

Understanding Your Bible



Ellen Lebsack



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contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Understanding Your Bible Ellen Lebsock Copyright 2017 – All rights reserved..... | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 6 |
| Week One..... | 8 |
| Understanding God's Word..... | 8 |
| Begin At The Beginning..... | 12 |
| Quite Times..... | 14 |
| Gather Some Supplies..... | 15 |
| Index Your Bible..... | 17 |
| The Assignment..... | 22 |
| Week Two..... | 29 |
| A Quick Review..... | 31 |
| The Good News..... | 33 |
| To Belong To Christ..... | 39 |
| Love One Another..... | 41 |
| The Assignment..... | 45 |
| Week Three..... | 50 |
| Salvation | 50 |
| Let's Review..... | 51 |
| The Epistles | 51 |
| Grace..... | 61 |
| Study Grace..... | 62 |
| The Assignment..... | 65 |
| Week Four..... | 70 |
| I am sure!..... | 71 |
| Index Your Bible | 72 |
| On Your Own..... | 77 |
| Are you Sure..... | 78 |
| The Assignment..... | 80 |
| Week Five..... | 83 |
| Inner Strengthen..... | 83 |
| Index Your Bible..... | 85 |
| The Teacher In You..... | 92 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| The Church Builder..... | 95 |
| The Assignment..... | 98 |
| Week Six..... | 100 |
| Know Him..... | 100 |
| Index Your Bible..... | 105 |
| Our High Priest..... | 110 |
| The Assignment..... | 114 |
| Week Seven..... | 116 |
| Your Bible Now..... | 116 |
| Finish Your Bible Index..... | 120 |
| Where Are You..... | 130 |
| A New Point of View..... | 132 |
| The Assignment..... | 133 |
| And Finally..... | 136 |
| Through the Word..... | 136 |
| To Know The Word..... | 137 |
| The Index..... | 139 |
| Make a Commitment..... | 140 |
| Are you committed?..... | 141 |
| Remember -..... | 143 |
| What Will You Do With Jesus?..... | 144 |
| Your assignment:..... | 145 |
| And finally..... | 145 |
| Bibliography..... | 146 |



Designed to promote spiritual growth and a stronger bond with Jesus Christ, ***Understanding Your Bible***, is a simple, yet well-rounded, guidebook for contemplative study of your Bible. Divided into a series of eight weekly study guides and daily devotionals it is geared to help the reader reach a higher personal appreciation of God's Word.

Spending time alone with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, each day will free the soul from worry. In Him exciting new opportunities will arise, and guidance will become available through His Word.

So, if you've finally reached the end of your rope—if you are feeling like trouble and sorrow have you around the throat, choking the life out of you—if you've cried out for help. "God if you're out there, if you really exist, please, HELP ME!" know this: God heard you and He will answer your prayer, even though you may not have known you were praying. He listened! He cared. No matter what challenges you are facing right now, rest assured that God is for you. His Word says,

"In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me"
_Psalm 120:1

In the meantime, what can you do?

Get to know Jesus personally through God's Word.
Develop the habit of spending devotional time with Jesus.
Then you will be able to say, with David the Psalmist-King:

*How kind the LORD is! How good he is!
So merciful, this God of ours!
The LORD protects those of childlike faith;
I was facing death, and he saved me.
Let my soul be at rest again,
for the LORD has been good to me.
He has saved me from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
And so I walk in the LORD's presence
as I live here on earth! _ Psalm 116:5-9 NLT*



Bee of Sweet Spirit



week one



*Then I called on the name of the Lord;
"Please, Lord, save me!" _Psalm 116:4 NLT*

Understanding God's Word

Understanding Your Bible | Week One - Day One

Every Believer Wants To Understand God's Word.

Some Believers believe "It is too difficult for me."

They'll say things like, "I've tried reading the Bible, but I simply don't get it."

Or, "Where Do I Start?"

At the beginning!

Of course! And if the Bible were just another book you could start at page one in Genesis, and continue reading to the end of Revelation. Then, when you reached the last chapter and verse, you could assume your need to read was finished until the next time – next month or next year – that you felt the need to read it again.

