

Ship of Salvation

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Week One

Read pages 7 – 21 in the book.

Page 16 in the book.

Okay, so we open up in the book with the story of Jonah. What do we know? We know that Jonah lived in the late 700's BC. We know that he was one of God's prophets. And the story begins with God telling Jonah to go warn the people of Nineveh that God had seen their evil ways and that He would destroy them because of it. We know that the people of Nineveh were Assyrians and that they had tortured, and murdered Jonah's people, God's people, and that Jonah despised and probably even feared these people.

What was Jonah's reaction? _____

Could you imagine being one of God's very few chosen prophets, being accustomed to hearing God's voice, having the respect of your church and community, then making the decision to run away from God's voice and your duty to serve Him? Jonah heard God's voice and he decided to disobey. Sometimes when we are new in our walk with Jesus and we begin to study His Word, or even if we have known Jesus a long time and choose to get our Bible back out to study, we realize that there is a part of our life that we have been living in disobedience to God, and we too are tempted to run in the opposite direction. I hope that as this story of Jonah unfolds that we will all see a different side to our story and our own disobedience in whatever area it may be, and we will have new understanding of the love in which God directs us to be obedient.

Page 17 – An Obedient Traveler. In the book.

God told Abraham to leave his country, relatives, and his father's family to go to the land that He would show him. Abraham stepped out into his journey with God in an act of obedience. But further along in Genesis we find out that 10 years would pass before God declared Abraham to be righteous.

Genesis 15:6 *"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."* NCV

So, Abraham's journey began with obedience, but it was not his obedience that made him right with God.

It does not say that because Abraham was obedient, he was declared righteous. It says that he believed in the Lord, and God accounted it to Abraham for righteousness.

Ephesian 2:8-9

So what does “believed” mean in Genesis 15:6?

The word “believed” means: to have faith in God and to put your trust in Him.

It does not mean to just believe that God existed. The demons believe in the existence of God.

James 2:19 *You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear.* NCV

Abraham obviously believed that God existed by the fact that he obeyed God. Even though Abraham had acted in obedience to God, it was not until he had learned to put his faith and trust in God that he was declared righteous.

God accounted Abraham’s belief in Him as righteousness.

Do you believe and trust that God has specific plans for your life? _____

Why or why not? _____

So what does righteousness mean?

The definition of righteousness is: “Rightness by God’s standards. Matching life with God’s commandments, love, and purposes. Action based on love for God and a relationship with God.” (The Student Bible Dictionary. Written by Karen Dockrey, Johnnie & Phyllis Godwin. Barbour Publishing, Inc. copyright 2000.)

What had happened just 3 chapters before Genesis 15:6, in Genesis 12:10-20?

Summarize Genesis 12:10-18

Write Genesis 12:19-20 _____

Now, let us move forward to 5 chapters past Genesis 15:6, the moment where God declared Abraham to be righteous.

Genesis 20:2 _____

What did Abraham just do, again, after having been declared righteous by God earlier in Genesis 15:6? _____

What reason did Abraham give to King Abimelech in Genesis 20:11? _____

Write Genesis 20:12? _____

It kind of sounds like Abraham is justifying his planned deception, by rationalizing to himself, that in fact, Sarah was his ½ sister on his father's side.

Abraham wasn't "really" lying about Sarah being his sister, was he? Just because he failed to mention the fact that she was his wife, didn't "really" make him a liar, did it? What do you think? Is deception the same as telling a lie? _____

What do you imagine Abraham was thinking as he heard those words fall out of his own mouth while he was trying to justify his behavior? _____

Have you ever had a moment, where even you didn't want to listen to the words coming out of your mouth? _____

Has there ever been a time in your life where you acted on information that turned out to be only ½ of the truth and realized later that you had been deceived and manipulated, to respond in a way that you might not have, had you known the whole truth? How did that make you feel? _____

Has there ever been a moment that you only shared part of the truth to someone, out of fear of what you perceived would be the consequences if the whole truth were revealed? In the long run, how did that work out for you?

Write Genesis 20:15-16 _____

Compare the differences between how the Pharoah reacted in Genesis 12:19-20 and how the king reacted in Genesis 20:15-16.

I picture a gentleness about King Abimelech, as he speaks to Sarah. I envision him gently lifting her head up by placing his hand on her chin, as he tells her that her honor has been restored and that she has been completely vindicated. This story is such a beautiful representation of how Jesus restores each of us and places His glory and honor upon us. Jesus will lift our heads.

Psalm 3:3 *But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head.* NKJV

Genesis 20:13 *“So when God had me wander from my father’s house, I said to her: Show your loyalty to me wherever we go and say about me: ‘He’s my brother.’* CSB

Underline the places that Abraham had asked Sarah to tell everyone that she was his sister.

At what moment did Abraham say that his deception began? _____

Does it sound like Abraham is possibly trying to excuse his lies, by placing the blame on someone else? _____

Was Abraham, in a way, implying that if God had not made him wander, that he would not have had to lie? _____

Who else in Genesis does that kind of sound like? _____

Genesis 3:12 *“The man said, “You gave this woman to me, and she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.”* NCV

Adam seems to be reminding God that He was the One that gave him the woman, that gave him the fruit.

We need to understand that as we fall short in our own walk with God, which we will do, that we should not try to blame God. It is not God nor His commandments that cause us to stumble. However, it is God that is always there, waiting to pick us up and to teach us whenever we fall down.

Did God declare Abraham to be “unrighteous” after he deceived King Abimelech? _____

What did God call Abraham in Genesis 20:7? _____

This is the first time God calls Abraham a prophet. God still saw Abraham as the person who He had declared him to be, even when Abraham didn’t seem to be seeing himself in that way. God understood that Abraham was a work in progress. God knew that he was still in the development process, of discovering his role of becoming God’s prophet and the father of Israel. God is like that with each and every one of us too. Once we become righteous through Jesus, God expects us to learn and grow as we discover our true identity and the future that God has prepared for us.

Write Jeremiah 29:11 _____

What is the point that Abimelech drives home in Genesis 20:9-10? _____

King Abimelech could have killed Abraham for his deceitfulness. What did he do instead?

Write Genesis 20:14 _____

How reassuring is it to you, to know that even though Abraham had still not completely trusted in God to protect him and Sarah, that God not only protected them, but He also never rescinded His declaration that Abraham was righteous in His eyes? _____

Instead of disowning Abraham, God chose to use this moment as a teaching opportunity. He used a king to ask Abraham the questions, that he would need to answer within himself, so that he could grow in his faith and his trust in God. I love when the king says, "You have done things to me that should have never been done." That was a pruning moment for Abraham. God may use strangers or even people, whom we would least expect, to teach us.

Has God ever spoken to you from a very unexpected source? Please share.

Did anything stand out to you in this week's reading in the book, or in the workbook?

Week 2

Read pages 21-25 in the book.

Let's stop for a moment and go back to the story of Jonah.

On page 21, Jonah has gotten onto a ship headed to Tarshish. He went down to the bottom of the ship, and he fell fast asleep.

Was anyone else like me and wondered how Jonah could possibly sleep? _____

Have you ever found yourself staying in bed with depression or anxiety? _____

I know I have. The longer you stay home, the harder it becomes to even leave your house. If that is you right now, know that it will not always be this way. When you begin to draw closer to God, in His Word, healing happens.

On page 22, we find out that In Jonah 1:4 we are told about the violent storm that God sent. The sailors all called out to their different gods. That didn't work. They threw all of their cargo overboard. That didn't work. So the captain went down to the bottom of the ship and found Jonah sleeping. He says to Jonah, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray to your God! Maybe your God will pay attention to us and we won't die!"

Then they cast lots to find out whose fault this evil storm was.

Remember in the book I mentioned that if Jonah had cried out to his God, that the whole story of Jonah would have been a completely different story?

Was Jonah too afraid? Too ashamed? Did he feel like he had lost his right to call out to God? Was he still angry with God?

Why do you think that Jonah might not have called out to God? _____

What reasons, or emotions, have ever kept you from calling out to God? _____

Do you now understand that any "reason" you think you might have to not call out to God is just a lie from the devil, who is doing everything he can to stop you from calling out to the God who loves you? _____

Unfortunately, there is an "unhealthy" fear of God that is still being taught in different religious settings today. These teachings are designed to scare you into believing in God. Their focus is on what happens if you don't accept

Jesus as your Lord and Savior. The end result is typically the same: people become too afraid to believe in God at all. Yes, there is a hell waiting for nonbelievers. However, there is also a wonderful faith filled eternal life, full of love, hope, peace, joy, comfort, strength, courage, and so much more, waiting for nonbelievers, here and now, on earth to receive. God does not want us to feel so terrified of Him, that we will never have the confidence to turn to Him, and to call out to Him, in our hour of need; in the mess of our sins; in the midst of our storms.

Read Psalm 32. Did any verses stand out to you, that you'd like to share?

Read Psalm 51. Did any verses stand out to you, that you'd like to share?

Has anything new been revealed to you, in either of these two Psalms, that has changed the way you see yourself? How you see God? Your perception of how God sees you? Or how you view the relationship you have with God? Please share. _____

I want each of you to understand that it does not matter how embarrassing your sin might be, or even how horrible. You need to confess your sins to God and ask Him for His forgiveness. When you do, that sin can no longer be used by the devil as a weapon against you. God is aware of your sin, and is waiting on you to come to Him, so that He can forgive you and help you learn from it. The longer you avoid confessing it to God and asking Him for His forgiveness, the longer you will be tormented by Satan, reminding you of it, using it against you, as he tries to convince you that you aren't worthy of forgiveness. Here's the thing, none of us are worthy of forgiveness. But all of

us have the God-given right to repent and receive forgiveness. Don't allow embarrassment, or shame, or guilt, or anything else stop you from taking your sin to God, allowing Him to forgive you, to heal you, to teach you, and to love you through it.

Your personal assignment this week is to address any unconfessed sin that has been a source of torment for you, a thing that has kept you from trusting God; to love and forgive you. Your Father is with you, in this very moment, waiting with an unexplainable, unmeasurable, deep love for you. Take this moment to talk to Him. Take a step forward in your journey with Him.

PRAYER on page 33 in the book might help you with the assignment.

Lord, I ask You, right now in this moment, for Your Holy Spirit to reveal to me the ideas, the words, or the behavior that I have wrongfully accepted into my thoughts, or that I have invited into my life. Lord, please reveal the worldly views, opinions and even laws that I have embraced, without any regard to what Your Word says, to what Your Word teaches me, without any regard for the unmatched pain, suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured so that I could be free from sin; so that I would be able to walk in agreement with You, with Your Word written upon my heart. Lord, please reveal any wickedness or sin in my heart that is preventing me from seeing the path that You have so lovingly prepared for me to walk on, hand-in-hand with You. Reveal the lies spoken to me, which I have believed, that are stopping me from seeing Your truth. I thank You Father, for Your truth, which is freely given to me in Your Word. Amen.

Did you do this week's personal assignment? _____

Did you experience a burden being lifted from you? _____

Please share. _____

Read pages 27-34 in the book.

Page 27

Jonah's sin of disobedience had caused this evil storm to rise up against him. As we can clearly see, this storm caused by Jonah also rose up against many other people. It came up against the lives of every sailor who was on board the ship with him. There is an important lesson for us all to learn here: It is impossible for any of us to continue to welcome sin into our own life without expecting to eventually be caught up inside of our own storm. It is equally impossible for the storms, which our sins create, to only affect us. It is a very selfish thought and belief that the sins which we choose to embrace should not have

any effect on the people who love us or the people who are closest to us. Our actions and our words, without a doubt, will affect those by whom we are surrounded. Look at the effect the storm was having on the lives of the sailors that day just because they were aboard that same ship with Jonah. Each of their lives was put into jeopardy on that day because of an individual decision that Jonah had made. We must always be aware, in our own lives, that the words and actions of others that we choose to allow to be close to us will affect us. We must also understand that our words and actions will affect those standing closest to us. Every word that we choose to speak will create images and thoughts in the minds of those who hear them. We must be mindful of the images we are creating and also of the ones being created in our own minds by others. The people we choose to spend the most time with matter. Stop. Take a good look. Who is on your ship? Whose ship are you on?

Amos 3:3 *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* NKJV

“Do two people walk hand in hand if they aren’t going to the same place?” The Message

Can two people headed in different directions be passengers aboard the same ship? _____

Have you ever tried to walk with God while holding the hand of someone who is not headed in the same direction? _____

What was the result? Did the relationship with that person last? _____

How did the experience affect your personal relationship with God? _____

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 _____

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 _____

Proverbs 2:1-5 _____

Proverbs 4:23 _____

Proverbs 13:20 _____

Did anything stand out to you in this week's reading in the book, or in the workbook?

Week Three

Read Pages 35-48 in the book.

Before we get to what happens on page 35 in the book with Zechariah 3:4, let's start with the workbook and Zechariah 3:1-2.

Zechariah 3:1-2 "Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing in front of the Lord's angel. And Satan was standing by Joshua's right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord says no to you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem says no to you! This man was like a burning stick pulled from the fire." NCV

Where is Satan standing? _____

What is Satan doing? _____

Revelation 12:10-12 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying: "The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have now come. The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accused them day and night before our God, has been thrown down. And our brothers and sisters defeated him by the blood of the Lamb's death and by the message they preached. They did not love their lives so much that they were afraid of death." NCV

When does Satan accuse the brothers and sisters? _____

How is Satan defeated? _____

When I read this, I became curious as to what "the message they preached" was referring to. I found this explanation in one of my study Bibles.

12:11| Even in death, the martyrs overcame Satan by: (1) the blood of the Lamb, (2) their testimony, and (3) their unwavering devotion to God (to the death). This is the same way Christians must overcome Satan today. (The David Jeremiah Study Bible NKJV.)

The "message" is their "testimony." Our witnessing and our testimonies are how we defeat Satan. Christians in so many countries are literally facing death daily as they stand up and testify to others about Jesus. Here in America we have not had to face anything more than ridicule, hate, and accusations when we stand up for God's Word. And unfortunately, just the fear of that has kept so many of us from even trying to share the gospel. We need to begin asking God for His strength and courage to share the good news of Jesus, and to share our testimonies. We need to remember the power and the protection of the God we serve. Our testimonies are declarations of God's power, His love, His mercy, His grace, and the truth of His Word.

Read Psalm 121.

Psalm 121:5-6 *“The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.”* NKJV

When is God protecting you? _____

How long will God continue to protect you? (Psalm 121:8) _____

Zechariah 3:1 told us that Satan is standing to the right of Joshua to accuse him. Psalm 121:5 states that God’s shadow is cast upon our right hand, which means that God is standing to our right, placing Himself between us and Satan. So, we are standing to the left of God. Satan is not the one casting a shadow on our right hand, God is. Hallelujah!

I find it interesting to note, that still today in our criminal courts, that the accuser/prosecutor is found sitting to the right of the accused/defendant.

Visualize that you are Joshua. Satan is at your right accusing you. God has placed Himself in-between you and Satan to defend and protect you. So you are standing to the left of God. So, to your right stands God, then the accuser, Satan.

Read Matthew 25:31-33.

Matthew 25:33 *And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.* NKJV

Who does Jesus place to His right hand? _____

Matthew 25:34 *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”* NKJV

Before Jesus returns, we are standing to the left of Jesus as He stands between us and Satan. When Jesus returns, He no longer has to stand in-between us and Satan. Satan no longer has the power or the authority to accuse us before God. So, Jesus removes us from our position of being under the constant attack of the accuser, and He places us in our position of eternal victory at His right hand. He places us on His right side, to be received by the glory of the Father and to take our rightful place in the kingdom of heaven. The next time Satan is attacking you, you just tell him, “You might be standing to my right accusing me now, but I know Jesus is standing in-between us defending me. I also know that the day will come that you will be defeated, and I will be standing to the right of Jesus, living in victory through the blood of the Lamb.” Amen!

