unity in your home, your family, your community, your church, the Church at large, and our country.

READ : 1st Timothy 2:11-14

No doubt about it—these verses are controversial in today's local congregations. But remember, all scripture is *GOD breathed*. If we start picking and choosing what we obey and what we don't, we are diluting our faith and deceiving ourselves.

It is important, however, to note that this is NOT a command. Paul says *he* does not permit.... But even at that, God still felt it necessary to include it in the Bible, so let's look at what experts in theology and Greek have to say on the matter.

In a nutshell, the consensus is that it is the matter of authority that is the sticking point. For a woman to assert authority over a man goes completely against God's *command* to women to be submissive. No argument can be made against that.

We need to remember, too, that the Church was very new and that it was a blending of Jews and Gentiles. Paul, along with the other early Church leaders were walking a fine line of blending the two with the Gospel of Jesus.

So, aside from the authority issue, which neither culture condoned, it is felt by most, to be a peace-keeping statement. Paul doesn't permit women to... and doesn't want Timothy to permit...in order to keep the Church moving forward.

We have moved forward. There is no longer Jews and Gentiles in the Church. So, other than the fact that women should still not be in positions of authority over men in the Church, participating in Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and other church meetings is not a sin. Neither is it a sin for women to lead a discussion or class in which men are present, **because they are not exerting authority over them.** They are guiding a discussion and are not seen as one in authority.

https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_timothy/2-11.htm

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/nivac-sample/1Tim.2.11-1Tim.2.12>

Do you agree or disagree with the explanation of these verses? Explain your answer.

What roles do you think a woman should and should not be assigned in the Church? Explain.

How do you justify your answers to the previous 2 questions with the fact that God's Word is holy, true, and the final authority on all matters?

READ : 1st Timothy 3:1-12

Do you feel the elders and deacons in your church meet these requirements?

Have you ever voted against someone to be an elder or deacon because they did not meet the requirements?

If you currently have men serving who do not meet the requirements, how do you feel the situation should be dealt with?

Why do you think the requirements for elders and deacons are the way they are?

READ : 1st Timothy 4:8

How much time do you spend in physical fitness vs. spiritual fitness?

What changes do you need to make to more closely follow God's message to us in this verse?

READ : 1st Timothy 4:12

Who are some of the young people in your life whose faith you admire?

What are you doing to encourage them?

What will you do to encourage them?

READ : 1st Timothy 5:1-14

Sum up this passage in your own words.

READ : 1st Timothy 6:6-10

How would you describe your level of contentment?

How often do you worry about money?

What are some examples of ways God has been faithful to you regarding your finances?

Why do you think it is difficult to trust God with money?

READ : 1st Timothy 6:12

How often do you think about heaven?

Does it excite or scare you? Explain.

What do you think you need to do to live each day with the same exuberance and hope you had when you first became a Christian?

READ : 2nd Timothy 1:7

Memorize this verse.

When have you been afraid to speak up for your faith? Why?

When have you boldly shared your faith, despite the risk of being made fun of, stared at, excluded, or worse?

What happened?

READ : 2nd Timothy 1:12

Does your life really reflect the fact that you are unashamed of your status as a child of God? Explain.

Spend some time now praying for boldness and the ability to hold on tight to the Holy Spirit.

READ : 2nd Timothy 2:15

In what ways do you correctly handle the Word of truth?

In what ways have you mishandled God's Word?

What would you like to do for God to put a smile on his face?

READ : 2nd Timothy 3:1-7

In what ways do you see this playing out in today's society?

Does this make you anxious? Explain.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: We are better served to live each day focusing on doing right in God's eyes instead of worrying about what is wrong in the world.

Explain your answer.

READ : 2nd Timothy 3:16-17

Memorize these verses.

The Book Of Titus and Philemon

The book of Titus is Paul's letter to Titus—a 'junior' Church leader and ministry assistant to Paul. Paul and Titus worked together in Ephesus and Crete, and possibly other locations, too. Most theologians believe it was written in Corinth and sent to Titus in Crete. Paul had left Titus in Crete to continue teaching and mentoring this young church. The letter is Paul's encouragement to Titus and his instructions on how to handle opposition, matters of Christian conduct, and that ever-persistent problem of false teachers.

The book of Philemon is one of the shortest in the Bible. The book gets its name from a convert to Christianity. Philemon, like so many others at that time, was a slave owner. One of his slaves, Onesimus, had run away after stealing from Philemon. Through a series of events, Onesimus met Paul and became a Christian. After giving his life to the LORD, Onesimus felt the need to return to Philemon and make things right. Paul wrote this letter to Philemon in order to lay the groundwork for forgiveness and to encourage Philemon to see Onesimus as a brother in Christ instead of a slave/criminal.

Paul wrote the letter from Prison and sent it with Philemon and Tychicus (a fellow missionary). The letter was written approximately 60 AD. The fact that Paul wrote the letter from prison tells us that time had passed Paul had obviously converted Philemon prior to his imprisonment. The time between Philemon's conversion and Paul's imprisonment obviously gave them time to develop a relationship that caused Paul to know Onesimus' conversion was genuine and sincere, and that he was a trustworthy individual.

READ : Titus 1:6-9

This is a repeat of what you read in Timothy—the requirements for elders and deacons.

What does it say to you that Paul felt it necessary to share these

qualifications with the churches in Crete, as well as the churches Timothy was overseeing?

Unity is a word that should come to mind when thinking about the qualifications of elders and deacons being shared with all the new churches. How is this unity lacking in today's Church?

How do you think the Church would be different if all local bodies of believers followed these instructions?

READ : Titus 1:10-14, 16

What problems are the Christians in Crete are facing?

In what ways are local churches facing these same problems today? Or are they? Explain.

How do you feel false teachers and those who cause dissention should be dealt with?

READ : Titus 2:7-8

Do you see these verses as a challenge or as encouragement? Explain.

Who or what causes you to struggle with being the person described in these verses?

What do you need to do to overcome these obstacles?

READ : Titus 2:11-13

Memorize these verses.

What do you need to start saying no to?

READ : Titus 3:1-2

How does this relate to a Christian's view and conduct on political matters? People in authority at work?

In what situations or with whom do you have difficulty being humble and peaceable? Why?

Do you do your best to avoid these situations, or do you rise to the ‘challenge’? Explain.

READ : Titus 3:10-11

Have you ever been in this situation? What happened?