Normally that would be fine, but the Bible is NOT just any book! It is not a novel, although there are many fascinating stories found between its covers. It is not just a history book, even

though the entire story of man-kind, and the nation of Israel, has been recorded in its pages.

No – the Bible is:

Inspired by God – or God breathed

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living,” _2 Timothy 3:16

Alive and active -

*“The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart.”*_Hebrews 4:12

A lamp and a light

“Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.”
_Psalm 119:195

The Sword of the Spirit

“And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives you.” _Ephesians 6:17

For these reasons you can approach the Bible as Inspired Words from God, knowing they will divide your thoughts, and emotions, teach you how to live right in God's sight, correct your faults and teach you all the truth. By the grace of God, with the Bible to light your path, you can bring your thoughts and desires in line with God's will for your life.

In one translation the Bible says:

“So overflowing is his kindness toward me that he took away all my sins through the blood of his Son, by whom we are saved; and he has showered down upon me the richness of his grace – for how well he understands me and knows what is best for me at all times.” _Ephesians 1:7-8 The Living Bible

The Bible Is God's Timeless Truth

In Exodus we find God telling Moses:

“I am who I am. You must tell them: The one who is called I AM has sent me to you.” _Exodus 3:14

God did not say I was.

He did not say I will be.

Thousands of years ago God called himself I AM.

Yesterday God was I AM.

At this moment God is I AM.

Five minutes from now God will still be I AM.

Thousands of years from now God will still be I AM.

In Revelation we find Jesus Christ telling John the Beloved:

“I AM the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End... He Who is and Who was and Who is to come...”
_Revelation 1:8 AMP

The Bible Is God's Covenant With Mankind

A Covenant is a binding agreement, treaty or alliance, between two parties, in the case of your Bible a divine ordinance with signs or pledges between God and man.

The Old Covenant or Old Testament records the history of God's agreement with his chosen people, the children of Israel. From the beginning of time God made promises and gave guidance through his appointed messengers, the prophets. From the beginning there were consequences for man's failures in their dealings with God. Yet we know God loves and forgives and has made provision for our salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ.

All that may be known about Jesus Christ is hidden in the Law and the Prophets.

The Old Testament is Jesus Christ concealed.

"And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." _Luke 27:25-27

The New Covenant or New Testament contains eye-witness accounts of one man's life on earth, his death at the hands of the religious zealots of the day, and the earth-shattering, world-changing, never-ending results of his resurrection from the dead. Jesus of Nazareth, born in a manger, hanged on a cross, seated at God's right hand remains one-hundred percent God and one-hundred percent man.

The New Testament is Jesus Christ revealed.

And there are also many other things which Jesus did. If they should be all recorded one by one [in detail], I suppose that even the world itself could not contain (have room for) the books that would be written. _John 21:25

God made his NEW Covenant with you and me – the believers and followers of Jesus Christ.

In Mark's Gospel [The Good News about Jesus] we read:

“Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. Jesus said,

‘This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's covenant. I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.’” _Mark 14:23-25

Begin At The Beginning

For this reason – we will start our exploration of God's Word at the beginning—of our NEW Covenant—with Christ; because it is critical that you see him as he IS. Here and now in your life today.

Later you can look into who he was, in the Old Testament, and who he will be in the future with a study of Revelation and Prophecy.

The purpose for dividing this series into weekly segments is to equip you with the tools necessary to live the full, rich and satisfying life Jesus promised his followers:

Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will

be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. _John 10:9-11 New Living Translation

In order to accomplish this goal it will be necessary to cultivate a new way of thinking and talking, the new nature Paul wrote about in his letter to the church at Ephesus.

... be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude],

And put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, in true righteousness and holiness. _Ephesians 4:21-22 AMP

The Bible tells us:

*"as a person thinks" [their everyday mental attitude]
"so he IS." _Proverbs 23:7 AMP*

In Matthew 12:34 and Luke 6:45 we find Jesus telling the religious leaders of his day

"the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

For the believer this means a new nature dependent entirely upon filling the heart and mind with positive, Christ-like thoughts and the mouth with positive, uplifting words. Everything needed to accomplish this can be found in God's Word – The Holy Bible.