Excerpts from pages 35-38 in the book.

Zechariah 3:4. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments (sins) from him.” (from you and from me and from anyone else who has received His

salvation) And to him (to each of us) He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.” (cleansed you of your sin, and have made you righteous before God) (NCV)

We need to get a clear-cut visual of ourselves as having been made righteous through Christ Jesus. Once Jesus forgives us, He removes our filthy rags of sin. He adorns us with rich new robes. After we are forgiven for our sins, those filthy rags of remembrance of our past sins, that we are still seeing ourselves wearing, also need to be removed! We need to receive and believe in the new rich robes we have been clothed in! They are referred to as *‘festive robes’* in the (CSB), and as *‘beautiful, fine clothes’* in the (NCV). I like to think that these clothes are referred to as beautiful, festive, and rich because of the huge celebration that happens in heaven every time someone either receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior, or like that lost sheep, returns to the Lord after having strayed away. These new clothes are our “let’s get dressed up and celebrate our new life” clothes! These are the robes of righteousness which we are now to visualize ourselves having been clothed in.

Now what happens next in Zechariah’s vision is interesting: *Zechariah 3:5 Then I (Zechariah) said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So a clean turban was placed on his head, and they clothed him in garments while the angel of the LORD was standing nearby. (CSB)*

As Zechariah is being given a vision of salvation, he speaks up and he asks for a turban to also be placed on the head of Joshua, the high priest, and it happens. This is the first vision that I have seen in the Bible where the person being given the vision can cause a change to happen in the vision. In other visions, which I have read about, people can ask questions and get answers, but in this vision, something actually happened after Zechariah spoke. Keeping along the lines of this being a picture of salvation, whether for an individual or for a nation, what is the significance of the turban which Zechariah has requested for Joshua and received?

The turban was part of the High-Priest’s required outfit, and it was inscribed with the words, “Holy to the Lord.” When we receive our salvation, we are sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit. We become “Holy to the Lord.”

So, how do I see this turban that Zechariah has asked for? I see it as the seal of the promise of the Holy Spirit living inside of us. I see it as the seal that separates the followers of Christ from those who refuse to believe. I see it as us needing to want more than just the forgiveness of our sins. More than our filthy rags being replaced with clean garments. Clean garments will only stay clean as long as the person wearing them does not go rolling around in the dirt again. We cannot go back to our favorite mud puddles of the past, and expect to keep our beautiful new robes from getting dirty. I see the turban as a reminder to us and to the world, of who we are in Christ Jesus. We are *“Holy to the Lord.”*

I would like for you to take this moment to look at yourself in the mirror and to thank Jesus for your new clothes. I want you to see yourself as the beautiful child of your Father in heaven, the way He sees you, as a child that His Son is shining through! See yourself as Holy to the Lord!

Ephesians 6:10-12 *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His great power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can fight against the devil’s evil tricks. Our fight is not against people on earth but against the rulers and authorities and the powers of the world’s darkness, against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world.”* NCV

Spiritual warfare is real. An example of what spiritual warfare can look like is found in:

Matthew 16:23: *But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."* NKJV

Jesus knew Peter wasn't Satan, but He did know that Satan was influencing Peter's thoughts. He knew Peter had let his mind get off of God and onto the things of the world. Peter thought he had the power to argue with, and even stop from happening, what Jesus had just told him was going to happen. Jesus responded by speaking directly to the spirit behind Peter's thoughts and words. We need to learn to do this in our own lives. Recognize the spirit behind the attack and speak directly to it! The devil cannot read your mind. The only way he knows if his lies are getting to you is by how you react. So when his lies enter into your thoughts, speak the words out loud. Tell him, "Not today, Satan, I see your lies! Get thee behind me!" Of course it might be weird to say out loud to someone, "Get thee behind me Satan!" But keep in mind that Satan will use anyone, including other believers like Peter, to engage in warfare with you. Just remember the true enemy at work and change your battleplan accordingly. Standing firm, responding with love, kindness, and forgiveness will make the enemy flee!

Luke 9:55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." NKJV

The Samaritans did not welcome Jesus, which James and John took so personally, that they wanted to annihilate them with fire from heaven. That is another perfect example of spiritual warfare. An unclean spirit of vengefulness whispered into their ears, and they responded through their flesh and not through the spirit. Vengeance means the return of an injury from an injury. The Samaritans did not welcome Jesus, which James and John took so personally, that they wanted to annihilate them with fire from heaven.

We have to be aware of this vengeful spirit when it speaks to us, especially today. When we share our faith and the truth of the gospel with others, if they choose to not welcome it into their lives, or even choose to verbally reject it, we have to learn to not take it as a personal rejection. We are called to share the truth of Jesus. We are not called to be the "belief police." However, we are called to "police" ourselves. How do we do that? We do that by asking ourselves: "Does what I am thinking, speaking, or doing, line up with the truth of God's Word, the truth of His love for me, and the truth of my identity in Christ?"

1 Peter 5:9 _____

Ephesians 6:13-17 *“That is why you need to put on God's full armor. Then on the day of evil you will be able to stand strong. And when you have finished the whole fight, you will be standing. So stand strong, with the belt of truth tied around your waist and the protection of right living on your chest, (breastplate of righteousness). On your feet wear the Good News of peace to help you stand strong. And also use the shield of faith with which you can stop all the burning arrows of the Evil One. Accept God's salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. NCV*

I like the NCV version here, where it says, “accept” God’s salvation as your helmet. Most translations say “take.” But we do not take our salvation, we receive it, we accept it.

We often hear, “I get up every morning and I put on the armor of God.” Or statements along those lines. We have to understand that putting on God’s armor involves more than just speaking those words. Our armor is something that we develop along the way as we discover the truth of God’s Word, and the truth of who we are in Christ. As our armor develops, it becomes a part of who we are. It is not something that we take off at night and put back on in the morning. Yes, it makes for a good catch phrase to say, “I’m going to put on the armor of God.” However, there is so much more significance, and deeper understanding necessary for us to be aware of, in what Paul is telling us to do when he tells us to put on the full armor of God.

The best way I have found to explain the armor of God, is by comparing it to a video game that I used to play with my son many years ago. The game was called Zelda. At the very beginning of the game, you are given this little wooden sword for your weapon, a cute little hat, and nothing else but the clothes on your back. Then as you play the game and win the little challenges, you start winning shields, helmets, armor, and bigger stronger swords. With the newer stronger armor you are able to easily win the previous areas of the game, which you had once struggled to get through. Each new bigger challenge along your journey is more difficult than the one before it, and would be impossible to get through, had you not already had victory on the previous levels which had earned you the new armor and stronger sword.

Well, being a new Christian is a lot like that game. God gives us our weapon, the Sword of the Spirit, His Word, at the very beginning of our journey, along with our helmet of salvation. As we travel through God's Word, our weapon becomes sharper and stronger. As we learn and grow and conquer the lies of the devil, we will be discovering the rest of our armor. The things of the world and temptations of the flesh, which are such a struggle to have victory over in the beginning, will become an easily defeated enemy for us in the

future, when encountered further down the road of our journey walking with God, because our newfound armor and our sword have been earned, and proven to be tried, and true. It's really pretty cool!

1 Samuel 17:34 *But David said to Saul, "I, your servant, have been keeping my father's sheep. When a lion or bear came and took a sheep from the flock, ³⁵ I would chase it. I would attack it and save the sheep from its mouth. When it attacked me, I caught it by its fur and hit it and killed it. ³⁶ I, your servant, have killed both a lion and a bear! This uncircumcised Philistine will be like them, because he has spoken against the armies of the living God. ³⁷ The LORD who saved me from a lion and a bear will save me from this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you." ³⁸ Saul put his own clothes on David. He put a bronze helmet on his head and dressed him in armor. ³⁹ David put on Saul's sword and tried to walk around, but he was not used to all the armor Saul had put on him. He said to Saul, "I can't go in this, because I'm not used to it." Then David took it all off. ⁴⁰ He took his stick in his hand and chose five smooth stones from a stream. He put them in his shepherd's bag and grabbed his sling. Then he went to meet the Philistine.* NCV

Just like David could not wear the physical armor of Saul, we cannot wear the spiritual armor of someone else. Every victory we experience on the spiritual battlefield molds and develops our armor uniquely to specifically fit each of us individually. It is the armor we will need to be prepared for the next unique battle we will each be facing next. My armor won't be the same as your armor because I have not fought in the same wars as you have. Just like your armor won't look like mine. Your armor will not prepare me for my battles, and mine will not prepare me for yours. Our armor is developed and earned over time. Our weapon, the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is designed for us to use against Satan, not against each other. The greater our knowledge of God's Word, the mightier our sword becomes, and the greater will be our victories. We should always be in the process of being spiritually transformed from the inside out. And our spiritual armor should always be in the process of being strengthened, being molded, and designed to fit our needs in the personal battles headed towards us. Just like each victory God had given to David had caused him to trust his weapon and his experiences over Saul's armor and weapon, that is how we learn and grow in trusting our own personal spiritual armor of God.

- 1) You have the helmet of salvation that you will wear to remind yourself that you are saved and loved by God. The first lie Satan uses against any new believer is aimed at convincing them that they aren't truly saved. Whenever he uses that lie against you, speak out loud and remind him that you are a new creation in Christ Jesus, and he does not have the power to steal your helmet of salvation.
- 2) The belt of truth is sewn together as you learn God's Word, and you accept it as being the truth, which was inspired and

breathed by the Holy Spirit. Until we know God's Truth, we will not have a belt to gird ourselves with. Without the knowledge of God's Truth, no one will win in a battle against Satan's lies. God's Truth brings us victory over all of Satan's lies.

- 3) Paul does not say to put on the breastplate of having been made righteous by God. Paul says to put on the breastplate of righteousness. The NCV version calls it the protection of right living on your chest. How do we do that? The breastplate is given to us as we line up the way we're living with God's Word.

Look back to week one and copy the definition of righteousness. _____

The breastplate guards the heart. If you are not living your life in a way that lines up with God's Word, then you have left your heart unprotected.

Read Proverbs 4.

Write Proverbs 4:20-23 _____

- 4) "On your feet wear the Good News of peace to help you stand strong." Wherever our feet take us, we are supposed to be sharing the Gospel of Jesus. Which means that we are traveling barefoot every time we choose to leave our faith at home. We should be excited about sharing the Gospel with people outside of our homes and away from our church. We should be voting for the person whose platform lines up with God's Word, and not with the 'politically correct' views of the world. Many Christians are traveling barefoot these days, and yet we wonder why our Christian toes are continually being stepped on.

- 5) The shield of faith is earned as you experience victories over the enemy, through live engagements of warfare on the spiritual battlefield. In the future when you are faced with a new attack of the devil, you will have a source of confidence which comes through the victories which Jesus has already given you in those previous battles. The shield of faith, which has been tested and tried to be true, will be raised without even giving it a thought the moment you recognize the familiar fiery darts of the devil headed your way. David's shield of faith came from the victories which God had already given to him. David gave God the credit for his victories over the lion and the bear. Because of that David had faith that God would also give him the victory over Goliath. David was wearing his shield of faith.
- 6) The sword of the Spirit is a magnificent weapon. The Word of God is intended for us to learn from to prepare us for battle. It is for us to be transformed by through the Holy Spirit. It is what the Holy Spirit uses to cut away the things of our flesh as He reveals to us our new identity in the spirit. It is the weapon God provided for us to use against Satan's lies, not each other. We are neither qualified nor authorized to use it against each other. Only Jesus has the qualification and the authority to use it.

"Jesus' instrument of warfare is the two-edged sword that proceeds from his mouth. This is the Word of God that judges all humanity." The David Jeremiah Study Bible NKJV.

Hebrews 4:12 _____

Revelation 1:16 _____

Revelation 2:16 _____

Revelation 19:15 _____

Did anything stand out to you in this week's reading in the book, or in the workbook?

Week Four

Read pages 49 - top of 54.

Excerpt from Page 49.

As Christians, we should be following God in such a way, that when people look at us, they will see the spirit-filled direction in which we are headed. They will want to find out more about who this God is, that we are following, and they will want to begin their own journey with Him. The most important way in which we are to serve God, is for us to live our lives in such a way, that we lead others toward Jesus.

We should be excited about sharing our journey with anyone and everyone! How is it that fear of rejection, or of offending someone, has overridden a Christian's desire to share the exciting Good News of Jesus? How is it possible that there are multitudes of Christians who have never witnessed to anyone about their faith? If we are not excited enough about our relationship with Jesus, to want to share it with others, then maybe we are not actually living the life God has prepared for us. Perhaps we have committed ourselves to a religion, but we have not fully embraced or entered into a committed relationship with our Father.

Starting today, we need to look for all of the wondrous reasons to be excited about God! It is time for us to be joyful and enthusiastic about beginning our new adventure with Jesus!

Philippians 1:6 *"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ."* NKJV

Philippians 2:12-13 *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you to will and to do for His good pleasure."* NKJV

NCV *"Because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases Him."*

Hebrews 12:28 _____

2 Peter 3:18 _____

1 Corinthians 15:58 _____

Matthew 11:28-30 *"Come to Me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Accept My teachings and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your lives. The burden that I ask you to accept is easy; the load I give you to carry is light."* NCV

Two oxen are yoked together, side by side. One ox does not pull the other ox. They both work side by side, sharing the weight of the load. We enter into in a partnership with God the moment we receive His salvation. It is up to us to work with God, learning His teachings, to discover just how great His gift of salvation is.

Have you ever seen a Russian Matryoshka doll, also known as a nesting doll? Inside of one wooden doll is another wooden doll. Inside of that doll is yet another wooden doll. Inside of that one is still another doll, and inside of it is yet another. The gift of salvation is like that. It is the gift that keeps on giving. There are no limits on how many treasures that you may discover and receive as you work out your own salvation.

Excerpt Page 53 in the book.

“When we become a new creation in Christ, God starts to do a good work in us. He begins to teach us, to guide us, and to transform us, through His Holy Spirit as we read and study our Bible. We need to understand that God is continually working on us, in us and through us, as long as we are seeking Him in His Word, following Him, serving Him, and living our lives through Him. As long as we are in alignment with God and following the direction He wants for our life, He continues His good work inside of each of us.

Notwithstanding, if we willingly choose to break off our agreement with God, if we let go of His hand, and if we willingly choose to turn away from Him, to step off toward the opposite direction, we have just brought the “good work” that God is doing inside of us to a screeching halt. We have literally walked off of our own spiritual job site.”

2 Peter 1:3 *“Jesus has the power of God, by which He has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know Him. Jesus called us by His glory and goodness.”* 4*Through these He gave us the very great and precious promises. With these gifts you can share in God’s nature, and the world will not ruin you with its evil.* NCV

2 Peter 1:5-7 *“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.”* NKJV

These Scriptures are a perfect example of how to work out our salvation, and how we are spiritually transformed from the inside out. Picture these Scriptures as a Matryoshka doll – a nesting doll. Begin with the smallest of all the dolls, the one inside of all of the other dolls. It represents us before we have been born again. Then place that doll inside of the next size up which we will label as faith. Through faith we have been saved. We have become new creations in Christ. Then to our faith we should add virtue, to that knowledge, to knowledge

In Galatians 5 we are given a pretty clear example of what it looks like for each individual, before and after salvation. Let’s take a look at the difference between walking in the flesh and living in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:19 *The wrong things the sinful self does are clear: being sexually unfaithful, not being pure, taking part in sexual sins,²⁰ worshiping gods, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people,²¹ feeling envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties, and doing other things like these. I warn you now as I warned you before: Those who do these things will not inherit God's kingdom.* NCV

If you don't see yourself in that list of "sinful self" then go ahead and put yourself under the category of "doing other things like these". We all have sinned. We have all fallen short at some point in our life. But that's okay! Each and every one of us can now walk in the Spirit and enjoy the fruit of the Spirit. What is the fruit of the Spirit?