What would you say to someone who says these verses contradict Jesus’ command to forgive someone 70 times 7 times?

What is the key word in these verses that makes the difference between reconciliation and separation?

READ : Philemon verses 4-7

What is Paul doing by reminding Philemon of his Christian character and integrity?

What are three words you feel describe Paul's motive for writing these verses?

READ : Philemon verses 9-11, 15

Have you ever been in a position to defend someone's character? Explain.

Have you ever been in a position of having to defend your character to someone who didn't trust you? Explain.

What does this say to you about the importance of giving someone a

second chance?

What are the ‘markers’ of genuine repentance and change?

READ : Philemon verses 17-18

What does Paul’s willingness to take responsibility for Onesimus’ debt say about Paul? About Onesimus?

Would you be willing to do the same for someone? Explain.

The Book Of Hebrews

The book of Hebrews was written sometime around 70 AD—prior to the fall of Jerusalem. The writer of this book, however, is not known. It was written in the midst of serious persecution in the Church. The persecution was such that Jewish Christians were struggling with the temptation to abandon the truth of the Gospel and return to Judaism and the Old Law of Moses.

The writer is obviously very familiar with the people he is writing to, and they with him. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume the writer is one of the Church's early leaders. Paul, however, is not one of them.

The message of Hebrews is to hold fast to Christ as Lord, the absolute supremacy of Jesus as the means to God's grace and mercy, and practical applications of the Christian faith.

READ : Hebrews 1:3

What a beautifully descriptive reminder of who Jesus is!

What five adjectives (descriptive words) would you use to describe Jesus and who he is in your life?

READ : Hebrews 1:4-14

Verses 4-13 give a detailed comparison between the angels and Jesus. These verses irrefutably state their position as being less than Jesus, but still very loved and valued by God. Angels are God's messengers and soldiers.

This verse is also one with three other irrefutable truths—angels are real, they

are present here on earth, but they are NOT the spirits of people who have died. The angels were created by God when he created the universe. They are eternal beings just like we *will* be.

Prior to reading this passage, what were your thoughts about angels; who they were, what they did, etc.?

How has this passage changed your perceptions? Or has it?

Have you ever experienced an encounter with an angel in your life? Explain.

Did you realize it at the time, or soon after; thanking God for the intervention? Or did you deny it? Explain.

READ : Hebrews 3:12-13

In your own words, sum up what these two verses tell us?

What do you think are the most common reasons Christians turn away from God?

What do you think the Church should be doing to try to prevent this from happening?

READ : Hebrews 4:12

Have you ever read something in the Bible that spoke to you differently or more clearly than when you had read it in the past? Explain.

How is it possible for the Word of God to be alive?

How does it make you feel to know that God's Word is powerful enough to speak to YOU in the exact way you need to be spoken to?

READ : Hebrews 4:13, 16

What words come to mind, to describe how you feel knowing that nothing is hidden from God?

How do those words compare with the message that because nothing is hidden from God, we should feel confident in approaching him?

Do you speak to God...do you foster a relationship with God outside of your times of need? Explain.

What can you do to be more intentional in being part of God's family?

READ : Hebrews 5:11-14

Where are you? Are you settling for milk, or are you striving for spiritual maturity (meat)?

What are some of the signs of a mature Christian?

What are you doing to become more mature in Christ?

What are you doing to help others do the same?

READ : Hebrews 7:1-10

We are not going to delve too deeply into Melchizedek; who and what he was. The reason for this is simply because we don't know. We cannot say with absolute certainty. But because he is spoken of in Genesis and again in Hebrews, and because there is somewhat of an aura of mystery surrounding him, it would be wrong to ignore him altogether in this study. So rather than try to read between the lines (which is a dangerous and erroneous thing to do), let's simply look at what we *do* know about him and leave it at that.

- Melchizedek was a real man.
- Melchizedek was a king and priest. He was king of Salem (later Jerusalem). There were countless kings in the Old Testament, so this is not anything special. His priesthood is somewhat more special or distinctive, however, because the priesthood had not been established yet. It was not until after Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt that God put into place the priesthood and specific procedures and guidelines for worship. Other religions had priests. Joseph's father-in-law was a priest in Egypt, as was Moses' father-in-law, Jethro (a priest of Midian).
- The Bible says Melchizedek was a priest of the God Most High, which proves he was chosen by God for the position.
- Melchizedek was NOT Jesus or any form of God. He is NOT part of the Trinity. The statement in verse 3, "...like the Son of God...." is proof of this.

Just like the book of John tells us that the Bible doesn't contain only a mere fraction of accounts of the miracles Jesus did, we don't know everything God

did with creation prior to Jesus' birth and ministry. Just like we don't know how God scattered the people around the world after the tower of Babel, and just like he chose to take Enoch and Elijah from this earth without dying, some things are not for us to know. He's God. He can do whatever he wants. It is just up to us to believe and know that everything he does is perfect and part of his perfect plan.

READ : Hebrews 10:22-25

What does it mean to you to have a 'sincere heart'?

What is the condition upon which we can be sure we have the hope God promises?

The word 'us' indicates family. What are you doing with and for your Christian brothers and sisters to draw closer to God?

How are they helping you do the same?

Verse 25 is the answer or rebuttal to those who say they can ‘get their church’ at the lake, in the woods, or someplace else on their own. How would you use this verse to explain this truth to someone?

READ : Hebrews 10:26-27

These verses are a warning to us that as Christians, we cannot say one thing and do another. Our salvation is dependent on our keeping the promise we make when we accept Jesus as Savior, to be faithfully obedient to him all the days of our life.

What is the difference between deliberately sinning and committing a sin?

How does reading this passage make you feel?

What would you say to someone who says that since they were saved at one time, what they do after that does not matter?

READ : Hebrews 11:1

Memorize this verse.

READ : Hebrews 12:1-2

In reading the Bible, who do you take encouragement from and why?

Which person in the Bible most closely resembles your relationship with God and why?

What makes it difficult for you to stay focused on Jesus?

What can you do to change that?

Write a thank-you note to Jesus or sing a song of praise to express your gratitude for what he has done for you.

READ : Hebrews 12:7, 11

What is the difference between discipline and punishment?

Considering the fact that as Christians, we are God's children, why would we think it unfair or unloving for God to discipline us?

How has God disciplined you?

How did you receive it? What did you learn from his discipline?

READ : Hebrews 12:14

What is your definition of holiness? How does it apply to Christian living?