Galatians 5:22-23 *"But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law that says these are wrong."* NCV

On the day of our salvation the fruit of the Spirit was deposited inside of us in the same moment that the Holy Spirit came to live inside of us. So how do we discover and experience that fruit? How do we get from having been a person that was described under "sinful self" to experiencing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

First, we need to trust in what God's Word tells us about God's part, and about our part in our relationship.

Philippians 1:6 *"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ."* NKJV

Philippians 2:12-13 *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you to will and to do for His good pleasure."* NKJV

NCV *"Because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases Him."*

2 Peter 1:3-4 *"Jesus has the power of God, by which He has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know Him. Jesus called us by His glory and goodness. Through these He gave us the very the very great and precious promises. With these gifts you can share in God's nature, and the world will not ruin you with its evil desires."* NCV

We have the power to do everything that God's Word tells us to do.

2 Peter 1:5-7 *"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."* NKJV

Let's quickly look at the rest of 2 Peter 1:8-15.

⁸ *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.*

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. **For if you do these things, you will never stumble,** ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.
NIV

So it sounds to me that it is extremely important for us to understand the qualities which Peter just laid out for us to add to our faith. It also sounds like we need to be reminded of this from time to time.

We will be going over this next part in-depth in class.

2 Peter 1:5-7 “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” NKJV

Diligence: spoudè – “speed” i.e. (by implication) dispatch, eagerness, earnestness: - business, (earnest) care, carefulness, diligence, forwardness, haste. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance G4710

David Jeremiah Study Bible NKJV – 1:5 **Diligence** is essential to spiritual growth. Though Christians are saved by God’s grace, it takes effort to make faith grow. For every privilege that God has provided, there is a corresponding responsibility.

Let me use that word in a sentence for you, that might help you understand.

A person who is caught up in addiction, will with all diligence, do anything and everything possible to score their dope.

You see, when we are living in the world, we have lots of experience in diligence when it comes to the desires and sins of the world. As new Christians, and even as experienced Christians, we have to maintain that same level of diligence when we are working out our salvation. We have to seek the Lord with at least the same diligence we sought the things of the world. I say that we actually need to increase our level of diligence in order to do what Peter is telling us to do. We need to take the time to put in the effort to learn every aspect of 2 Peter 1:5-7.

So, what is faith?

“**Faith** simply means believing that something is true, and then committing our lives to it. In the Bible, “faith” means believing in God, and in what Christ has done for us to make our salvation possible—and then committing ourselves to Him.

In other words, faith has two parts to it, and both are equally important. The first part is belief—belief that God exists, and that He loves us and sent His Son into the world to save us. Faith isn't a vague hope that God might exist; it is a definite belief that what the Bible says about Him is true.

Hebrews 11:6 *“Without **faith** it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him”* NIV

The second part of **faith** is commitment—a definite decision not only to believe in our minds that Christ has saved us, but to put our lives into His hands and trust Him alone for our salvation. True **faith** not only believes Christ can save us, but actually trusts Him to do it.” Answers by Billy Graham – Billygraham.org

Student Bible Dictionary – Faith in Jesus Christ is essential for salvation. Faith is always active: it is a commitment of both mind and heart.

So, what is it that we are first told to add to our **faith**?

Virtue.

Virtue – Behavior showing high moral standards. Manly strength or courage: valor.

Valor – strength of mind or spirit that enables a person to encounter danger with firmness: personal bravery.

Virtue is knowing the difference between right and wrong, and having the courage to do what is right, or to speak what God says is right or wrong. Before any of us knew God, we basically knew the difference between right and wrong. No one has to teach a 2-year-old to lie, or to hide things. They know that they are up to no good when they try to deceive you.

To add **virtue** to our faith means that we have to purposely begin to choose that which we know to be right. David Jeremiah refers to **virtue**, (as it is used in this Scripture), as moral courage.

Here's what we all need to understand: Through **Faith** we are given a clean slate. Any immoral, wrong, or **unvirtuous** behavior has been erased. After receiving God's salvation, we each have a choice to make. We can choose to step forward in alignment with the truth that we are a new creature born again through Christ Jesus, and live with **virtue**. Or we can turn away from our salvation and go back to living in the flesh, living in the same mess that Jesus died to save us from, and continue to live a life without valor, without moral courage, and without **virtue**. It will always be our choice.

In order to add virtue to our faith, we must begin to live our life, as if what we believe about being born again is really true.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!* CSB

“Before we had received God’s gift of grace, we lacked both the ability and the desire to live in Jesus’ glory and goodness. Now that we have been empowered to do so, we “must make every effort” to add the following qualities to, or “alongside,” our faith. In other words, we must begin to live as if what we believe is really true.” Bibleref.com

We have to make up our mind that each of our decisions moving forward will be based on God’s Word. Which is why I believe that virtue was listed before the next thing that we add to our faith after virtue. We have to first make the decision that we believe all of God’s Word is true, or none of it is. We have to truly believe that we are new creations through Christ Jesus. We have to decide to begin to study God’s Word to discover how it is we are to live the new lives we have been given with our salvation. We have to want to read our Bible and apply it to our daily lives and our decision-making process.

Once we have added this new virtue to our faith, then what are we told to add to our virtue?

Knowledge

Bibleref.com – We are also to add **knowledge**. This is a deeper understanding of our God, through His Word, and prayer, and so forth, which informs our **virtue**. Merely wanting to do good, to do what is right, is not enough; we must know what good is by knowing God.

Colossians 2:2-3 *“I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the **knowledge of God’s mystery** – Christ. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* CSB

James 1:21-22 *“Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, **humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**”* CSB

“Confess and repent of your sin and **humbly receive the implanted word**. Through it, after all, God has implanted in you a new nature. You have everything you need for spiritual growth. But you have to receive it, humbly placing yourself under its authority so that it can save you – that is, deliver and transform you.”

“Spiritual transformation is an internal change that reflects the character of Christ and brings about a corresponding external change. And though it requires your involvement, you don’t actually transform yourself. **God accomplishes it as the Holy Spirit uses our exposure, openness, and obedience to the Word of God to grow us from one level of spiritual development to the next.**” Tony Evans Study Bible CSB

We cannot move forward in our faith without having added **knowledge** of God’s Word to our **faith** and our **virtue**.

What do we now add to our **knowledge**?

Self-Control

David Jeremiah Study Bible Commentary “The next building block is of the Christian life is **self-control**. All godly attributes require personal discipline. Faith grows further when believers decide to exercise discipline, not just in their daily lives but for a lifetime.”

Self-control means mastering one’s emotions rather than being controlled by them. The false teachers whose views Peter was exposing believed that knowledge freed people from the need to control their passions. **The Parallel Study Bible**

Bibleref.com – “Without the ability to control ourselves, our **knowledge of good**, and the desire to do it, are both worthless. **Self-control** is the moment-by-moment restraint of our urges. This is the ability to make the right choice, in those moments when temptation strikes us.”

Virtue is making up our mind to align our decision-making process with God’s Word. Then we seek the knowledge of right and wrong. Self-control is when we take our decision to be virtuous and apply it to the knowledge God’s Word teaches, and our actions are evident of our faith, virtue, and knowledge. Most of us, if not all of us, have a tendency to relapse in this area of self-control from time to time. Which means when we fall short, we need to get back up and try again. We don’t give ourselves permission to stay down.

Instead of focusing on whether to do drugs or to not do drugs, or to drink or not to drink, our focus should be on “Am I going to acknowledge Jesus as my Lord and Savior in this moment? Am I going to stand firm in the knowledge of how great the salvation which God has given to me is? Am I going to stand by the new virtue which God has placed inside of my heart? Am I going to believe my knowledge of God’s Word, that I am a new creation, that I have been forgiven of all of my sins, and that I have been given authority and victory over this temptation to sin, to use drugs, to drink alcohol, from Satan?” Bottom line here is, “Am I going to acknowledge my relationship with Jesus, or am I going to return to a relationship with the one who came to steal, kill, and destroy everything in my life?”

Satan loves it if he can get us to focus on the sin, because it increases the strength of the temptation. God wants us to focus on Him and the power He has given us to turn away from drugs, to turn away from alcohol, to turn away from all forms of sin and temptation. God knows it’s not going to be easy for us when we begin to turn our lives around, that’s why He tells us after we add self-control to our knowledge that we are to add perseverance.

Perseverance

Bibleref.com – **Perseverance** is the ability to practice self-control over time. Our sprints of doing good turn into marathons. Our moment-by-moment, hour-by-hour, day-by-day choices eventually turn into lifestyles. Perseverance is the ability to maintain self-control, even when the pressure of temptation continues to attack us.

Student Bible Dictionary – Keeping on, not giving up, lasting consistency, endurance.

How have you seen perseverance work in your journey with God? _____

What happens when you are not persevering? _____

Okay, now that we have **persevered** in our decision-making process based on our **faith, virtue, knowledge, and self-control**, what can we now add to our **perseverance**?

Godliness

Here Peter uses the word “**godliness**” to speak of the need for Christians to be continually aware of God’s presence. Knowing that all of our life is in His hands, should influence every aspect of our life. This happens when we have learned to acknowledge God in all of our ways. **The Parallel Study Bible**

If we are basing our thoughts, actions, and words upon our knowledge of God, with perseverance, then all that we do will become an acknowledgement of God’s presence in our lives.

Proverbs 3:6 *“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* NKJV

The definition of acknowledge is, ‘to accept or admit the existence of or truth of something.’ So, let’s put that in the verse: In all your ways ‘accept and admit the existence of God’ and ‘the truth of God,’ and He will direct the way of your path.

So, with that in mind, let’s take this a step further. If you ask Google what the opposite word for acknowledge is, you will find that the opposite meaning is ‘to ignore or to deny something.’

Therefore, when we choose to speak, act, or even think in a way that does not line up with the truth of how God has told us to live our lives, we are actually choosing to ignore and even deny the existence of God and the truth of His Word. Let that sink in for a minute. With every decision, every choice, we are either saying to ourselves and to others, that we believe God is real and His Word is His truth, or we are denying or ignoring His presence in us and the truth of His Word. The most important decision we will ever make is to ask Jesus into our heart. The second biggest decision we need to make is to find out what that means to us.

How does godliness present itself in our interactions with others?

The awareness of God's Presence in all aspects of our lives, especially the awareness of all we ourselves have been forgiven for. "Godliness" allows us to become more aware of the true struggles of our brothers and sisters. We are able to discern how it is that we can teach them and lead them into a closer relationship with Jesus. Once we have experienced the peace, comfort, and joy from living our lives in constant awareness of God's presence, we will have more love and patience for our brothers and sisters when we see them struggling in their commitment to their faith.

And what does that create inside of us to add to our **faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, and godliness?**

Brotherly Kindness

"Brotherly kindness is reaching out with grace and mercy to other believers" (Gal 6:10). **David Jeremiah Study Bible**

Galatians 6:10 *"When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers."* NCV

Galatians 6:1 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any sin, you who are spiritual [that is, you who are responsive to the guidance of the Spirit] are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness [not with a sense of superiority or self-righteousness], keeping a watchful eye on yourself, so that you are not tempted as well.* AMP

Bibleref.com – "Now Peter writes that we must add **brotherly kindness**, or affection, alongside godliness. The idea is that we become motivated to do good for each other. This is supposed to come from a sense of connectedness. This is the type of connection experienced in the closest of families. And, truly, our brothers and sisters in Christ are our family. Peter calls us to "make every effort" to develop a familial affection for each other. Hard as it may be at times, we should strive to really "like" each other, so that we want to do good for one another."

A simpler explanation is for us to be aware of how much God loves each of us, and to be able to see and treat others with the same kindness, grace, and mercy which God has exhibited towards us in our own lives. If someone has fallen, we help pick them back up, with love and compassion for them.

Now, what is the last thing Peter tells us to add to all of these things which he tells us will keep us from stumbling?

Love

Bibleref.com – Then, finally, we come to the pinnacle of these qualities: **love**. **God is love**, and the goodness of Jesus was motivated both by His love for the Father and His love for us. Paul's term for "love" here comes from the Greek root word **agape**, which refers to a selfless, sacrificial concern for the good of others. It makes sense, then, that our ultimate reason to do good is the same self-sacrificing love that Christ showed for us.

Bibleref.com – “To agape-love someone is a choice. It is to choose to see them in a favorable light. To choose to delight in them. And to choose to faithfully act on their behalf. When we agape-love God, we see Him as honorable, true, and loving. We trust Him and respond to that trust with obedience.”

Agape Love is experiencing God’s love in our hearts for others, those saved and those unsaved. This is the love that encourages us to not only want to reach out to the lost, but to be able to do so with God’s love and kindness shining through our words and our actions. When God sees this agape love in our hearts and our thoughts, He will know that He can trust us with the hearts of others. This is where we all want to be in our journey with Jesus and in our relationship with Him.

This is where we have gone from our awareness of our “sinful self” to experiencing the complete awareness of the abundance of the fruit of the Spirit that is growing and living inside of us.

Galatians 5:22-23 “But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law that says these are wrong.” NCV

If and when we feel like we are no longer experiencing all of the fruit of the Spirit, like we once had, we need to open back up our Matryoshka doll and review the steps in 2 Peter 1:5-7.

Have we stopped feeling agape love for all people?

Have we run out of patience or love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, who seem to be floundering?

Have we forgotten to acknowledge God in all of our way? Have we stopped thanking Him? Praising Him? Worshipping Him? Spending time in prayer with Him? Have we stopped seeking Him daily?

Have we allowed ourselves to stop being diligent in our perseverance of self-control?

Have we lost control over our emotions, over our physical self-control? Have we decided that some of the knowledge written in God’s Word doesn’t apply to us?

Have we stopped seeking knowledge? Have we stopped reading and studying our Bibles? Have we decided that we know enough to get by on and don’t need to know or grow anymore?

Have we backslid into an unvirtuous lifestyle? Have we accepted a lie of the world that tells us that not all of the things, that God says are sinful, and have invited them back into our life?

Have we forgotten our faith? Have we forgotten that when we asked Jesus into our heart that it was to be our Lord and Savior and not just a ticket to heaven? Have we forgotten that our faith is based entirely upon the truth written down for us in this Bible?

Whenever we find that we have stumbled in any of these steps, all we have to do is to recommit ourselves to serving Jesus, and to our journey on the path He has prepared for each of us. As we realign our spirit with the Holy Spirit and the Living Word, we will find ourselves back on God's designed path for our life, and we will once again be moving forward on our journey with Him.

Did anything stand out to you in this week's reading in the book, or in the workbook? _____

Week Five

Read Pages 54-55 in the book.

In every moment of every day we have the freedom to choose to reach out for God’s hand to hold on to as we journey down through the depths of the valleys and up to the tops of the mountains. We can decide to hold onto the knowledge, that with Him by our side, we will be walking on the path He has prepared and blessed for us. Or we can choose to let go of God’s hand, turn away from Him and head off down that rocky road of the world, on a path full of sin and bad decisions, all alone without any true peace, comfort, or hope.

What might seem to be the hardest decision of your life, to follow Jesus in all your ways, is not as tough as you might think. Once you make this life changing decision, you will soon find out that it was the easiest and best decision that you will have ever made. If you stay on God’s path, traveling with your hand in His, you will discover that every decision that you need to make will be clear. God will supply you with everything that you will need to be able to make the right choice in every situation. You can easily do that, by simply asking yourself, “Which decision allows me to continue moving forward on my journey with God?”

Do you feel like you have completely embraced your new identity in Christ Jesus? _____

Why or why not? _____

Do you feel like you have been diligent in working out your own salvation?____

Spend a moment meditating on these questions, allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire you with His answer and guidance. Please share any new thoughts or revelations about who you now are in Christ Jesus. What does that mean to you? _____

Read pages 57-74.

Okay, we left off where the sailors were casting lots to see who was responsible for the evil storm. The lots cast fell upon Jonah.

The sailors immediately hit Jonah with a barrage of questions.

Jonah 1:8; Then they said to him, “Tell us, who caused our trouble? What is your job? Where do you come from? What is your country? Who are your people?” NCV

Page 57-60 – Excerpts from Confronting Our Issues

Wow, those are a lot of questions! Whenever any of us have stopped long enough to see the storm in our own lives, I think we have all ended up asking ourselves just as many questions: “How did I get here? How have I drifted so far away from my faith and my relationship with God? Who is this person I’m looking at in the mirror?” Or towards someone else: “Why have they done this? How am I supposed to deal with them when they are choosing to behave in this manner?”

As Christians, a lot of the time the advice we give, and receive, when dealing with a person or a situation is this: “You just need to lay that down at God’s feet, drop it off and leave it there.” I think everyone at some point in their life has either heard this or has said it. I am not entirely sure that these words, which are meant to comfort us, are always helping us. I wonder if this idea, this advice given with such good intentions, might be the cause for many of the repeated storms in our lives.

Sometimes, that thing that we keep wanting to lay at God’s feet, is something that we need to bring to Him, not to lay down to be able to just put it aside, but to ask Him for His help. Instead of trying to “just get through something,” we need to invite Him to help us “grow through it,” so that we are able to heal, to move past it, and to step forward toward our next level of spiritual transformation. The wisdom we gain from one experience prepares us for the next. That which we would prefer for God to remove from us, might actually be something that He can use to teach us, and to guide us to our next level of spiritual maturity, preparing us for our next spiritual battle.

Why do we keep leaving behind, dropping off, or ignoring, that from which we could learn? It is so much better for us to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to learn, than it is for us to continue dropping things off there.

Let us look at *Luke 10:39-42: Martha had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to Him teach. But Martha was busy with all the work to be done. She went in and said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen the better thing, and it will not be taken away from her.” (NCV)*

He revealed to Martha, and to all of us, what abiding in Him, being in Christ, should look like. We should be placing ourselves at His feet.

Here is something we all need to understand, Jesus sees each of us in His salvation before we ever receive it. Maybe we should start visualizing each other in the same way. We should all want to view ourselves and to try our best to see others, as sitting at Jesus’ feet, studying His Word, listening to Him teach.

Martha was only processing what was physically in front of her; Mary was not working, and she was. And that was not fair to her. Those thoughts caused Martha to be unaware of what was spiritually happening right in front of her own eyes.

When we lay our own interpretations of other people’s behavior at God’s feet, without asking Him to show us what it is we are not seeing, about them and about ourselves, we are preventing ourselves from receiving new wisdom and a new revelation from the Holy Spirit

Jonah had looked at the Assyrians, living in Nineveh, and only saw Godless people unworthy of being saved, and he based his decision to turn away from God because of what his mindset of sin had shown him. Gideon had looked at the Midianites and viewed himself as being incapable of defeating them, even

after the Angel of the Lord had called Him a *'mighty warrior'* and had told him that the Lord was with him. (*Judges 6:12*) Gideon had allowed his fear from his view of his enemy to cause him to hesitate in trusting and serving God.

Page 73.

I am not saying that there will not be a time where we will need to lay something down at God's feet. I am suggesting that we examine those things which we have grown tired of dealing with, those things we have given up on, those things which we believe will never change, those things that we would rather leave at God's feet than to deal with, and we choose to sit with each of them, at His feet, and to ask Jesus to teach us through them and to heal us. *"Mary has chosen the better thing."* Choose the better thing.

In the book, on page 71, I had encouraged you to ask God if there is anything that you have placed at His feet, that you need to pick back up, place onto your lap, and then sit there with it, while the Holy Spirit teaches you how to have victory over it.

Did the Holy Spirit reveal something or someone, which you had left at God's feet that He needed to hand back to you in order for Him to teach you and heal you? _____

Did you take the time to sit down with the Holy Spirit to allow yourself the opportunity to reexamine your reasons for leaving it there and *washing your hands of it*? Please explain. _____

Were you able to see the issue in a different light than you had before? Explain. _____

Read Judges chapter 6.

In Judges chapter 6 we get to meet Gideon. This happens in yet another moment of the Israelites history where they have turned their backs on God and were worshipping all kinds of false gods and idols. So the Lord removed His protection and allowed the Midianites, Amalekites, and other people from the east, to basically terrorize them and steal and destroy all of their crops

and livestock. They would destroy the land with all of their tents and animals. The Israelites hid in the mountains in caves and dens. While Israel was living their lives through God, they remained under His protection. When they turned their back on God, He allowed them to live without His protection.

Israel had taken their blessed, favored lives through God for granted. I think that is still happening with the Christians of today. Many say they believe in God, but then they never bother to read His Word. Some read His Word but then believe the lie that it is no longer meant to be followed today, in these "modern times". Today's Christians have incorporated modern day idols and beliefs into their lives without giving it any thought. Children are being raised with more belief in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny than they are in Jesus. Adult "Christians" are choosing to live together, over the commitment of marriage. Astrology, palm readers, and people that communicate with the dead have all become acceptable, when in the eyes and law of the Lord, they are not. We, as Christians, are supposed to influence the culture, not allow the culture to influence us.

In Judges 6:1 we are told, *"Then the children of Israel did what the Lord said was wrong. So for seven years the Lord handed them over to the Midianites."* I want you to get this, that these attacks and living in fear went on for 7 years! Y'all this nightmare of a life went on for seven years before they decided to cry out to the Lord!

It is possible that the Israelite's shame and guilt had kept them from crying out to God for those 7 long horrible years.

Maybe they still thought the freedom to sin was more important than the freedom to serve God.

Why do you think that they lived like that for 7 years before calling out to the Lord? _____

What has been a reason that has kept you from crying out to God? _____

What I really want for each of you to understand is that you do not have to waste 7 years of your life punishing yourself, while the God who loves you is waiting and wanting to rescue you, to free you. You don't have to wait 7 days, 7 hours, or 7 minutes, or even 7 seconds! You can cry out to Him right now! Because when we do, just like God did for Israel, He will start speaking to us and guiding us back to Him.

God sent a prophet to remind Israel of all He had done to save them and to give them the land of the Canaanites. Which brings us to Judges 6:10.

Judges 6:10 *“Then I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God. Live in the land of the Amorites, but do not worship their gods.’ But you did not obey Me.”* NCV

Judges 6:11 *“The Angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak tree at Ophrah that belonged to Joash, one of the Abiezrites people. Gideon, Joash's son, was separating some wheat from the chaff in a winepress to keep the wheat from the Midianites.”* NCV

So, we meet Gideon. I love how the Angel of the Lord just took a seat under a tree. Without making a grand supernatural entrance, he just sat beneath the tree. He came to where Gideon was, he sat, and he watched Gideon as he was threshing the wheat. When wheat is harvested, it must be beat on what is called a threshing floor, to separate the grain from the plant. When you do this the outer soft coating comes off, then is carried off by the wind. Their enemies would be able to start seeing the chaff floating through the air and know it was time to go raid their grain. So Gideon is hiding, threshing his wheat in a wine press. You do not hide unless you are afraid. So it is safe to say he was feeling incredibly nervous as he was trying to get his grain prepared before his enemies came to take it from him.

In Judges 6:12, we are told, *“The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!’”* NCV

So this is cool! It says that He ‘appeared’ to Gideon. God was there, sitting under an oak tree, but could not be seen until He wanted Gideon to see Him. I take great comfort in that. I think about how God is always with us through the Holy Spirit living inside of us. Even though we cannot see Him, He is with us. God also speaks to us, to our hearts, to let us know He is there with us. It might be a moment where we need Him most or it might just be a sweet moment when God just lets You know that He sees you, by giving you an unexpected blessing just to let you know He is pleased with you. God will make you aware of His presence in so many wonderful ways!

But remember, when we need correcting, He also makes us aware of His presence with conviction through His Holy Spirit. We need to welcome those moments as well, so we can address anything that is keeping us from having that closeness to God, which Jesus died for us to have. Jesus did not die for us to blindly recite a salvation prayer uniformly in a church setting. He died so that we can have a true relationship with God the Father. The blood Jesus shed washed us of our sins so that we could stand righteous before God. When we receive salvation, we are confessing that we want Jesus to be our Lord and our Savior, which means we are committing our lives to Him and dedicating ourselves to learn and practice the Word of God in our lives daily.

God calls Gideon, this man living in fear and hiding in a winepress, "*mighty warrior!*"

Here is what I want you to get! God sees us for who we are in Him. He looks at Gideon and calls him mighty warrior, because He knew that was the correct description of who Gideon was. God does the same thing with us. God also knows each of us as His mighty warriors because He knows the power that He has placed inside of us. The power of His Holy Spirit! He does not see our weaknesses; He sees His strength in our weakness. God sees our destiny for victory when we aren't even able to see past today.

Immediately after being told, "The Lord is with you." Gideon's response in verse 13 is, "*Sir, if the Lord is with us, why are we having so much trouble? Where are the miracles our ancestors told us He did when the Lord brought them out of Egypt? But now God has left us and handed us over to the Midianites.*" NCV

You know I think this is a question that we each have at some point in our Christian walk. Maybe before we ever came to know the Lord as our Savior, or after we first become saved. Everyone is telling us, God is with you - God is with you, but we look around at all of the turmoil in our lives, all of the pain in our families, and the complete mess our life has become and wonder where is this wonderful Father I have been told about? Where is my miracle healing? Why does it feel like God left me and handed me over to my own Midianites: emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, addiction, depression, anxiety, etcetera? Maybe, we have forgotten that when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we have agreed to not worship any other gods or idols: sports figures, celebrities, public approval, horoscopes, politicians, money. Maybe we conveniently forgot the part about obeying Him and living by His standards.

Our salvation includes our commitment to God in response to His love and commitment to us. When we lose sight of God, we lose sight of God's calling on our life. We find ourselves surrounded by Midianites. We can reach a point where we feel like it is impossible for us to ever free ourselves from our situations, our captors, and our prisons, because our focus has become on "self" not on God. Please pay attention to what God says next in His response. He does not address Gideon's "why" questions. Instead He speaks confirmation of who Gideon is and what he has been called to do.

Judges 6:14 *But God faced him directly: "Go in this strength that is yours. (God's strength given to him) Save Israel from Midian. Haven't I sent you?"* The Message

God explains to Gideon that it is through His strength that He is sending Him, not his own strength.

So when we cry out to God and He speaks to our heart and tells us what He would like for us to do/or to stop doing, or where to go/or where to stop going, or what to keep/or what to leave behind; that as hard, extremely difficult, or even impossible, as it might sound to us, remember it is through His strength that we will be able to do it.

Philippians 4:12-13 _____

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 _____

Judges 6:15 *But Gideon answered, "Lord, how can I save Israel? My family group is the weakest from Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family."* NCV

Gideon had lived in fear and at the lowest end of their social community, and had been a victim for so long, that it had become his internal identity. Just like all of us, we look around at where we have been or even where we are now and think to ourselves, "How can I save myself or my family, (much less an entire nation) from all of this? I am at the lowest of low positions in life." God is going to ask all of us to do some great things, and some hard things, as we learn to walk with Him, in His will. God knows our true identity in Him! We need to discover it for ourselves through His Word.

I want to take a minute here to also talk about the other end of the spectrum of where we might make the mistake of looking for our identity. Have you ever met someone for the first time and within 5 minutes they have given you their complete family lineage? They seem to be very proud as they tell you the names of the people they are related to, and all of their relative's accomplishments. They seem to want their identity to be determined by who they are related to by birth. I was at a Bible study once, where I met a woman for the very first time. Within 5 minutes of meeting her, she had worked into our conversation that her father, husband, and son were all doctors. The conversation ended without my finding out anything about who she was. Her identity was in being the daughter, wife, and mother of a doctor.

Galatians 3:26-29 tells us, *"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* NIV

We are children of God. That is our true identity. We should not and cannot base our identity on the people we are related to. In the case of Gideon, he thought lowly of himself, because of who his family was. The woman with the 3 doctors in her family felt highly of herself because of the accomplishments of her family. The problem with that is this: If her husband leaves her for a nurse, then what is her identity? If her son stops being a doctor to become a circus clown, or becomes addicted to the drugs he prescribes himself and loses his medical license, then how will she perceive herself as a mother?

If you google what word is the opposite of pride, you will find out that shame is the opposite of pride. I think that's why the Bible warns us about the dangers of pride. God knows how easily something that has been a source of pride for us can easily turn into a source of shame for us.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall. CSB

Unfortunately the world has taught us to take pride in the child who becomes a doctor, and to be ashamed of the child caught up in addiction. It does not teach us to see each other as God sees us. It doesn't teach us to see the spiritual warfare behind the struggles of others. The world doesn't teach us that, but God's Word does! That is why it is so imperative for each of us to study the Word, and to teach and share what we learn every chance we get. Our true identity, who we are in Christ, can only be discovered in His Word. Remember, receiving salvation is only the first step in our journey. The Bible prepares us for the spiritual warfare that each of us will face.

Judges 6:16 The Lord answered Him, "Surely I will be with you, and you will defeat the Midianites as one man." NKJV

God assures Gideon that not only will He be with him, but it will not seem as if he is going up against huge armies. It will be as if he is fighting against just one man. God is telling us the same thing today. It might look like you have battles going on in many different areas of your life, with many different people, but God can combine all of the chaos of war into a single battle against the one true enemy. In this battle, God has assured us of our victory. The one true enemy, the one we are always in battle with is Satan. All the chaos that comes into our lives is spiritual warfare.

Judges 6:17-18 Then Gideon said to the Lord, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You." And He said, "I will wait until you come back." NKJV

Now I know if I were Gideon, I would really be having to wrap my mind around having this physical, verbal interaction with God. I mean here is God telling him that he is going to save Israel. It would be like God telling me or you

that we were going to save America! I think that we would be like Gideon, struggling to wrap our mind around this whole prospect of being used by God to save a nation. Gideon is obviously trying to process all of this to make sure it is all real. So he asked Him to wait there while he goes to prepare food. It was not a loaf of bread with maybe some cheese or peanut butter, that Gideon had decided to prepare. Oh no! He went to pick out a young goat to kill and prepare for Him. Now I am not a butcher or a hunter so I have no clue how long it takes to kill, prepare, and cook a young goat, but I am thinking that the process cannot be extremely fast. So I can only imagine that as Gideon was going through the motions of preparing the food, that his mind was trying to get control over what just happened. He probably kept running to take a peek at the Angel to see if He was still there, waiting for him.

I loved where God said, "I will wait until you come back!" And that is exactly what God does with each and every one of us. When we drift away from Him or even turn our back on Him deliberately, He will wait until we come back, with His arms ready to hold and comfort us. He will even send people into our lives to lead us back to Him. I just love how God loves each of us the way He does! Oh to love ourselves and others the way God loves us!