Do you consider yourself a holy person? Why or why not?

READ : Hebrews 13:4-5

The writer of Hebrews is reminding Christians that we are to live differently than the world. There are set standards of moral conduct and character God expects us to adhere to. The last statement he makes in these verses—to be content—is the summation of it all.

Are you content with what you have? Explain.

How would you describe the difference between contentment and

laziness or indifference?

What are some things you feel Christian couples should (or shouldn't) do to honor their marriage?

What are some things Christians should (or shouldn't) do to keep money from becoming a stumbling block in their lives?

READ : Hebrews 13:7

Who are your leaders?

What made (or makes) these people's faith stand out to you?

Have you thanked them for setting a Godly example for you and others to follow?

Who might be watching you? Are you setting a good example?

READ : Hebrews 13:8

Memorize this verse.

Describe how this verse gives you comfort, courage, and hope.

The Book Of James

The book of James was written by Jesus' brother (half-brother), James. James, like so many others, did not become a believer until after Jesus' resurrection. But when he did, he was all in. James was a strong and devoted leader in the early Church—a member of the council (church board, as we would call it today) in Jerusalem.

The book was written sometime before 50 AD—probably around 46 to 48 AD. It is clearly a book written to Jewish converts who were not dealing with the issues of combining Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is evidenced by the fact that the book contains no references to imposing the Law on Gentiles or the need to abolish the Law. It is a book written to people who are interested in one thing, and one thing only—being more and more like Jesus.

James is often called the manual for practical Christian living, because it addresses the issues we face in everyday life. It addresses how we are to live our normal daily lives in a way that honors and pleases God. It tells us how to make Christianity who we *are*—not just something we do.

READ James 1.

Verses 2-4 and 12: It is incredibly difficult to be joyful when bad things are happening to us or to the people we love. Thinking about some of the difficulties you have faced in your life, did you allow them grow your faith? Did you persevere instead of hide or complain?

How would you describe the difference between a trial and a hardship?

Do you think God wants us to be joyful when we make decisions and choices that cause hardships? Explain.

Verses 5-8: What is Godly wisdom?

How is it different than worldly wisdom?

Verses 13-15: Summarize these verses in your own words.

**Verses 19-20: When have you been slow to speak and quick to listen?
What was the outcome?**

When have you been quick to speak and slow to listen? What was the outcome?

Verse 22: Memorize this verse.

Verse 27: Keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world is something we've read multiple times in the Bible—and for good reason. Belonging to God's family is an all or nothing choice. James' statement that pure religion involves looking after widows and orphans, is something we've not heard until now. How does this statement translate into our acts of faithful obedience today?

READ : James 2

Verse 1: Do you believe words like ‘prejudice’, ‘discrimination’, and ‘intolerance’ are today’s version of favoritism?

How have you been guilty of this?

What is the difference between showing favoritism (discrimination, prejudice) and not tolerating someone to remain in a sinful lifestyle while claiming to be a Christian?

How do you think the church should handle this problem? Or do you think it is a problem?

Verses 14-19: Summarize these verses in your own words.

What makes the difference between deeds of faith and trying to earn your way to heaven?

Thinking about some of your 'faith deeds', what was the outcome? Was God faithful?

Who can you tell about the blessings you have received in return for your faithfulness? Will you?

READ : James 3

Verse 1: Why do you think those who teach/preach will be judged more

strictly?

Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?

Verses 3-12: Are the words you speak a true representation of your status as a member of God's family?

When have your words have caused hurt instead of healing and been angry and full of animosity instead of gentle Godliness? Have you asked forgiveness to the people they were spoken to? Why or why not? If so, what was the outcome?

What ‘tricks’ do you have for keeping a close watch on your tongue?

Who do you know that could benefit from some kind and encouraging words? Don’t just think about these people—be the one to speak the words they need to hear.

Verses 13-17: Are you harboring any bitterness, envy, or selfish thoughts? Why? Toward whom (or what)?

What does this passage of scripture teach you about dealing with these thoughts?

What are you going to do to follow through on what you've learned?

READ : Chapter 4

What are five life-lessons you feel you need to take from this chapter?

Why do you think we have to come close to God in order for him to come closer to us?

How would you explain this truth to someone just learning the Good News of the Gospel?

READ : Chapter 5

Verses 19-20: Who do you know that has wandered away from the faith? What are you doing to try to bring them back to a relationship with the LORD?

When has someone held you accountable or restored you to your relationship with the LORD?

The Book Of 1st Peter and 2nd Peter

The books of 1st and 2nd Peter are letters written by Peter to Christians scattered around the world. This ‘scattering’ of Christians took place after the Roman government, along with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, inflicted severe persecution on Christians in the weeks and months following the birth of the New Testament Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost.

These early Christians took Jesus’ words to heart—that those who were persecuted for his sake, and the sake of God, the Father, would be blessed. They were bold and undeterred in their commitment to spread the Good News of the Gospel. And praise God for it!

The early Christians experienced hardships and trials because of their faith no matter where they were. Thus, Peter, being one of, if not the most influential leader of the early Church, wrote his letters to Christians everywhere to encourage them to stay the course and to make sure that course was the same one Jesus set for us before he returned to heaven.

In his letters, Peter focuses on doctrinal issues as well as Christian character. He also takes great care in his second letter to warn against the most common enemy of the day—false teachers.

Peter’s letters are direct and to the point. He doesn’t mince words, but then we wouldn’t expect him to. This is Peter we are talking about. When Jesus reinstated Peter in the last chapter of the book of John, Peter decided right then and there (if not before) that he wasn’t going to ever make the mistake of letting Jesus down again. This doesn’t mean Peter was perfect and sinless the rest of his life. What it does mean, however, is that Peter took his role of transferring from a disciple (one who was being taught) to apostle (one who was teaching) very seriously.

Peter isn’t afraid to tell us these things. Are you afraid to listen and obey?

READ : 1st Peter 1:3-7

How does these verses contradict the perception many people have of God being more like Santa Claus-like? Only doing nice things for people?

Think about some of the trials you've faced and the difficulties you've brought on yourself. Did you let yourself grow closer to God because of these things, or not? Explain.

What could you have done differently that would have let you experience more spiritual growth?

READ : 1st Peter 1:13-16

What 'desires of the world' do you have trouble separating yourself from, and why?

What does it mean to you to be holy like God is holy? Do you not try because you think it is impossible?