Judges 6:19-21 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them. The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock and pour out the broth." And he did so. Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the Rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord disappeared out of his sight. NKJV

Now this is how cool God is! This is how I see this happening! He touches it, the fire rises up and consumes the meat and bread, which I visualize causing this huge smoke to shoot up and He disappears behind it! You know, like how magicians do in their acts? As a matter of fact, this could very well be what gave the very first magician the inspiration to do this trick. Who Knows?

Summarize what is going on with Gideon's emotions and how God chooses to handle it in Judges 6:36-40. _____

God knew you before you were born. He knew Gideon was a mighty warrior before he was born. He has a unique work designed specifically for you to

do in His kingdom here on earth. I know you might not be able to see it right now at this moment in your life, and that's ok, because God sees it for you. Or maybe He has already shown you a vision of the path He has prepared, and you think to yourself, "Who am I?". Please understand and remind yourself, that you are who God says you are, and you have His Holy Spirit living inside of you providing you with everything you require to fight in the battle. Which means you have everything you need for your victory in all of your battles. You are His mighty warrior! You just need to let go of all of the lies the devil has told you, and allow God to reveal His truth to you!

Speak Jeremiah 1:4-5 out loud, addressing it directly to you: *The Lord spoke His word to me, saying: Before He made me in my mother's womb, He chose me. Before I was born, God set me apart for a special work. God appointed me as a prophet to the nations.*

Was there something about Gideon to which you could relate? _____

Did anything stand out to you this week in your reading assignment in the book, or in the workbook?

Week Six

Read pages 75- 76.

After being asked all of the who, what, why, when, and where questions, Jonah replied in Jonah 1:9, *“I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”* NCV

Now, do you notice that Jonah says that he fears the Lord? He had allowed his extreme feelings and emotions toward other people to override his fear of the Lord. Those are dangerous waters to be sailing on. We should not allow our negative emotions to outweigh our fear of the Lord or our love for the Lord. We also cannot allow our positive emotions to become more important to us than our being able to fear, to love, and to trust God.

Here are some examples of what that may look like:

- 1) “I know Your Word tells me to forgive, but I’m too hurt, and I’m too angry to forgive right now.”

Translation: “Holding onto these negative emotions I’m feeling, of hurt and anger, is more important to me right now than my fear or my love for You, Lord.”

- 2) “I know I’m supposed to tithe, but I am too afraid that I won’t be able to pay my bills if I do.”

Translation: “My fear of running out of money is greater than my trust in You, Lord, to provide all of my needs.”

- 3) “I know that the Bible tells me that I am supposed to wait till marriage to have sex, but I love this person.”

Translation: “My love for this person is greater than my love for You, Lord, and my relationship with them means more to me than my relationship with You.”

- 4) “I believe in God, but I feel like the Bible was written a long time ago, and maybe not all of the things written down back then apply now.”

Translation: “I believe in the idea of You, God, if that means I get to go to heaven; however, I do not believe that everything written down in Your Living Word is true or necessarily applies to me or others.”

1 Samuel 15:23 states, “For rebellion [disobedience] is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (NKJV).

Stop it with the buts and your stubbornness in your relationship with God! There are no buts nor any exceptions for being obedient to the Lord or believing in His Word. You cannot believe in God if you do not believe in His Word. Either all of God’s Word is true, or none of it is. It is absolutely biblically and spiritually incorrect for anyone to believe otherwise. It just is. If you have been someone who has been convinced to believe that not all of the Bible still applies, I would like for you to give this some careful thought and some serious prayer. If we, as Christians, do not believe in the complete truth of God’s Word, then we are not all believing in the same God. It really is that simple. Please do not be deceived.

2 Corinthians 11:3 *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”* NKJV

Take a moment in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any area in your life where you have been stubborn, and have knowingly and willingly acted in disobedience to God's Word. Ask Him to reveal any areas in your thoughts where you have bargained with your emotions to agree with the lie, that everything written in the Bible does not necessarily apply to you, or to this *modern world*.

Write a prayer using your own words for what has been placed upon your heart. _____

Read pages 77-82.

To have a fear of the Lord means to have a reverence for God; deep respect, love, and awe for Him. Did you know that God sets such high standards for us because of His own deep love and respect for all of us? Do you understand the extreme value He places on each of us individually? He places more value on us than we usually feel or exhibit toward ourselves.

When God invited us to receive His gift of salvation and to align ourselves with His Word and His Spirit, He was inviting us to experience an even greater understanding of how great His love is so that we would finally be able to see ourselves through His eyes. When we discover the vision of who we are in God's eyes, we will know our true worth as the sons or daughters of the Lord God Almighty. Afterward, we will want better for ourselves than all that we had settled for before in our life, before knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Every aspect of our life should be continually changing as we align ourselves with God's Word through the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts and our hearts will begin to transform as they line up with the heart and thoughts of the Holy Spirit living inside of us. The only way for us to discover who we are in Christ Jesus is for us to read and to study His teachings, the Bible, the Living Word while processing it through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The choice Jonah made to ignore God's instructions (God's spoken Word) was based on his negative emotions and not on his respect, love, fear, or knowledge of the Lord. We cannot trust our emotions. We can trust God. We can trust His Word because Jesus is the Living Word.

The Word is the Way Page 78-79

John 1:1 tells us that *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (NKJV).

John 1:14 goes on to tell us this: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (NKJV).

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine [useful for teaching], for reproof [showing us what is wrong in our lives], for correction [for us to be able to correct our own faults], for instruction in righteousness [for teaching us how to

live right], that the man of God may be complete [the person who serves God will be made capable to do so], thoroughly equipped for every good work [having all that we need to do everything God asks of us].
2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

“Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him’”
(John 14:6 CSB).

Jesus is the Word. The Word is the way. The way for us to seek and to find God. The Word is the truth. The truth of who He is and who we are in Christ. The Word is life. The Living Word reveals to us the spiritual life we were created to live here on earth. No one comes to know the Father except through His Word. If you know God’s Word, you will also know God the Father.

Jesus is the Word. How can we believe in Jesus if we don’t believe in His Word? It is impossible to do so. Remember, to *believe* means to put your complete faith in trust in. How can we put our complete faith in trust in God’s Word, if we refuse to read and study it? Something wonderful and amazing happens when we spend time in God’s Word, allowing time for the Holy Spirit to impart His love, wisdom, and knowledge to us. Without knowledge of God’s truth, we will continue to be victims of Satan’s lies. We are at war, and we need to be prepared for battle.

We need to understand that to invite Jesus into our hearts, is also to invite His Word into our heart.

Proverbs 7:1-3 _____

Psalms 37:31 _____

Psalms 40:8 _____

Isaiah 51:7 _____

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 *Write these commandments that I have given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside of your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at*

night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the door posts of your homes and on your city gates. The Message

Our true identity is in Christ. The knowledge of our identity is in His Word. When we remove God’s Word from our lives, we are truly shortchanging ourselves, and we are not truly understanding our new identity in Christ.

Read pages 83–97. As you are reading the excerpts below, highlight or underline any points that spoke directly to you. Be ready to discuss them in class.

Page 83

Now, let us get back to the story. The storm was strengthened. The waves grew higher, and the winds blew harder.

In Jonah 1:11, the sailors asked Jonah a question: “*Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you that the sea may be made calm for us?’—for the sea was growing more tempestuous*” (NKJV).

Jonah instructed the sailors to pick him up and to throw him overboard. He told them that if they would do this that then the sea would calm. He confessed to the sailors that this tempestuous storm was all his fault. Instead of quickly throwing Jonah overboard, which I think most of us would have done, the sailors tried to row the ship back to land, but the harder they rowed, the more the storm intensified.

So, first they had tried praying to every god they knew, and that did not work because those were false gods. After they stopped turning to their false gods for help, they turned toward their own self-reliance. The crew decided to dump all of their cargo overboard into the sea, hoping that a lighter load would be the answer. This also failed. Thirdly, they tried with their own strength to row the ship back to land. Not only did their actions not work, but they actually caused an increase in the violence of the storm. They were putting their faith and their effort into everything except for what they should have been putting it into God.

Don’t we do that too? Don’t we put our faith in our government and others to provide our food and shelter instead of trusting that God will provide? Somewhere along the line, our nation, which was founded on Christianity, has shifted the responsibility of the church over to the government and other organizations. Somehow our Christian nation seems to have forgotten that God’s people and God’s church are required to provide for the needs of those unable to provide for themselves. I think there are many in the church today that have lost sight of that. Many churches seem to be ignoring their responsibility to serve God by providing for those in their community who are less fortunate.

Page 84 Spiritual Giving Versus Physical Giving

In Proverbs 14:31, we are told, “*Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God*” (NCV).

When the church is the one providing the needs of God's children, it has an opportunity to lead the lost and the broken into a relationship with God. If the government or another non-Christian organization or person is providing their needs, that opportunity has been lost. Instead of being led to a relationship with Jesus, people are being led to a government that demands that there be a separation of church and state. Or they are being led to others who live and teach against the principles of the Bible. There is a reason that God requires His church to care for those who are in need. Yes, it is to show His love for them through His provision. However, God did not intend for His church to just hand out food and assistance without teaching His Word. Giving a person a can of green beans without telling them about the God who (page 85) created those green beans will not plant a seed inside of anyone's heart. If a church administers food, clothes, or financial assistance without sharing the fact that it is only through God's love and forgiveness for all of us, including them, that the church is able to provide for them, then their act of giving only glorifies them, not God. When Christians, as individuals, accept the philosophy that all they need to do is to go out and to be kind and giving toward others without even mentioning the name of Jesus, then they too are only glorifying themselves. Believe it or not, there are actually kind, giving people who are not Christians. Our giving should stand apart from all others. We, as Christians, need to give honor and glory to our Father in heaven with every gift that we give. Because the truth is that there would not be a gift to give had it not been for the gift of God's salvation. A gift given without also sharing the gift of the knowledge of God's salvation is not a gift that honors or glorifies God.

Also, the church must give in a different way than the local food banks or any of the government assistance programs. Why has it become acceptable in the church to focus on meeting the requirements of a person's physical needs without taking the time to sit down with them to address and provide for their spiritual needs? A church should always include spiritual nourishment each time it shares physical nourishment. Having a food pantry in a church is nice. However, distributing that food without witnessing or sharing a testimony only causes people to seek food there and not seek God, the Bread of Life. This practice will only cause them to become thankful for the church instead of them being thankful to God. Every time a person walks through the doors of a church, they should not be able to leave without hearing God's Word spoken to them. That involves more (Page 86) than just a quick "God bless you!" as you hold the door open for them to leave with their food.

What if, on the first time someone walks through the doors of a church for help, the church tells them about God's love for them? And I do not mean by just saying those three words, "God loves you." Most people have no concept about real love until they know God's love for them. So when they hear "God loves you," it does not have the impact we might believe it to have. I realize that the people working in a church office might not have the time to spiritually minister to each person that walks through the doors looking for assistance. So why not create a team of volunteers from the congregation that would be available to minister to the ones who do come in? What if after meeting their needs that day, someone then encourages them to come to their next service? What if they are not only encouraged to do so, but the prerequisite for receiving additional assistance in the future is to attend church on Sunday? If they say that they are unable to find a ride, what if someone offered to have someone from the church pick them up? Of course, these would not be rules written down in stone, but it would be a good suggestion for the church to encourage them to attend services.

Have some churches stopped encouraging the homeless, the addicts, the alcoholics, and the downtrodden to come to their service for a reason? Is it because they would not fit in with their congregation? Is it because they cannot foresee any additional tithes coming into their church from a person who cannot provide for themselves? Is it because they are seeing these people as the world sees them, as hopeless? How can a church allow someone to enter through their doors and then leave without making

them feel loved by God and to feel genuinely welcomed and encouraged to come back to attend the Sunday service?

What are your thoughts? _____

Most churches have no problem with sending missionaries to other countries to provide food and healthcare while at the same time preaching the gospel. Why then would any church not see the need for sharing the gospel with the sheep in their own pasture when they come there to be fed? When did preaching the gospel get completely removed from the act of giving, inside of a church’s own building and community? If a church has been blessed to be able to provide a massive distribution of food in their parking lot, would it not honor God to set up a prayer tent or maybe even a revival tent? Maybe, if all of God’s church had been providing more faithfully to each of their communities, from a Spirit-led, heart-felt source of motivation, it would not have been so easy for the government to have deemed them nonessential. No one should be astonished that the government sees no need for the church. Neither should anyone be surprised that the people, who have become entirely dependent upon the government, will also find no need for the church.

Page 89 Reflecting the Goodness of God – Continue highlighting or underlining the things which you feel like spoke to you, or that your eyes might have been opened to something new. Be ready to discuss.

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus said, *“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’”* (NKJV).

Every time we make the decision to give to someone in need, we need to ask ourselves this question: “Is what I’m about to give to this person a reflection of what I would be giving to Jesus?” (Jesus just told us that whatever we are doing for someone or giving to someone, we are doing and giving to Him.) So we should ask ourselves, “Is the food that I am giving to this person or donating to a food pantry the same brand and quality that I can afford to buy for myself?” Or “Am I buying the cheapest brand available?” “Am I choosing the same brand of toilet paper or household products that I will always choose for my own home?” The better question to ask is, “If Jesus needed food, toilet paper, or anything else, would I provide Him with the best brand I can afford, or would I purchase the cheapest one that I can find?”

In other words, when we are giving to the “least of His brethren,” are we making them feel like “the least?” Or are we making them feel as honored as Jesus? Does our provision reflect the goodness of God? Have we lifted this person up spiritually, or have we just met their physical needs? Did our contribution add weight upon an already crushed spirit? In other words, is our gift of provision reminding them of who the world tells them they are, or is it telling them who they are in Christ? Is it telling them who we are in Christ? Are we planting a seed? Shouldn’t every gift be given with the intent to share verbally and to show the love of God? Shouldn’t every opportunity we have to share with the less fortunate be considered an opportunity to show them how great God’s (Page 90) love and forgiveness is for all of us?

We should always tell them how precious and valued they are to their Father in heaven. We should always demonstrate God's great love for them through our provisions. Maybe we feel like we cannot afford to buy the better brand, which we usually buy for ourselves, so we do buy the cheapest one, the lesser quality one. Then would it not be better for us to give the best brand away while keeping the lesser brand for ourselves? Would we not do that for Jesus? I believe that we would.

Unfortunately, many Christians give with the old, "beggars can't be choosers" attitude and spirit. They are not giving from a place of love for the needy or from their love for Jesus. They are giving from a place of obligation, possibly even with a judgment against the people who might be receiving the items. They are giving from a mindset of obedience to the law of the Word without engaging with the Spirit behind the law. Instead of being thankful to be able to give, many are being resentful about being called to provide for the needs of others, whether they realize it or not. Many are allowing the devil to influence their financial act of giving with these types of thoughts, *They need to get a job! You get up and go to work every day, so can they! They are just being lazy. Or These people are probably on drugs. If they have money for beer or cigarettes, (Page 91) then they should have money for food.* Here is another one, *People shouldn't have children if they can't afford to take care of them.* Do you hear the sense of judgment and condemnation in all of these statements? If we really think about it, the person giving with this type of prejudgment and mindset is giving, but they are not forgiving. The world teaches us to judge others by their situation. Jesus teaches us to lift others up and out of their situation as if He were the one, we were lifting. The bottom line is this: How are we treating the needy? Is how we are providing for the needy honoring God, or is it insulting Him? Remember, whoever mistreats the poor insults their Master, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. We cannot forget that being poor is more often than not more than just a financial situation; it is also a spiritual situation. We should never ignore or mistreat those who are poor financially or spiritually. Our greatest act of kindness is to minister to a person's broken spirit first, letting them know how much they are loved. Someone in need of food or financial assistance has a much greater emotional need to feel like their life matters, that they matter, that they are loved and valued by their Father in heaven.

Now, of course, if the generic brands are the only ones that you can afford to buy for yourself and others, then it is perfectly acceptable, kind, and extremely generous for you to do so. And in doing so, you are honoring God. In fact, you are honoring God more than the sum of all of the ones who gave the same as you but could have actually given more. I want to make that crystal clear. So please do not misunderstand me.

Let me clarify this with Luke 21:1-4: (NCV)

"As Jesus looked up, He saw some rich people putting their gifts into the Temple money box. Then He saw a poor widow putting two small copper coins into the box. He said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people. They gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had to live on."

Jesus is well aware of how much each of us is able to give toward His kingdom. It is not the dollar amount that we choose to give that He sees. Jesus looks at the amount we give compared to the actual amount that we are financially capable of giving. It was the poor woman who had given more in the eyes of Jesus. When any of us choose to give, we should be reminded of this scripture. Either it will cause us to give more generously, or it will reassure us that what we have given is just as great as what all of the other, less generous, wealthier people have given. What a fantastic scripture!

Any thoughts? _____

The World's Evil Influence

James 1:27 tells us, “*Religion [the church as a whole and our individual faith] that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence*” (NCV).

So many Christians have accepted the world's evil influence: the celebrities, the movies, TV, and magazines, the sports figures, and even the politicians as idols. So many deem these people, who have thoughts and opinions that do not honor God, as someone for them to emulate and to honor. (Page 93) It always amazes me when I see a Christian post something on Facebook about who they are or what their personality traits are established by a questionnaire they took online. I am shocked at how many Christians still indulge in astrology, looking toward a zodiac sign to direct them in their life and in their relationships. How many magazines have questionnaires that claim they will tell us how we can become a better version of ourselves? We have been fooled into thinking that all of this is “harmless” fun. Let me tell you this: there is nothing “harmless” about inviting the world's influences into our lives. Everything that we allow into our hearts, thoughts, ears, and eyes influence us. I think that it is time for each of us to ask God to show us which evil influences we need to be freed from. It is time for us to stop looking at ourselves and others through the eyes of social media and the world. It is time for us to ask God to show us the orphans, the widows, the poor, and the needy, and to reveal to us how we, as an individual and as a church, can help them and honor them, as we honor and glorify God while doing so.

We Have Been Warned

The Bible warns us about the evil influences of the world and its warped philosophies, and it also instructs us on how we are to respond to them.

Listen to what 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 teaches us:

The world is unprincipled. It's dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.
(MSG)

We should not be engaging in the things of the world and the warped philosophies that go against God. We are supposed to be fighting against them on the spiritual battlefield. This is spiritual warfare. We will be engaged in many battles against the lies of the world! We certainly are not supposed to allow the views of the world to influence how we should view ourselves, view others, or how we should live our lives. When did we start allowing the world to tell us who we are and how we should live? Why has the opinion of the world become more important to us than God's opinion? As Christians, the only opinion that should matter to each and all of us is God's.

Proverbs 29:25 tells us, “*The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe*” (NKJV).

Luke 12:4 takes this a step further: (MSG)

I'm speaking to you as dear friends. Don't be bluffed into silence or insincerity by the threats of religious bullies. True, they can kill you, but then what can they do? There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands.

We should be looking toward God to reveal to us who we are in Christ, to teach us His standards on how we are to live our life. We should want to discover the life that Jesus died for us to have and to experience through Him, not through the world. When we choose to be influenced by the world around us and be politically correct but not biblically correct, we are really choosing to do things our way, by our own strength, without God.

What are your thoughts? Any new revelations? _____

Similar to how the sailors chose to dump their cargo, our way of trying to lighten our load in our relationship with God is to dump our cargo: the scriptures we don't care for, our obedience to Him, and our responsibility to serve Him. We row hard and fast, trying to do things our own way, not God's way. It is our mistaken belief that we can get to where we want to go through our own strength without having to allow God's strength to flow through us. We believe the lie that we can turn away from the standards of living that God requires of us and that we will still be able to reach the destination, which He has prepared and waiting for us. When we choose to lower the standards, which God has established for us, we are also lowering the level of our awareness of and our access to His strength, His peace, His comfort, His joy, and so much more that He wants to bless each of us with. I love the question Steven Furtick asked in a message I watched on TBN, "How can I expect God's strength if I'm not willing to embrace His standards?" The real answer is that we cannot. (Page 96) And one day, just like those sailors, we will discover that all of the ways, which we have attempted without God, have also not worked out for any of us.

So, after trying everything possible the sailors could think of, then and only then did they turn toward God and cry out.

In my head, I picture Jonah 1:14 something like this: with someone at one end of Jonah holding his feet and someone at the other end holding onto his arms, and as they were swinging him back and forth, *"then they prayed to God, 'O God! Don't let us drown because of this man's life, and don't blame us for his death. You are God. Do what you think is best'"* (MSG). *Then they chucked him overboard!*

However, Jonah 1:15 tells us this, *"So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging"* (NKJV). I know we are told that they "picked up Jonah" after crying out, but for some reason, I still enjoy the picture I have of them swinging him by his feet and his arms as they spoke those words to God.

At that moment, the lives of the men aboard that ship drastically changed. They saw a raging sea calm instantly. They saw God's great power and His great mercy in action. They realized they had just witnessed the supernatural power of the one true God, who could calm a violent storm as quickly and as

easily as He had started it. He had shown them His mercy, and He had saved them and their ship. They decided at that moment that they would worship Him and follow His ways. They made a vow to God, commemorating this momentous occasion, with a sacrifice to Him.

In the very next verse, Jonah 1:16, it tells us, *“Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows”* (NKJV).

(Page 97) The ship that they had all believed would break up in the storm and be the cause of their death became their own personal ship of salvation, offering them an eternal life with God. This ship full of men, with all kinds of different beliefs in different gods, each came to know God the Creator, the Sovereign God, the one true God as their God. God was using Jonah to preach to the Gentiles before he even arrived at Nineveh, and he did not even realize it. This was happening while he was in a “timeout” in the belly of that fish. This shows us that even when we ourselves, as Christians, make mistakes or even act out in disobedience, that we serve a God that says, “I can still use you. I can still use you.” Oh man, that is good! That is so good! Make sure you get that!

God is able to take our mistakes and turn them into messages that will draw others closer to Him. God doesn't give up on us. We are the ones that have allowed ourselves to give up on Him and ourselves. How does it feel to know that God can turn our past into His purpose?

Have you had a negative experience while seeking help for food, electric bill, rent, or some other type of assistance from a church or a Christian friend or family member, that created a negative thought towards God or what your perception of a Christian was? _____

Or, have your eyes been opened up about your own giving? Did you become aware of any negative thoughts, or lies from the devil, that you had previously believed when you were making the decision to give?

Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you with an idea on how to better serve your church and the community. Did He reveal to you somewhere that He would like you to serve Him? _____

Have you been given a game plan, inspired with a better way to serve the people that are in need? Please share with the class. _____

Was there anything that has stood out to you this week in the book or the study?

Week Seven – Discussion Night-Come Ready to Share.

Read pages 99-115.

Forgiveness is a tough topic of discussion. This week we will have an open discussion on the topics below. Please take the time to allow yourself to listen to the words about unforgiveness, and the spiritual need to forgive others, as well as yourself, with an open heart and with a willingness to hear something new. There is a spiritual healing available for each of you this week!

Has there ever been a moment in your life, where now looking back, you can see how you had convinced yourself that it was okay to do something, (based on your emotions) that you knew was wrong, or by 'looking for false signs?' Please explain. _____

Now, also looking back, can you remember any 'signs' that warned you not to do what you were about to do, or were already doing, but you chose to ignore them? _____

Did you see the red flags on the beach but decided to go ahead and jump into the water? _____

Please explain. _____

The Wonderful thing about knowing God and having the Holy Spirit as our teacher and guide, we no longer are left to our emotions, or to desperately looking for 'signs,' to know the direction in which we should be heading. Amen!

Forgiveness. Probably one of the toughest things that we will ever have to learn how to do. Have you ever experienced a moment in your life, where the thought of having to forgive a certain person seemed entirely impossible,

seemed completely unfair, or seemed like a submission of your right to not be hurt again? _____

I think it is safe to say, that anyone living, and breathing, can say yes to that question.

Unfortunately, since the majority of Christians seem to have difficulty, a mental block if you will, sharing their own true experiences, and all of the unchristian like thoughts and emotions that occurred when someone did something wrong, cruel, or hurtful to them, many are walking around still carrying unforgiveness with them. The only advice many are able to offer someone else in pain is, "You need to forgive them." However, they are unable to offer any instruction on how exactly it is that one is supposed to do that.

I hope my sharing my own personal journey to spiritual forgiveness has opened your mind and your heart in a way that you are finally able to experience God's spirit of forgiveness flowing through you. I completely understand how difficult it is to be able to even admit that you have been holding on to your right to be angry and unforgiving on the inside, while pretending all is well on the outside. True spiritual forgiveness involves that first step of being ready to dissolve your relationship with the spirit of unforgiveness which we have stood in silent agreement with for so long. We have to want to.

After reading my story of unforgiveness, and true spiritual forgiveness, have you been able to apply it in your own life? Please explain. _____

Read pages 116-118.

2 Corinthians 3:18 *Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of His face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like Him.* The Message

"Spiritual transformation is an internal change that reflects Christ's character and brings about a corresponding external change. And though it requires your involvement, you don't actually transform

yourself. God accomplishes it as the Holy Spirit uses our exposure, openness, and obedience to the Word of God to grow us from one level of spiritual development to the next.” (The Tony Evans Study Bible)

What three things does the Holy Spirit use to grow us from one level of spiritual development to the next?_____

Do you want to hear something funny? Before I had ever learned about spiritual transformation, I was experiencing it as I was beginning to study God’s Word.

For example: Things I used to watch on tv, no longer appealed to me. I did not consciously think, “Well I’m a Christian now, I can’t be watching that anymore.” I just didn’t enjoy watching them anymore. Listening to comedians with foul language or inappropriate jokes became unbearable to watch, because of how my spirit felt inside, from what I now understand to be conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, brothers and sisters, there is so much joy to be found when the Spirt corrects and convicts you! When we understand that with each correction and instruction we receive and then choose to apply it to our life, that we are participating in a glory moment and are being further transformed into the image of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Once we grasp what is happening to us on the inside, and that it is working its way out to the outside, will learn to welcome the pruning involved in our spiritual development. That development does not happen without God’s Word being read and written on our hearts.

Can you think of an area of your life that changed on its own, as you grew closer to God in His Word, without you having to make a conscious decision or effort to make that change? Please explain.

What, if anything, were you able to apply to a personal issue of unforgiveness?

Read pages 119-127.

The moment which we choose to receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, all of our sins have been forgiven. However, it is only the first step in our journey towards healing, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Too many of us stop at the forgiveness we receive, and think that that is all to our salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you receive nothing else from this study, please understand the importance of studying your Bible. I know from my own personal experience, that once someone begins and continues seeking God in His Word, that the growth in their salvation and in their spiritual maturity will happen. That is when the Holy Spirit will move in your heart and your spirit, thus beginning the transformation that can only happen when you study God's Word. It is then that we receive the gift of vision that allows us to look back at our past with a new, different, truthful understanding of the lies we once believed and the destruction that they caused.

Sometimes, to be aware of God's presence in the present, we need to ask Him to show us a moment in our past, where we felt like we were suffering alone, completely unaware of His presence. So I would like for you to ask God to reveal to you the prison ships of the past that had held you captive, without your knowledge of the prison walls, or God's presence there protecting you from complete destruction. Ask God to reveal the lies which you had believed then about others or about yourself, and to teach you His truth about your new, true identity of who you are as His loved child.

List the names of the prison ships in Satan's fleet which you were once a passenger on before salvation. Beside each one please write the lie you believed then and the truth you know now.

The Ship	The Lie	The Truth
Addiction	Once an addict always an addict.	I am a new creation in Jesus.

Now, write down the names of the speedboats that have been sent to create waves and even storms in your calm waters of salvation. Write the lie about yourself, your situation, or even other people in your life, which at first you

believed, or might even still believe. Ask God to reveal His truth to you. Then write down the truth you now know that sends that speedboat on its way, away from you and your peaceful, calm waters of trust in God.

The Speedboat _____

The Lie _____

The Truth _____

Speedboat _____

The Lie _____

The Truth _____

Speedboat _____

The Lie _____

The Truth _____

Speedboat _____

The Lie _____

The Truth _____

Speedboat _____

The Lie _____

The Truth _____

In one of the classes I was teaching, God spoke to one of the women's heart, in a profound, spiritually healing way. He gave her a Scripture of His truth, demolishing all of the lies she had believed for so long. This was life-changing for her. This was a spiritual transformation, which she had received from the Holy Spirit. I'd like to share with you, those things which she shared with the class. It's truly a blessing how God uses His Word to speak to each of us!

Ship of abandonment – Matthew 28:20 - *And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Ship of Shame – Growing up as an illegal in the USA – Philippians 3:20-21 *But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.*

Ship of unloved and unworthy – Jeremiah 31:3 Long ago the LORD said to Israel: “I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.”

Ship of feeling dirty – 1 Corinthians 6:19 Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?

Speedboat of not feeling good enough. – 1 Corinthians 6:20 You were bought with a price [you were actually purchased with the precious blood of Jesus and made His own]. So then, honor and glorify God with your body.

Speedboat of holding unto the right to be angry and grudges towards others. – 1 Peter 2:23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

Speedboat of I am forsaken. – Deuteronomy 31:6 So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

Speedboat of I am not loved. – Romans 8:39-39 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Isaiah 43:2 _____

John 16:33 _____

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 _____

Lamentations 3:21-24 _____ -

Philippians 4:6-7 _____

Psalm 34:4-5 _____

Read pages 128-132.

1 Peter 5:8 warns us, *“Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.”* CSB

Satan is always looking for someone to devour. (*to drown or to swallow up*) He is continually looking for an unaware accomplice that he can manipulate with his lies to maneuver them into position to help him with their own drowning, or the drowning of others, even the ones who they love. Satan tells each of us lies about ourselves, and the people we love. It is only the truth of God that can destroy these lies. We must stay clearheaded and be vigilant in our awareness of his lies, his tricks, and his schemes. We do that by knowing the truth in God’s Word. God’s Word is the weapon that exposes the deceit of the devil. The words which we choose to speak about ourselves and also about others play a huge role in our battleplan.

Proverbs 15:4 *A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.* NKJV

Proverbs 18:21 *Words kill, words give life; they’re either poison or fruit – you choose.* The Message

Satan knows this about our words. That is why he loves to get us to use his words, his lies, against each other. Be aware! Do not fall for the trap! No one needs to drown!

Hebrews 11:29 *By an act of faith, Israel walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. The Egyptians tried it and drowned.* The Message

What was it that allowed the people of Israel to walk through the Red Sea?

What happened to the Egyptians, who were without faith in God, when they tried to go through the sea? _____

What lie has the devil told you that caused you to feel as if you were drowning or being swallowed up? _____

What truth do you now understand? _____

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a time that you, yourself, had been used by the devil to speak words that assisted him in the destruction and the drowning of someone you love. Ask Him to give you the truth and the courage to face the truth. Ask God to instruct you in how you should address this newfound truth. God can use the same mouth, that was used as a weapon to hurt someone, as an instrument to bring His healing to that same person. We are deceived into hurting others. We need to be intentional about healing the wounds that we have caused. Taking this huge step in your walk with God will not only heal you, but it will also spiritually transform you, and new doors of opportunity will open for you to teach others.

Did the Holy Spirit reveal to you someone that your words have harmed?