READ : 1st Peter 2:1-1-2

What does your spiritual diet consist of? How often do you feed your spiritual self?

What can and should you do to be more intentional about growing your faith?

READ 1st Peter 2:11-15

Would people you randomly encounter identify you as a Christian?

Would your friends and coworkers describe you as a strong Christian?

What do you say and do (or don't say and do) that sets you apart from those who don't know Christ as Savior?

READ : 1st Peter 3:1-4

If you are a woman, how does your life reflect obedience to this passage of scriptures?

Is there any part of these verses you disagree with? Explain.

Do you understand that disagreeing with God's Word doesn't make it any less true? Explain how this makes you feel.

READ 1st Peter 3:15-16

What habits do you need to develop in order to be better equipped to give right answers to anyone who asks?

READ : 1st Peter 3:18-21

Rewrite this passage of scripture in your own words.

READ : 1st Peter 4:7-10

List what you believe to be your God-given talents and abilities.

List some ways you use these gifts to serve God and others.

Choose at least two things from the list you just made to do this week. Write them here. Afterwards, record your thoughts and feelings about these experiences.

READ : 1st Peter 4:14

Have you ever been made fun of, rejected, or persecuted for being a Christian? What happened? How did you respond?

If the same thing happened today, would your response be different? If so, how?

READ : 1st Peter 5:8-9

Give some examples of what self-control looks like in today's culture and society?

Are you exhibiting good self-control?

READ : 2nd Peter 1:3

When have you felt like God hasn't given you enough? Why did you feel like that?

READ : 2nd Peter 1:5-9

Rewrite this passage of scripture in your own words.

READ : 2nd Peter 1:16

Do you believe the Bible is an eye-witness account of creation, God's power, Jesus' life and ministry, and the lives and ministries of the leaders of the early Church? Why or why not?

How does this belief affect your relationship with God and the possibility of spiritual growth?

READ : 2nd Peter 2:1-7

History repeats itself, right? What false teachers are in the Church today? In other words, how is the Church being influenced and affected by false doctrine?

READ : 2nd Peter 3:3, 8-9

What do these verses tell you about the second coming of Jesus?

Do you view these verses as a warning, a promise, a scare tactic, or a little of each? Explain.

The Book Of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John

John who was one of the first four disciples, wrote these three letters. Jesus called John into full-time ministry at the beginning of his (Jesus') ministry; making him privy just about every moment of Jesus' three-year evangelistic crusade.

Among the twelve disciples Jesus chose as his core group of confidants and assistants, he had an even more select group of three—Peter, James, and John. And from those three we see numerous times when it was John Jesus relied on. It was John Jesus entrusted his mom to right before he (Jesus) breathed his last breath on the cross.

At the time of his writing Christians were still undergoing a tremendous amount of persecution. They were also under attack from the Gnostics. If you will remember from earlier reading, the Gnostics:

- Believe Jesus was nothing more than a good man whose life is worthy to be emulated.
- Believe we live more than one mortal life so there is no resurrection of the physical body.
- God came from humans and is a glorified human. To say that God has always been is to say he is not real because everything has to have a beginning.
- We have the capacity to be equal with God.
- The body and all things made of matter are evil, but the spirit is entirely good.
- Faith is a choice, but there is no condemnation in walking away from God.

John's primary focus in this first letter was to expose the lies of the Gnostics and reassure Christians of the hope and truth of salvation and the second coming of Christ.

John wrote this second letter about the same time he wrote his first letter to

Christians around the known world. In this letter John continues his emphasis on love by reminding us that Christ's love for us is the ultimate example of love and that we are called by God to love one another in the same way Jesus loves us. He stresses that for Christians love is not an option. It is a command. John's other main concern addressed in this brief book of the Bible is for Christians to watch out for false teachers—specifically, once again, the Gnostics.

This final letter from John which makes up the New Testament book of 3rd John was written near the same time as his first two letters (about 90 A.D.). Unlike the previous two letters, however, this third letter is specifically addressed to one of the faithful leaders of the Church—Gaius.

John's purpose in writing Gaius is three-fold. One: He encourages Gaius to continue in his faithfulness to God and to the Christians in the province of Asia. Two: He thanks Gaius for being such a solid believer and for upholding the message of truth in spite of the fact that a leader in one of the other churches in Asia Minor was doing whatever he could to discredit John and those like him (meaning those who taught the truth of the Gospel). The man's name we learn, was Diotrephes.

Diotrephes was a rogue preacher/teacher—much like more than a few televangelists in our century. These are men who allowed the notoriety, power, material wealth, sexual sins, and other sins of this world to lure them away from the truth and into false piety and teaching.

Diotrephes had allowed many of these same things to happen to him. His greed for power and control over his congregation had caused him to become extremely dictatorial—so much so that he was excommunicating people (kicking them out) who held to the true message of the Gospel and who welcomed missionaries sent by John and other church leaders.

John's devotion to the Church and to the spreading of the Gospel made it impossible for him to sit on the sidelines and let this happen. But due to distances, the time it took to travel, and other logistical issues, John couldn't deal with Diotrephes alone. Gaius provided the help he needed and his letter to Gaius provides us the help we need to combat similar issues today.

READ 1st John 1:3-4

Why should telling others about Jesus ‘make our joy complete’?

What does it mean to have fellowship with the Father and the Son?

**Do you feel you have a deep fellowship with the Father and the Son?
Explain.**

READ : 1st John 1:6, 8-9

What does it mean to you to ‘walk in darkness’?

If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you were once a sinner in need of salvation. Now you are a child of God, made righteous by the blood of Jesus. Based on this truth, how would you describe the difference between sinning and being a sinner?

READ : 1st John 2:16

Take a few minutes to read Matthew 4:1-11. The things John lists as ways Satan tempts us are the same three things he tempted Jesus with. How have you recently been tempted in these areas?

How did you respond?

READ : 1st John 2:22

The term ‘antichrist’ is confusing or mysterious to some people, but it shouldn’t be. John’s explanation is simple and clear.

What is the definition of the antichrist?

Is there more than one antichrist?

READ : 1st John 2:28

Are you confident of your salvation? Why or why not?

READ : 1st John 3:16-18

Describe in your own words what this passage of scriptures means.

READ : 1st John 4:1-3

What does it mean to test the spirits?

What tools do we have available to us to test the spirits? Do you use them when you feel conflicted? When making a decision? When faced with a moral dilemma?