Have you now become aware of the damage, the hurt, and the harm, that the words, you yourself, have spoken? _____

What steps did you take to address this new understanding of how Satan tricks us into using his words against each other to cause death and destruction, instead of our using God's Word to bring life and victory to them? Please share.

Did the Holy Spirit allow you to see this person or yourself in a different light? _____

I know this week has caused us to look at our lives in areas that might be extremely uncomfortable for us, but I want you to know that the discomfort is temporary. However, the healing lasts a lifetime. Amen and hallelujah!! This is an amazing opportunity for each of us to right a wrong thought, and

to speak God's truth into the pain caused by our own words. We have to address our own individual pain before we are ready to address the pain which we have caused others. God wants to heal you of your pain, your bad memories, and your guilt, from a time in your life when you didn't know any better. This is not a moment of condemnation, this is a moment of conviction and correction. Do not let the devil convince you otherwise, because trust me he will try. An act of faith, forgiveness, and belief in the God's Truth, will dry up the waters of deceit Satan has used in his attempt to drown you or someone you love.

How did this week of study go for you? Is there anything you would like to share?

Week Eight

Read pages 133-134. Time to Make a Choice.

We receive salvation when we genuinely believe in our heart that Jesus is the Son of God, that He was crucified for our sins, and that God raised Him from the grave. Receiving God's salvation is a moment that can happen anywhere. We don't have to be standing inside of a church, reciting a prayer with the congregation, to receive the gift of God's salvation. We could actually be completely alone in the comfort of our own home for this blessed moment in our lives. We could be walking on a crowded city street or down a quiet country road. We can be surrounded by the love of our family or friends, or we can be in a prison cell exposed to hate and isolation. We can be completely sober without any vices to turn away from, or we can be battling addiction, or some form of sin in our life. That is the wonderful beauty of God's gift of salvation, it can be received anytime, anywhere, in any type of circumstance.

It is what we do after having received that gift that is equally important in our lives as we learn and grow in our salvation. We are not called to be quiet, secretive followers of Jesus. We are called to confess our belief before man.

Read Romans 1:18-32. Summarize in your own words what stood out to you.

Romans 5:9-11 _____

Romans 10:9-10 _____

Read Romans 1:18-32

Romans 1:21 _____

Romans 5:9-11 _____

“When a person believes, he receives justification. But in order to receive deliverance from temporal wrath in history (Romans 1:18-32; Romans 5:9-10), a believer must also publicly acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ and call on Him for divine assistance. When a person believes, he receives God’s righteousness (i.e., he is born again). But when he publicly acknowledges identification with Christ, he receives temporal divine intervention. Failure to do so results in loss of that intervention (i.e., deliverance; see Matt 10:32-33).” The Tony Evans Study Bible. Christian Standard Bible. Copyright 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers.

Matthew 10:32-33 _____

I have yet to find it written, anywhere in the Bible, where it states that confession of our belief is a singular event in our Christian journey. Every day of our life should in some way be a confession of our having made Jesus the Lord of our life. We should be honoring Jesus in the privacy of our own home, with praise, worship, and seeking Him in His Word. The person that we are at home should be reflected in the person we are in public, and visa-versa. The people we interact with at work, in businesses, and at family gatherings should know that we are Christians through both our actions and our words of confession of our faith. When we openly confess our faith, we are establishing the level of standards of what our behavior should be as a Christian. Omission of our faith while interacting with others, leaves us wide open for temptation to **“sin and blend in.”** We cover our white robes of righteousness with the camouflaged clothing of the world, and instead of exhibiting our faith and belief in Jesus, we take on the properties of the world around us trying to blend in. Are we picking up our cross and carrying it with us?

Matthew 10:38 _____

Matthew 10:40 _____

Matthew 16:24-26 _____

Let us move on to a different type of confession required of Christians: our sins after salvation. One of the biggest problems affecting the effectiveness of the church today, and their ability to lead others to Christ is their unwillingness to share confessed sins and repentance, with each other, and with the world. So many worry more about how their weaknesses and sins will make them appear to others. For non-believers and new believers, the images of "false purity" exhibited and spoken, by so many Christians who are afraid to be honest about their own personal struggles, become a stumbling block keeping them away from seeking or having an intimate relationship with Jesus. What if no one had ever shared their experience of the forgiveness and repentance of their own sin? What if God had left out of the Bible the sins of Moses, David, and so many others? Christianity would have become one of those religions that came and went and completely forgotten. We have to be real, church!

Read 1 John 1:5-10. Summarize in your own words. _____

1 John 2:1-2 _____

God does not require us to share every deep dark sin with the world. Please do not misunderstand me. But He does expect us to be honest about the struggles we will experience as we discover our true identity in Him. There we always be a before and after picture as we learn and grow in our salvation. The person I am today is not the same person I was spiritually just 2 years ago. The Scriptures I thought I understood 2 years ago, I now have a deeper understanding of today. And so on and so forth it is with each of us. With each victory over each struggle we are being spiritually transformed from the inside out. It is through the sharing of our experiences, accompanied with the telling of God's great love, grace, and mercy, that allows others facing the same struggles to not feel alone and to be reassured that they too will also rise above it.

James 1:2-5 _____

No one knows, better than God the temptations and trials, which we will face. Please don't allow yourself to lose patience, giving up on yourself, and your relationship with God, just because you experience a moment of weakness that made you feel separated from God. He is always there, ready to impart His wisdom of how you are to remove any obstacle that is preventing you from moving forward in your walk with Him. His wisdom and knowledge are always available in His written word. However, many times God will use someone He has already taught to teach you. That is why it is so important for all who have fallen short in their own walk to share with others what they have learned along the way. There is no shame in the telling of our receiving God's forgiveness, love, and direction, when we ourselves have detoured off God's path. Nothing gives us more courage to continue to try, than hearing tales of others who also struggled and succeeded.

This week I want you to make it a point to either share your faith, by confessing to someone that you either already know, or happen to meet, that Jesus is you Lord and Savior. Share a moment with them where Jesus forgave you and loved you through something in your own life. Maybe share a Scripture that has spoken directly to your own heart, that gave you

strength when you needed it most. Basically, I'm asking you to share a "before and after" moment in your life. Choose to share something that acknowledges Jesus in your life, and something positive that has come out of your relationship with Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your words. Ask Him to show you who it is that He would like for you to share with. Even if you don't experience an encouragement towards a specific person, still choose someone. Take a step out in your faith and watch God work through you. If you just gave your life to Jesus 15 minutes ago, that too is a testimony worth sharing! Please share the outcome.

I really wanted this week to focus on both our salvation and our publicly confessing our belief and faith to others. I understand the amount of courage it takes, especially in today's climate, and the world's attitude and hatred towards Christians, to share your faith openly in public. I want each of you to understand that even though this might seem to be an enormously huge, and intimidating step, that just the thought of terrifies you, that it is the first step toward your making yourself available to truly **serve** God as your Lord and Savior. You will be amazed what God will do with just that single step!

Write a prayer for the encouragement of the Holy Spirit to move through you as you step up to share your belief in Jesus and to trust in His Holy Word.

Was there anything about this week's study that you would like to add to or talk about?

Week Nine

Read pages 135-139. Stubbornness.

The thing we need to remember about being stubborn with God is that He has all the time in the world to wait for us to change our stubborn minds and to call out to Him. However, we do not have the luxury of even knowing how much time we have left before we run out of time to repent and to have a change of heart. The sooner we catch on to the fact that God’s way will always be the best way for us to follow, the sooner we will get to walk out the calling God has placed upon our lives, with a true love and passion for God’s Word, written upon our hearts. Stubbornness in one area in our relationship will begin to tear away at our confidence and faith in all areas of our relationship with Jesus. Eventually the one thing we gave ourselves the permission to reject, becomes the cornerstone for us to completely reject Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

“The greatest mistake any Christian can make is to substitute his own will for the will of God.”
Harry Ironside

“There is nothing progressive about being pig headed and refusing to admit a mistake.” C.S.
Lewis

Proverbs 29:1 *“For people who hate discipline and only get more stubborn, there’ll come a day when life tumbles in and they break, but by then it’ll be too late to help them.”* The Message

Romans 2:4 *He has been very kind and patient, waiting for you to change, but you think nothing of His kindness. Perhaps you do not understand that God is kind to you so you will change your hearts and lives.*
NCV

Romans 2:5-6 _____

Acts 7:51 _____

Psalm 81:11-14 _____

Find another Scripture that addresses stubbornness. _____

What area were you once stubborn about in your relationship with God, but have now come to understand and believe in the truth of His Word, and the error of your ways?

Take a moment to speak to God in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any area of stubbornness that you are either unaware of, or are choosing not to deal with. Please share the area which you have ignored or rejected. It might be a specific Scripture or a general understanding of His Word on a particular subject, which you have chosen to reject based on your own will, your own desires, or the approval the world has given to it.

After reading Jonah's prayer, as He called out to God, on page 137, what stood out to you as you read it? _____

What encouragement did you feel when God immediately responded to Jonah, as He had the fish spit Jonah out onto the dry land? _____

Please take note of the fact that immediately after God had released Jonah from the repercussions of his disobedience, that He then repeated His original direction and commandment to Jonah to go to Nineveh. God gave Jonah another chance to serve Him by following His instructions, and His will.

Write a prayer of thankfulness based on the knowledge that God hears our prayers even in the moments of our disobedience, and that He offers us yet another chance to choose His will over our own.

Read page 141-Remaining on the Path on page 152.

Isaiah 55:11 _____

Do you realize that whether we are speaking God's Word to others, or even just reading them out loud to ourselves in the privacy of our own homes, that God's Holy Spirit is moving through them? Every time we speak out using God's Word, we are creating spiritual waves of wisdom, knowledge, healing, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and things we aren't even aware, and they are moving through the spiritual realm accomplishing what pleases God, and He shall prosper the thing for which He sent it. Each and every one of us have the opportunity to be used by God to accomplish His will on earth, just by sharing and speaking His Word. How awesome is that?

Galatians 5:22-23 _____

John 6:63 _____

Matthew 4:4 _____

One of our goals as Christians should be to successfully encourage nonbelievers, and new believers, to read God's Word for themselves. We should not be gathering up the Scriptures to point out their sins. We should be sharing the Scriptures that speak of God's love for them, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to their hearts through those words. Our trust should be in the Holy Spirit speaking the truth to them through His Word, not in our ability to point out their sins to them. Our main goal is to introduce them to God the Father, Jesus the Son and Savior, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Bible. The Holy Spirit will take it from there.

John 14:26 _____

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 _____

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 _____

1 Corinthians 2:13-14 "And so we explain spiritual truths to spiritual people. A person who does not have the Spirit does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God. That person thinks they are foolish and cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit." NCV

This Scripture explains clearly how using God's Word to condemn a nonbeliever and to scare him into believing in God does not work. To the nonbeliever the concept of a future punishment in hell seems foolish to them. Without the knowledge and experience of allowing Jesus to be their Lord and Savior, they will not have the Helper, the Holy Spirit, teaching them the spiritual truth of God's Word.

We must remember that God has not called us to be perfect, or to expect perfection in others. He calls us to be honest about Him, His Word, and how knowing Him as our Father in heaven, our Lord and Savior, and our Guide and Teacher, has transformed our hearts and has changed our lives for the better. We cannot let the bitterness of the world stop us from sharing the sweet gift of forgiveness and salvation we found in Jesus. We cannot allow fear of rejection to stop us from stepping out in obedience when God calls us to pray for a stranger, or even for a friend or family member.

What stood out to you this week in the Scriptures that you looked up? Did any Scripture change your thoughts or point of view about a belief you once held? _____

What stood out to you as you read the reading assignment in the book this week?

Was there anything to which you could relate? _____

Was there anything that changed your view on sharing God with others?

Or offering to pray with a stranger? _____

Week Ten

Read pages 152-157.

Psalm 119:105 *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.* NKJV

When we look at our life after having received salvation, we will be able to see distinct areas of new steps we have taken represented by what I call new stones. These are the stones which we will never see until God reveals them to us through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. As He teaches us, He prepares us to step out in trust, onto the stone that has been designed specifically for us. I never dreamed any of the stones which I have been shone and stepped onto even existed, until I experienced them. I live each day with excitement as I continue to study God's Word, knowing He will continue to show me new stones and new directions for me to follow. I listed many of my lifechanging, transforming experiences, since the beginning of my journey with God, as new stones. Write a list of the new stones which you have stepped onto in your own personal journey with God. No two people will have the exact same list, but they will share the same starting stone, the Rock that is Jesus.

First Stone: Receiving the gift of Salvation through Jesus Christ.

Second Stone: _____

Third Stone: _____

Fourth Stone: _____

Fifth Stone: _____

All others:

Which stone or stones were the biggest milestones for you? Which ones can you look back on and see a distinct change in your heart, definite growth in your salvation, or a complete spiritual transformation, that opened your eyes to a new revelation about who you are in Christ? _____

Now, look at your journey up to this point, and identify a place that you lost your footing and fell off of the path which God had prepared for you. It might have been just a slight step off, or a major detour. Which stumbling block of the world did you trip over and what steps did you take to get back onto the right path that would lead you to new stones from God? _____

Have you ever settled for completely relying upon secondhand knowledge of God's Word in the past, or even now? _____

The problem with solely relying upon someone else's testimony, is that you only get to hear about how God changed and blessed their lives. Someone else is not able to reveal the unique stone that God has prepared and waiting just for you. Like me, they can tell you that God has a plan and purpose for your life, but they cannot reveal that plan or purpose to you. You have to take the steps to discover it through the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, as you take the time to study God's Word. It is the living Spirit in God's Word that breathes wisdom, knowledge, healing, freedom, guidance, and purpose into our spirit. Please reread pages 156-157. God had all of that and more waiting for me. Don't you want to discover what all He has prepared and waiting for you?

Read pages 159-171. All Have Sinned.

The moment of truth which we need to experience in order to be able to forgive others, happens when we realize that God loves the person that caused us the most harm, as much as He loves us. At first it will not make any sense to us, how God can expect us to forgive someone who has crushed our spirit with their words or their actions against us, while we are still suffering from the pain. Sometimes we are so focused on our pain, that we do not realize that God can, and will, remove our pain and suffering. He heals our wounded spirit once we learn to trust Him with our forgiveness. It is not really our forgiveness that we are being asked to give, it is our making the decision to allow God's forgiveness to flow through us. It is not our love that allows us to forgive, it is our decision to allow God's love to flow through us. God is not asking us to trust the person, who has hurt us, with our forgiveness. God is asking us to trust Him with our willingness to allow Him to forgive them. Because when we get right down to the root of our

unforgiveness, if we are honest with ourselves, we discover that we really don't want God to forgive them. We want them to suffer for how they caused us to suffer. We have to be willing to allow God to forgive others through us.

Why does God want us to allow Him to forgive others through us? Because God knows the power of spiritual forgiveness and He knows the spiritual affect it will have, not only on us, but also on the person who is being forgiven. The Holy Spirit will use our obedience and trust to elevate us to our next level of spiritual maturity. This is one of the most powerful levels of spiritual growth and understanding. When we allow God's love and forgiveness to flow through us, the possibilities are endless on how God will change the hearts and minds of others, as well as ourselves!

It is almost impossible for any of us to understand how it can be that God wants to save the adulterer, the murderer, the liar, or the thief, when we have been cheated on by a spouse, lost a loved one through a brutal murder, have been lied to and manipulated by someone we trusted, or have had everything we owned stolen from us.

David was an adulterer and a murderer. Moses was a murderer. Peter lied about knowing Jesus. Abraham told ½ truths about how Sara was related to him. A thief hung on a cross next to Jesus. Not only did God save David, Moses, Peter, Abraham, and the thief on the cross, He used them to teach all of us how great His love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace is for each of us. He used each of them in mighty ways and rewarded them greatly.