We need to understand that demonic spirits (Satan's minions) are just as real as the Holy Spirit--not as powerful, but just as real. What are your thoughts on this?

READ : 1st John 5:3

Do you agree with this verse—that God's commands are not burdensome? Explain.

Which of God's commands do you find most burdensome? Why?

READ : 1st John 5:18-20

How is 'not continuing to sin' different from being perfect—which none of us is?

Why does John say the whole world under the control of the evil one (Satan)? Isn't God the Master of the Universe?

How would you describe the difference between Satan's control and God's status as Master?

READ : 2nd John verse 6

Why is love equated with obedience?

READ : 2nd John verse 12

What does this tell you about the importance of personal communication vs. email, text, or social media posts?

READ : 3rd John verse 4

Describe how this verse is personally applicable to you and your life?

The Book Of Jude

Jude, who was also called Judas, was one of Jesus' siblings, is the writer of this book. Like their brother James, who wrote the New Testament book of James, Jude did not readily accept his oldest brother as the Messiah. How could his brother, the same guy he'd played with, squabbled with, eaten with, done chores with...done life with...how could *he* be the one? He (Jesus) sure didn't seem to be any different than the rest of them. Besides, wouldn't their parents have treated Jesus differently if he was who he claimed to be? Wouldn't they have said something?

All of these questions and more surely played a role in Jude's journey to faith and salvation. We don't know exactly when Jude accepted the truth, but he obviously did. We also know in reading Acts 1 that Jude was part of the very select group who joined with the remaining disciples in the days immediately following Jesus' resurrection and return to heaven. They gathered to pray for wisdom, understanding, and guidance on how to go on without Jesus' physical presence.

Jude's faith in Jesus *the Son of God* was deep and sincere. The concern he has for the spiritual wellbeing of his brothers and sisters in Christ is obvious in every sentence he writes.

Jude wrote this letter to the congregations scattered around the Roman Empire and is proof of his passion for evangelism. But the people he is writing to had already been baptized into Christ. So instead, the purpose of Jude's letter was to encourage readers to remain steadfast in their faith. The people needed reminders such as this due to the fact that there was a real and constant danger of being lured away from the faith by false teachers.

READ ; Jude verse 4

False teachers rarely try to take a place 'by storm'. They gradually work their way in; gaining your trust before slowly and methodically

challenging your beliefs without you even realizing what is taking place. We often refer to this as being ‘desensitized’.

How have you been desensitized over the past few years?

How has the Church in general been desensitized over the past decade?

What can you do to protect yourself from letting this continue to happen?

READ : Jude verse 5

Reminders are important...consistent reminders. What resources do you consistently use to remind you of God’s mercy, love, and grace?

READ : Jude verse 21

Memorize this verse.

The Book Of Revelation

The apostle John wrote the book of Revelation about 95 A.D. The book or Revelation is many things. It is a book of prophecy, a book of analogies, a book containing literal descriptions, warnings, and promises. But if asked, Christians and non-Christians describe the book of Revelation with words like confusion or mysterious.

John wrote the book of Revelation to record the things God disclosed (revealed) to him by sending angel to speak with him, and through visions. John wrote the book of Revelation while a prisoner on the Island of Patmos. He was a prisoner of the Roman Government under the leadership of Emperor Domitian.

By the time John was banished to Patmos, he was in his nineties, the only remaining disciple/apostle who had been an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, and had already survived being doused with hot oil for refusing to obey Domitian's laws for emperor worship.

Now that you have a little more background of the book's origin, let's begin looking at the book itself. You need to understand that this is not a comprehensive study of Revelation. Nor does it delve into theological theories and interpretations. In other words, it is not an unveiling of a great mystery being solved, because there are simply some things we won't know until we are there—living the day of judgement and the eternity that follows. Therefore, we are going to take the book of Revelation at 'face value'. By that I mean I am going to point out or clarify those things that are literal and ask that you accept the things that are figurative on faith.

READ : the book of Revelation; chapter by chapter. After each chapter, read the comments and use the space provided to record your own thoughts and questions.

Pray for peace of mind and understanding. Pray for faith to trust in God's wisdom for those things you don't understand.

Chapter 1

Chapter one identifies John as the writer (verse 4). Just prior to that John states that what he is about to write was revealed to him by an angel *and that* that he has a solid reputation for being a dedicated leader of the Church and a man known for his honesty. His reason in saying these things is to ‘prove’ the validity of what he is about to say. John also tells readers that those who hear it and take it to heart will be blessed, because the end is coming.

The angel then addresses John as if he was writing a letter. He addresses John and prepares John to get ready to hear directly from God as God addresses seven churches in the province of Asia (minor). The seven churches addressed in the letter were seven actual churches in existence during that time. While they weren’t the only churches that had been established, the seven that were addressed were all dealing with different spiritual problems or areas of concern. These problems still exist in our churches, making each ‘speech’ relevant and useful to this day.

After the angel gets John’s attention and informs him of what is about to take place, God himself speaks to John, saying, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.*” (1:8)

Verses 12 through 17 of chapter 1 are John’s description of who he saw (1:17-18). It is important to note that he used the word ‘like’ several times in that description. For example, when John said he had eyes *like* blazing fire, he didn’t mean God’s eyes were actually a blazing fire. He means they were intense and piercing. And when John said God’s voice was *like* the sound of rushing water, he didn’t mean it was inaudible and ‘whooshing’. He meant it was powerful and forceful.

Chapter 2-Letters to the churches

Ephesus

God praises the church of Ephesus for standing up to false teachings and not allowing them to permeate the church or distract from the truth of the Gospel. The church in Ephesus has, however, become a bit stagnant and 'dry'. It appears they are falling into the habit of just going through the motions of Christianity rather than making it their passion and heart's desire. God warns them against letting this go any further and encourages them to get back on track.

Smyrna

God comforts the people of Smyrna by telling them that he is aware of their lack of material possessions and of the persecution and suffering they are going through...and that he hasn't forgotten them. He tells them that things are going to get worse before they get better, but that when 'better' comes, it will be more than they could have imagined or hoped for.

Pergamum

God praises the church for being so steadfast—even though it has cost several of them their lives. He is grateful for their faith and their perseverance. But, God says, some of the Christians in Pergamum have allowed this mindset of compromise to taint their relationship with him. They have turned a blind eye to sexual immorality and some forms of idol worship. Some are even participating in these sinful practices. God warns them to get back on track and devote themselves wholly to him before it is too late.

Thyatira

God once again begins his message to the church by complimenting them on their faithful perseverance. Or rather he compliments those who actually are remaining faithful and assures them they have nothing to fear as long as they remain faithful. He then goes on to reprimand them for allowing a prostitute named Jezebel who is calling herself a prophetess in order to perform sexual acts with the men of the church. God says he has given her time to repent, but that his patience is gone. She, along with her family and anyone who has had sex with her, will suffer severely. God does, state, however, that if those who are guilty of sexual sins with Jezebel repent and if their repentance is genuine, he will spare them from the suffering.

Chapter 3-Letters to the churches

Sardis

The church in Sardis is dying a spiritual death. They have the attitude that they've done their part and are now just going through the motions. This is not the way it is supposed to be. Christianity isn't something we do. It is who we are from the day we confess Jesus as Savior and are baptized into him until the day we die. God warns the people of Sardis to not forget this.

Philadelphia

The church is commended for their faith and commitment to keeping God's commands. Because of this, God tells the church in Philadelphia that he will spare them from great suffering and testing. He tells them that if they will continue to hold fast to the truth as they have and were currently doing, they would be abundantly blessed.

Laodicea

The church of Laodicea is not one God is pleased with. They are bland. Idle. Lukewarm. So because of their lukewarm-ness, God says he is going to spit them out of his mouth; meaning he will not bless them or be in their presence. The people there have prospered and are putting their faith in material wealth and possessions. They depend on their own wisdom and abilities rather than God's. God goes on to say, though, that he still loves them and that if they repent and genuinely turn back to him, he will welcome them back with open arms.

NOTE: Do you see the relevancy of God's messages to the seven churches? Are these still not the very things we need to guard against today? Are we still not called to be completely and wholly obedient to all of God's commands?

Chapter 4

John is given just a small glimpse of heaven. His description is once again filled with comparisons (like this or that). John's description also contains literal descriptions of things—things like a radiant rainbow encircling God's throne and heavenly beings who continually sang praises to God (4:3-8).

Chapter 5

In this chapter John tells us how overcome he was with emotion when he experienced another small piece of heaven. What John sees and reveals to us is a foretelling of what is to come on the day of judgement. Jesus, the sacrificial lamb who died for our sins, is the only one worthy of opening the

scroll described earlier in the chapter.

As for what is on the scroll, we don't know. Most theologians compare it to a deed of trust for property—the 'deed' that declares God the creator and master of the universe. This makes sense due to the fact of what John sees next—countless angels and creatures singing praises to God.

What follows in verse 13 of this chapter is what definitively tells us that what John is experiencing is a foretelling of what is to come because every creature on heaven and earth have not yet joined forces to praise and worship God. But it will happen (Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10).

Chapter 6

The imagery of the six seals opened by Jesus (the Lamb) and described by John is one of the visions God gave him for the purpose of writing this letter. The fact that John had these visions should not confuse or mystify anyone. God gave Daniel visions and he gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams/visions. Peter had a vision in which God used creative imagery to tell Peter he needed to share the message of the Gospel with the Gentile nations. So why not use visions to remind us of God's unmatched holiness and power and to give us a hint of what heaven will be like?

The seals clearly represent different world-events, so to speak. The first seal represents God as the supreme and all-powerful master of the universe. Images of war, peace, death, grief, famine, and even an image of those who remain faithful are seen. And finally, the sixth seal is clearly a vision of the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the earth.

Chapter 7

John's vision of the seals continues without the opening of the seventh seal. Instead, an angel stops the destruction taking place to allow for preview of the day of judgement for all mankind, dead or alive.

John describes how 144,000 people were to be sealed—12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This number has been the root of a considerable amount of debate and disagreement over the centuries. Is it a literal number? If so, have those people already been chosen? If so, then what's the use? If not, then...?

As you can see when looking at it from that perspective, AND to look at the Bible in its entirety (including the verses immediately following this section) that the number of 144,000 is most likely not a literal number, but rather a number that signifies perfection or completion, i.e. 12,000 from 12 tribes. *This* meaning that God's chosen people will have finally come full circle and return to him.

It is impossible to logically believe that the number is literal---that only 144,000 will spend eternity in heaven, because in verse nine, John's vision reveals that countless people from every tribe of every nation are also standing before the throne of God singing his praises and worshipping him. This is not something a multitude of people condemned to hell for all eternity would be doing. Add to that the numerous verses in the Bible that speak of God's patience in waiting for more to be saved and the command given to us

by Jesus that says we are to spread the Gospel to all the earth so that as many as possible can be saved.

The vision described in chapter seven ends with an elder or angel in heaven asking John if he knows who the white-robed people are. He then answers his own question by telling John they are the saved—the ones who have remained faithful to a) their dying day or b) Christ's return. They are the ones who will spend eternity in heaven, where...

“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (7:16-17)

Chapter 8

This chapter talks about the opening of the seventh seal followed by a period of silence, which was then followed by four trumpet blasts. Each trumpet blast was followed by devastating events on earth. An earthquake, thunder, hail, water turning to blood, horrendous forest fires, violent waters, violent deaths....

But these things were nothing, John was told, compared to the misery that would come after the blasts from the final three trumpets.

Chapter 9

The fifth and sixth trumpet blasts were followed by images of devastation that Satan and his minions will be allowed to inflict on the earth before its

final destruction and the day of judgement.

This chapter is filled with ‘like’ phrases, i.e. “...they wore something like....” “...hair like....” “...sound of their wings was like....” These phrases indicate imagery—not actual acts taking place. God knows that these word pictures are the most effective means he has in depicting just how dreadful things will be. The evil, destruction, death, and devastation described in chapter nine is figurative in regards to *how* it happened (fiery horses with lion’s heads and scorpions with tails that tormented people). It is, however, literal from the perspective of how emotionally, physically, and spiritually painful it will be.

The most tragic words spoken in chapter nine are found in verses eleven and twelve. They tell us that in spite of all the pain and suffering, there will still be people who refuse to stop worshipping demons and idols. They will continue murdering, stealing, committing sexually immoral acts, and all kinds of other evil. They will refuse to repent. They will chose eternal suffering over eternal joy.

Chapter 10

In this chapter John tells us that there were things he heard that he was

instructed to omit from his writing. John gave no indication of what these things were, which is just one more piece of evidence as to the genuineness of his faith and his obedience.