When we focus on the sins of others, two things happen. First, we have left ourselves open for the lie that somehow all of our sins aren't really that bad compared to what another person does. We begin to feel less convicted for our own sins. After all, we have not broken any laws, have we? If we decide to have sex with a consenting adult, and neither of us are married, what harm is that? There is no law against that is there? If we take it upon ourselves to make sure that everyone and anyone knows the pain and hurt someone has caused us, we aren't really gossiping, are we? Isn't it our right, as the injured party, to tell the truth? There's no law against speaking the truth is there? The list of ungodly compromise is never-ending. Once we allow ourselves to think that our behavior is acceptable, based on the laws governing our society, instead of God's law, our sin has become worse than that of the criminal who knew he was breaking the law, and chose to do it anyway. The criminal knew that he would face legal punishment for his crime if he was caught. How is it that we as Christians, convince ourselves that we can continually disobey God's laws as long as we aren't breaking any laws of our society?

The second thing that happens when we focus on someone else's sin is that we only see them as sinners. We deny ourselves the opportunity to visualize them as having been saved by the Father. We will not be able to see them as the human being that has been being beaten up and left bloodied on the spiritual battleground, since the day of their birth. We will not see the person who has never experienced the love and forgiveness of Jesus, as we have. We will miss the chance to tell them that they too have the right to be loved and forgiven by God, as much as we do.

Shortly after my book, *Ship of Salvation*, was released, God presented me with a new challenge. It came in the form of a question and an assignment, which I am thoroughly convinced He has spoken to many a preacher or person in ministry: "Are you able to practice what you preach? I want you to show Me."

Now, remember, we are all in ministry, so we are all called to "practice what we preach" and to align our words and our actions with God's Word.

Allow me to share how God brought it to my attention, what it was He wanted me to do. I was scrolling through my Facebook feed, and through a local news page I saw a mugshot of a young man, who was 19 – 20 years old, who had been arrested for removing a young child from his home and killing him. The mugshot wasn't one of those terribly frightening faces that would scare the life out of you if they knocked on your door. It was just a normal looking young man. God put it on my heart to pray for him, to ask God to forgive him, and to pray that he will come to know God as his Lord and Savior. So I did. Two days later, the same mugshot of him came up in another article about his crime. Only this time, it was accompanied with a photo of the small child he had murdered, along with the brutal details of the stabbing. Again, God puts it on my heart to pray for him. After taking a moment to process the horrible thing which he had done to this beautiful child, and praying for the child's family, I asked God to give me the strength to want to pray for him. God made me look at his picture again, only this time God wanted me to see him as His lost child, who had never known pure love or true kindness. A child who has become so lost, that even he doesn't understand why he did what he did. I looked into his eyes, and I saw eyes without any spark of life or love. And I began to pray. I asked that God reveal the whole truth surrounding the crime. I asked for God to reveal to him the truth of what he had done, and the pain he had caused the child and his family. I asked God to send to him, people in prison who would lead him to the love and forgiveness waiting for him through Jesus Christ. I asked God to forgive him of what he had done and to one day allow him to be able to forgive himself. I asked that God would, one day use him in a mighty way to

tell others about God’s love, forgiveness, kindness, and mercy. I cannot tell you how difficult it was for me to begin that prayer, but as I submitted to God’s will for me to pray for him, the Holy Spirit began to give me the words to pray. The news came up a few more times on my feed, and each time I prayed.

Having completed this task, which God had given to me, I felt like God asked me, “What do you think would happen if everyone who saw this same mugshot, and read the same story of how he had murdered that child, had decided to pray for him in the same fashion which the Holy Spirit had given me to pray?” Man! That hit me like a ton of bricks! The possibilities of what God could do through the prayers of so many others, in this young man’s life were endless. I wondered in awe of all of the possibilities and ramifications if every Christian prayed for every person they saw arrested or convicted of any crime, even a heinous crime like this one. What would it be like if every victim and family member of the victim prayed for the person that committed the crime? As a church we could have a tremendous impact in our community and in our society, as a whole, if we chose to pray for the people who hurt others, instead of wishing or hoping that they would burn in hell!

This leads me to this week’s challenge for each of you. I want you to choose to pray for someone you happen to see in a mugshot and learn of their crime. Or, watch the news, and instead of getting angry towards that politician whose words and actions go against God, and speaking something mean against them, I want you to pray for them. Or look at the actions of that in-law, that tends to drive you crazy, and to make you so upset with the person that you are related to, that you lose your patience with both of them, and I want you to pray for them. These are just examples. I am confident in the fact that God will give each of you your own personal assignment and challenge.

Please share what you experienced in this challenge. _____

Luke 6:27-28 *“But I say to you who are listening, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who are cruel to you.”* NCV

Mark 5:7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”* NKJV

Did anything stand out to you this week in your reading assignment in the book, or in the Bible study?

Week Eleven

Read pages 173 through to the top of 178.

Has anyone ever judged you harshly by your past? _____

If so, how did that make you feel? _____

Take a moment and pray for that person who judged you. Ask God to reveal His Truth to them and that He would also reveal to them, the person that you are now, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever judged someone by their past? _____

Have you ever reminded someone of their past when you are angry or upset with them? _____

Have you ever told someone, or even thought to yourself, that they will never change? _____

What effect did your negative words have on them? _____

Take a moment and ask God to forgive you for any harsh words or condemning words to this person. Forgive the person that caused you to receive the spirits of unforgiveness, that have so enjoyed reminding you of every time this person hurt you, disappointed you, or let you down. With every movie clip they use to goad you into negative emotions and judgmental thoughts towards this person, I want you to speak a blessing over the person and pray for them, each and every time.

Share your experience. _____

Colossians 4:2-6 _____

This week's assignment: Ask God to provide an opportunity for you to share His goodness, and His grace, shown to you personally, with someone this week. Tell them about your own moment of unforgiveness and the impact of being able to forgive (either yourself or someone else) had on your heart and your life. How did it go? _____

Read pages 178 – the top of 180.

I am thoroughly convinced that each of us have been blessed by God in a moment of complete unawareness of His presence or His blessing. Ask God to show you one of those moments in your own life. Or share a moment you have already been made aware of. Please share. _____

Ask God to show you someone that you already know, (friend, family member, neighbor, or coworker) that He would like for you to ask Him to bless. You do not have to know a specific need of theirs to be able to ask God to bless them. God already knows their need. He is asking you to serve Him by allowing Him to bless others through you. He might actually even show you a way in which you yourself can bless them. Just be open to receiving God's instructions with a heart ready to serve. Share how God led you to pray for or to bless someone, and what happened when you did. _____

Daniel 9:18 _____

Read Matthew 5:43-47.

Summarize using your own words. _____

Romans 8:26-27 _____

Read pages 180-189 to "Remember the Fire." As you read, underline any sentences or Scriptures that spoke directly to you. Be prepared to share any new thoughts or revelations. _____

When I discovered that God's Word tells us that we cannot have feelings of hatred towards someone and continue loving Him at the same time, it opened my eyes to a new level of understanding of how vital it is for us to learn how to forgive completely and spiritually. How many of us have been in denial as we use phrases like, "I don't hate them, I just hate what they did." If we continue to hate someone's actions, then that is exactly what we

will think about every time we see them or think of them. It is impossible to separate a person from their actions when we are truly forgiving them. We have to forgive them and their behavior itself, or we have left the door open for Satan to walk in. When I looked up hate in the concordance, I discovered that it means “to love less.” I quickly realized that I had some feelings of “hate” or of “loving less” that I needed to deal with.

The best way to stop hate and anger in its footsteps is to quickly ask yourself, “Is this thing which someone just did or said, worth giving up my right to love God? Do I really want to give this person the power to separate me from my ability to love God?” Remember, there is nothing that can stop God from loving us, so Satan will be sending everybody and anybody he can find to make us so angry, so full of hate, and to make us “love less,” to try to get us to relinquish our right to love God back. Satan created the “word game” of exceptions and excuses, and it is a game designed in a way to make us think we are winning, when in fact, we are actually losing.

I really want you to take the time to thoroughly think about this reading assignment. Where your heart is bitter, and wants to shut down instead of dealing with these difficult emotions, I encourage you to press on, to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you through it. There is a weight that can be lifted from you this week if you will allow the Holy Spirit to teach you spiritual forgiveness, as He spiritually transforms you and prepares you for the next step in your journey.

Have your eyes have been opened this week to something new? _____

What steps have you taken with the new wisdom, which you have been given by the Holy Spirit? _____

Has there been a heavy weight lifted off of you, which you have carried and have painfully endured for an extremely long time? Please Share. _____

This week has had a lot of information and revelations to absorb and to experience. I am so proud of you for having the courage to open your heart

and to address the issues God wanted you to address. The bigger the challenge, the greater the reward. You are right where God intended you to be in this moment and in this study. God has a purpose and plan for you that requires your receiving the message and lesson He has provided specifically for you in this study. What you are taught might not be the same as what He is teaching the person sitting next to you. Each of you will be given a personalized lesson to learn, through this one class together. That is why sharing is so important. God might give you a lesson that He wants to use in this class to enlighten and teach someone else sitting in the same room with you. Be diligent in your desire to seek His truth for You. Be obedient to the urging of the Holy Spirit. This is a time for each of us to learn and grow in our salvation and mature in our spirit. Though some steps may seem too hard to take, approach them with the love and joy God has placed into your heart and you will find His courage and His strength to press on.

Summarize what this week’s lesson has meant to you. Have you have had a change in your heart about the way you view the word hate? _____

Have you experienced a transformation in your thoughts? _____

Have you shared what you have learned with others? _____

If you have witnessed an act of the Holy Spirit moving in you or through you this week, please share. _____

Did God lead you to any additional Scriptures that you would like to share this week? _____

Was there a prayer, or a blessing for someone, that you found yourself speaking, that came from your heart through the Holy Spirit? Please share.

What stood out to you most this week? _____

Week Twelve-Final week

Read pages 189-204.

Romans 8:16-17 _____

Matthew 3:11-12 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:19 “Do not quench the Holy Spirit.” NCV

Leviticus 6:12-13 *“Meanwhile keep the fire on the Altar burning; it must not go out. Replenish the wood for the fire every morning, arrange the Whole-Burnt-Offering on it, and burn the fat of the Peace-Offering on top of it all. Keep the fire burning on the Altar continuously. It must not go out.”* The Message

“Five times in this paragraph the priests are instructed to keep the fire burning. There are at [least three reasons for this: (1) The original fire on the altar came from God (9:24). (2) Perpetual fire symbolized the perpetual worship of God. (3) Perpetual fire symbolized the continual need for atonement and reconciliation with God, which was the purpose of the offerings.” (NKJV Bible Commentary. The Parallel Study Bible. Copyright 2006 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.)

In your own words, compare the fire on the Altar to the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 4:18-19: *“The ways of right-living people glow with light; the longer they live, the brighter they shine. But the road of the wrongdoing gets darker and darker – travelers can’t see a thing; they fall flat on their faces.”* The Message

The fire of the Holy Spirit is a gift from God, given to each of us in the moment of our salvation. Only God can give us His Fire. God expects us to keep His Fire alive, continually blazing bright. We add wood to our fire daily by worshipping Him. We allow the fire to continue to grow larger, and burn

brighter, by remaining in His Word and in His will. We do that by seeking Him earnestly in His Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us. We add more wood to the Altar when we spend time in prayer and conversation with our Father in heaven. And, in those moments in which we fall short, when the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, He does so to get our attention, to show us when our words, or our actions, have become just like a bucket of water, thrown onto a burning pile of wood. He is warning us of the possibility of the quenching of His fire. The sooner we reconcile ourselves with God, through true repentance and a renewed commitment to serve Him, the quicker the pilot light is refueled and restored to that beautiful fire shining bright for all to see, that glorifies God through His Holy Spirit. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. May the fire of our Altar never burn out.

Matthew 22:37-40: *Jesus answered, "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and most important command. And the second command is like the first: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the laws and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."* NCV

How are we to love the Lord? _____

"Love your neighbor as yourself." This one gets tricky. You see we must first be able to love ourselves before we know 'how to,' or are even capable of loving someone else. That is why we have to utterly understand and believe that through Jesus we have been thoroughly cleansed of sin, and that we have become new creatures in Christ, created for His good work. When He looks at you, God sees the person that He has made wonderful plans for, and created amazing adventures in faith to step out into. You are wearing the new fine robes of righteousness, tailored specifically for you. My dear child of God look in the mirror and see just how wonderful you are, as God's glory shines upon you and through you. Allow yourself to be loved by God, so that He may love others through you, starting with your loving Him and trusting Him enough to be able to love yourself. Whenever the devil tries to make you feel like "less-than" get out your Bible and start reading the red letters that spell out the love and promises of God spoken by Jesus Himself. Do not allow Satan to rob you of the complete spiritual experience of the circle of God's love. God loves us. We love God and we love the person we have become in Christ. We increase the circle and the power of God's love when we allow it to flow through us to others. There is nothing more powerful than God's love flowing in and through His children. That is why Satan is so desperately trying to stop us from loving.

What do *all of the laws and the writings of the prophets* depend on? _____

Love is the key that opens the door to all of God's promises, to the wisdom of His teachings, and to the heartfelt desire to keep His commandments, written down for us inside of the pages of His Holy Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 13. Summarize in your own words. _____

With new technology came new ways for us to compare ourselves to others, causing us to feel like we don't measure up to what the world calls beautiful or successful. Satan loves using television, movies, magazines, and the internet to tear away at our ability to feel like we are worthy to be loved by anyone. It becomes so easy for any of us to not be able to love ourselves, whenever we compare ourselves to others. This barrage of false images and expectations are intended to make us feel foolish for our faith in God, the truth of His Word, and the truth of who we are in Christ. It is aimed at making us believe that we are unlovable, and undeserving of anyone's love, even God's love. If Satan can stop us from loving ourselves, he can prevent us from loving others. We have to guard our thoughts and our hearts. We do that by paying close attention to what we are allowing to enter and to influence us through our eyes and our ears. It is foolish to think that we can live or even survive in this world, which Satan rules, if we are not guarding and protecting ourselves from its evil influence. We cannot eat the 'junk food' of the world and expect to have a healthy spirit and clear thinking. It is the Bread of Life which sustains us and keeps our spiritual heart healthy.

1 Corinthians 1:18-19 _____

1 Corinthians 1:21 _____

Isaiah 33:6 _____

Read Proverbs 4.

Proverbs 4:20-22 _____

Write a prayer of commitment or a renewal of your commitment to stay in the Word of God. Include a reminder to yourself of that first time that you invited Jesus into your heart. Ask for forgiveness for the times that you have allowed yourself to drift away from having Jesus as your compass. Write and speak a new promise to reignite that flame of fire in your spirit today and every day. Write a prayer that expresses all that you have learned these past 11 weeks and how you are going to apply them to your life. Your prayer does not have to include everything I just listed. Use them as a guide and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you with His words, through your spirit and heart. Submit yourself completely and unabashedly through prayer, to your renewed commitment to learn, to grow, to be transformed, and to share with others what you have been taught and healed through.

Well, we did it! Congratulations for sticking it out to the very end! How wonderful it is to be blessed by the Holy Spirit; to learn, to grow, to heal, to be transformed, and to now be equipped to go out and to share and teach others! Ask God to begin opening up doors of opportunity for you to be used by Him to share His love and His Word. Get ready for God to reveal your next steppingstone, that leads you forward on the path He has specifically prepared for you! I am so excited for each of you! May you continue to add wood to the Holy Fire burning inside of you, keeping it continuously burning, strong and bright! Amen!