Chapter 11

John's vision in chapter eleven reminds us that God's family consists of both Jews and Gentiles who recognize Jesus as the Savior of the world. This chapter is filled with reference of Old Testament prophets, references to Sodom and Egypt which are alluding to the fact that the world is evil and overrun with idol worshippers, and references to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. All of these things are referred to as the 'second woe', with the third and final woe to come...the blast of the seventh trumpet followed by second coming of Christ.

Chapter 12

The *signs* that appeared in heaven were not actual events that were taking place, but rather signs or scenes being played out before John's eyes.

Jesus' birth definitely brought out the absolute worst in Satan. Prior to Jesus'

birth he had little trouble getting people to fall into temptation. It was somewhat easy to lure them away from the Old Law and to plant seeds of doubt in their minds that the prophets of long ago were telling the truth about a coming Messiah. But the arrival of Jesus on earth in human form once again caused Satan to go into ‘overdrive’.

The description John gives us of a dragon trying to devour a child and the rage he displays is gruesome. But this is undoubtedly God’s perspective of what took place. He sees straight into the hearts and minds of everyone—including Satan; making what John saw a dramatization of what these events looked like from the inside out.

As for the numbers (12 stars, 7 heads, 10 horns), there are all sorts of speculations as to what they mean or represent. Quite honestly it doesn’t really matter. This is one of those things we can’t really understand. But since our acceptance of salvation doesn’t hinge on our knowing, I am of the opinion that it isn’t worth wondering about or stressing over.

Beginning in verse 7, John begins telling us how Satan came to be. It is important to note that this is not a sign or a vision. He is telling us of an actual event. It is as if he has asked God or the angel talking to him the questions, “Why does Satan exist?” and “Where did Satan come from?”

For most people this is by far the most perplexing aspect of God’s character. Why didn’t he just do away with Satan? Why did he allow Satan to remain? Why did God give him the power to “...lead the whole world astray....”?

Following John’s explanation of how Satan came to be, his attention is then turned back to the visions of Satan’s pillaging of the earth. Seeing Satan at work from God’s perspective is both sad and frightening and should make us more keenly aware of our need to resist Satan and cling to God.

Chapter 13

There are two beasts described in chapter 13. The first is Satan, who blasphemes God, who wages war against anyone who follows Jesus, and who has been *given* authority (power) over the inhabitants of the earth. Those whose name is not found in the Lamb's book of life (saved through the acceptance of Jesus' gift of salvation) worship this beast.

NOTE: It is important to note that Satan was *given* the authority he has; meaning it came from someone higher than him. That someone, of course, is God.

The final portion of chapter 13 is arguably the most controversial in the entire Bible. Beginning in verse 16, the beast of the earth (false teachers) forces everyone to receive a mark on their hand or forehead. It is a mark that is the name of the beast or the number of his name. And then in verse 18, the last sentence tells us that man's number is 666.

Much speculation has gone into the meaning of the number 666. Is it going to be a world-wide event? Is it something that will happen on the day of judgement to differentiate between the saved and the unsaved? Has it already happened, i.e. the Holocaust? Was it something that was taking place in the Roman Empire? Or is it even an actual mark? Is the mark a figure of speech?

The answer is this: God only knows.

That's enough for me and it should be enough for us all. Instead we should focus on the first part of verse 18 which says, "This calls for wisdom...." The 'this' John is talking about is being aware of the beast, standing firmly against the beast, and refusing to allow the beast to invade your heart, soul, and mind. Wisdom and knowledge are power and in this case, they are also the difference between joy and suffering for all eternity.

Chapter 14

Chapter fourteen brings quite a change of scenery. John isn't seeing heaven or imagery depicting God's perspective of things. John is seeing the future of an actual place—Mt. Zion. In viewing Mt. Zion John also sees things coming down from heaven—another indication that John is being given a supernatural view of an actual place.

John's vision is also quite different in the fact that it is peaceful. No beast. No war. This would indicate that what he sees is what happens after the way—a war we already know the outcome of. God will be victorious over Satan.

The 144,000 are mentioned again as being redeemed because of their purity and faithfulness. They are singing a new song (a victory song). Who are these 144,000? We truly don't know. They might be the remnant of Israel restored to Jerusalem. And if they are, so be it. Did God not promise over and over to restore them to greatness? Are they not his chosen people?

Who they are should not concern us because in reading further into the chapter we once again see God's angels harvesting the earth; separating the faithful from the unfaithful. In other words, it shouldn't matter to us what our status is in heaven. Only that we are residents should matter.

Chapter 15 and 16

These two chapters provide us with ‘visual aids’ as to what God has planned for the final stages of the end times. We can read through the plagues as described in chapter 16 and compare them to things happening in our world today. But then they could do that several generations—even a century or more ago.

Yet here we are still waiting.

The point to be made is that while we are to be expectantly waiting for Christ’s return, we shouldn’t be analyzing current events in order to try to determine when that day might be. No, we are to be living with joyful expectation knowing that because of our obedience to Christ, we have nothing to fear. It should be enough for us to know *that* he is coming back and not worry about the *when*.

Chapters 17 and 18

In this chapter an angel explains several things to John about the beast (Satan) and gives sin the embodiment of a woman—a prostitute. The angel continues by explaining that those whose names are not found in the Lamb's book of life are going to be astonished and perplexed when they see what has become of the beast—how he has been brought down and that they, too, are going to share his destiny (hell).

Chapter 18 sees John meeting another angel. John is now in the present again. No visions. No imagery. 'Just' angels speaking the truth as instructed by God. This angel describes the fall of Babylon and what it was like for the people who experienced it. In doing so the angel is also warning Christians that the same thing is going to happen to the Roman Empire because of its godless leadership and way of life.

Remember...John is writing this to warn the Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire to resist the ideas of compromising between worshipping God only and emperor worship. So in sharing the angel's message with them, John is telling them to "Come out of her...so that you will not receive any of her plagues...." (18:4)

These two chapters are just as relevant for us today as they were for the Christians back then. Sadly the Church has allowed worldly views, i.e. sin, to become benign, harmless, just the way things are. We have allowed ourselves to water down the truth and the commands of God to make life easier for us. We've conformed to the world instead of reforming it—which is exactly what the angel and John are warning us against.

Chapter 19

The coming of Jesus Christ! John is allowed to see into the future—what it will be like when Jesus comes to finish what he started the night he was born in that dark, dank, stable.

The choir of angels and the songs of praise were overwhelming to John. He fell at the feet of the angel to give praise, but the angel immediately refused to accept John's praise by reminding him (John) that they were fellow-servants of Jesus Christ and that he was not worthy of John's praise.

John then describes Jesus' appearance and seeing Satan, his demons, and the beast of the earth being thrown into a lake of burning sulfur, where they will spend eternity.

Chapter 20

This chapter continues with John's continued vision of the second coming and judgement. He speaks about a period of one thousand years in which Satan is locked up and powerless over the earth. It is almost utopia-like. During this time John says that those who died because of their faith in Christ were raised from the dead and lived with him for this thousands years.

After the thousand years has passed, Satan is going to be released onto the earth again for a short time before being thrown back into hell for good.

There is much discussion as to when this thousand years is going to take place. Will it be after Jesus' initial return and prior to the final judgement and destruction of the world? Is it taking place now or in the future before Jesus actually makes his appearance?

After Satan is locked back into the Abyss, everyone who was dead from the time the world began to whatever day it is God chooses for this to take place, will be raised back to life and stand before God to be judged. Those who were faithful will be saved. Those who were not will be thrown into the lake of fire that is the second death. (20:12-15)

These questions have come from preconceived notions and as a result of not taking the Bible in its entirety. But when you read John's words and look at the book of Revelation as a whole, you will see that the events in chapters 19 and 20 are all part of the second coming.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 opens with John seeing heaven and earth pass away and is given instructions to be sure and write down what he is about to see. It is also during this time that those who are still living on earth when all of this takes place will be judged (21:6-8). And then life as we have known it for centuries is over. Eternity has begun.

John is then given what has to have been the most magnificent of all his visions. John sees heaven! His description doesn't do it justice, we know, but it whets our appetite for wanting to be there. But if you will notice, the description doesn't answer the question everyone asks: "What will we do in heaven?"

It is my personal opinion that we will do many things in heaven. God is far too creative and has far too good of an imagination for it to be anything but exciting and good. But whatever we do we can be sure that praising God for his amazing grace, goodness and love will be a part of it.

Chapter 22

This final chapter of the book of Revelation opens with John's last little look at heaven. Following these few verses Jesus speaks to John telling him that he is coming soon and that those who keep the words of this prophecy (the one just given to John) will be blessed for all eternity.

John ends the book by reiterating that what he has written is true and that what he says he saw he actually saw. What he says he heard he actually heard. And lastly, John implores us to remain faithful unto death so that we can spend eternity in the holy city described in this letter. The city of heaven.

Did you like the book --> What Does the Bible say About FAITH ?

Before you go, I would like to say "thank you" for purchasing my book.

I am sure there are plethora of books available on Bible and Bible Study lessons & Prayers & Discipleship, but you gave me a chance to help you.

So a big Thank You to you for buying this and reading it till the very end.

My *small* request to you is to take a minute and leave a review for this book on Amazon. I would really appreciate you leaving an honest feedback about the book.

May God be with you!.

GET BRIAN GUGAS BOOKS FREE and A FREE GIFT

Thanks for reading my book and as a way of saying Thank You I have this free gift for you. This will also help you sign up and in turn you will get notified when I run my promotions, giveaways and free books.

In Bible Verses and Inspirational Christian Quotes Book , you will have quotes and explanations some very important aspects of our life i.e Friendship, Life, Peace, Motivation, Salvation and many more...

[>>> TAP HERE TO GET YOUR FREE BOOK : BIBLE VERSES AND QUOTES](#)

AUDIO BOOKS BY BRIAN GUGAS

If you would want to listen to my Audio Books rather than reading them then signup for AUDIBLE membership. When You signup you will get one of my Audiobooks for Free. Signup for Free AUDIOBOOKS here [**GET BRIAN'S AUDIO BOOKS FREE**](#)

With this link you will get any an Audiobook free including Brian's

Brian Gugas Book's

Overview of all 66 books of Bible - Old Testament and New Testament

[Bible Study Guide for Beginners: Each of the 66 Books Explained for Getting Started](#)

All 66 books of the Bible are covered in detail, including: Author of each book and the time frame in which it was written - Key themes for each book - Summary of the message in each book

Study Guide Series for each of the 66 Books

Book1 - The Book of Genesis

[Study Guide The Book of GENESIS: Understanding God's Word](#)

The book of Genesis is a book of beginnings-the beginning of the universe, the beginning of sin, the beginning of the need for God's mercy and forgiveness

Book2 - The Book of Exodus

[Study Guide The Book of EXODUS: Understanding God's Word](#)

The book of EXODUS is a story of how one man led his people out slavery and out of Egypt. That man was Moses

Book3 - The Book of Leviticus

[Study Guide The Book of Leviticus: Understanding God's Word](#)

The book of LEVITICUS provides readers with an in-depth look into the basics of the Mosaic Law in a way that is easily understood by anyone and everyone.

Brian Gugas How to Books

[How to Study the Bible for Beginners: Study Guide on How and Where to Start Learning the Bible](#)

Quick and easy guide for those who are grappling with how and where to start the Study of The Bible

[How to Memorize Bible Scriptures and Verses: Quickly and Easily](#)

Approaches and methods to memorize The Bible Scriptures and Verses

Study Lessons, Workbooks, Prayers and Journals

[Bible Study Lessons Women of The Bible: What we Can Learn from the Women of The Bible](#)

Bible Study Lessons from the Women of the Bible

[Bible Study for Women: Guide and Workbook](#)

A simple and easy to understand guide and workbook for Bible Study for Women

[Thirty Quick Bible Studies That Will Change Your Life: For The Better](#)

Each of the thirty studies contains scripture, a Biblical example of the subject matter, a more modern day example, and suggestions for applying what you've read to your life.

[40 Prayers from Bible for Believing in Yourself](#)

40 days and 40 prayers will help you connect with God and give you strength to believe in yourself.

[Marriage Prayers: Prayers and Encouragement for Every Married Couple](#)

This book focuses on combining the examples of marriage we have in the Bible with passages of scripture that provides instruction on how to do marriage right.

52 Week Gratitude Journal

[The Gratitude Journal: Simple 2 Minutes of Daily Journaling, Weekly Prompts & Monthly Inspirations](#)

This Gratitude Journal will help you establish the habit of giving thanks. By spending a few minutes each day writing down a few of the reasons you have to be thankful, you will find yourself viewing life through a more positive lens, growing closer to God, the giver of all things, and making the world around you a more pleasant place to live.