Quite Times

Understanding Your Bible | Week One – Part Two

Walking with Jesus means learning to *understand* your Bible

Jesus left us the example for our Quite Times during his life on earth. He often went away, by himself, to spend some quite time alone with the Father; certainly every day and probably several times each day. During those times, we are told He talked to God the Father; He LISTENED to God the Father; and He relied on God the Father for everything He would need in this life.

When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. The people heard about it, and so they left their towns and followed him by land. _Matthew 14:13

After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone _Matthew 14:23

Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself. _John 6:15

During the next seven weeks you will be asked to spend some time alone with God the Father every day, allowing his Word to renew your mind and your heart. These special times will give you a new mental and spiritual attitude, causing you to grow up into the likeness of Christ—which is truly what being a Christian is all about.

Sometime during the coming week it is suggested that you

Gather Some Supplies

Before you go any further, gather together a few supplies to help you personalize God's Word during your Quite Times and implement his covenant more fully in your daily life.

“A Bible that's falling apart, belongs to someone who isn't”

It is important that you use a Bible you can think of as your *Owner's Manual*—a Bible that you will be comfortable treating as a text-book, a learning tool and a notebook—one in which you can post notes, highlight verses and write on pages without guilt or shame.

In today's world everybody knows what an owner's manual means. If a new appliance, a tool or an electronic devise is purchased, it comes with an owner's manual. To get the most practical use from your purchase, it's going to be necessary to “*read the manual.*” If the purchase is to perform a specific task we go to the correct section of the owner's manual and follow the instructions on that subject.

From today forward – please consider your Bible

Basic
Instructions
Before
Leaving
Earth!

There are a few more basic supplies you may want to gather together before going any farther. These items are advisable to

make it easier for you to practice the suggested method of learning from God's Word.

A Blank Personal Journal

As you work through the weekly study guides, please make notes in your journal as things occur to you. It is also suggested that you write down your thoughts and prayers every day.

A journal is often the most significant tool for personal and spiritual growth. People who keep a daily journal do it for diverse and private reasons, and most will tell you the rewards are tremendous. Keeping a regular prayer and study journal will help you see more clearly what your thoughts and feelings are, because you've written them down.

You can really get to *know* the Lord by recording your prayers, because you can look back to see how He has worked with you and answered them. Going back and making notes on how God has handled your prayers builds faith in amazing ways.

A couple of things help in keeping a journal.

First – choose a type of notebook or blank book that pleases you. Choosing the right journal just for yourself is an important decision.

I personally prefer a size that can be carried comfortably with my Bible and is loose-leafed so I can add pages and archive older entries.

Second – set aside a time every day when you can settle down to pray and write in your journal.

These details matter. The more pleasing your journal is to you, and the more intimate you make the time set aside, the more likely it is that you will stick to daily reading and writing as a ritual for a lifetime, sort of like brushing your teeth.

Sticky Tabs and Post-it-notes

The choices here are endless. Colors range from bright neon to palest pastels. You can spend as little as one dollar or as much as twenty. It's all up to you. The tabs are for indexing the books of your Bible. Removable tabs are great, because they can be re-positioned and removed without damage to your pages. Again, this is all about pleasing yourself.

Your Favorite Pens and Highlighters

Index Your Bible

Understanding Your Bible | Week One - Part Three

Unless you are already very familiar with the sixty-six books of your Bible, building a tabbed index can be a helpful tool. If you have already memorized the books of your Bible, you're probably thinking, "What possible benefit can there be in spending my time building an index? I already know all of this!"

Have you ever met anyone who knows everything there is to know about God's Word?

Please trust me when I suggest you'll learn something new, and significant, just by taking the time to refresh your knowledge of things you thought you knew all about already.

We'll be using Sticky Tabs, those little peel off index tabs you can find in the office supply section of any grocery or drug store. Of course Bible Index tabs are readily available at your Bible Book Store, but they are permanent and can, over time, tear away from the pages. Sticky tabs work equally as well and can be removed or re-positioned at any time without damage to

your Bible.

So, let's get started

About six pages into most Bibles you will find a Table Of Contents with page numbers for every book. Find the Table of Contents and

PUT A STICKY TAB ON THE PAGE SO YOU CAN TURN TO IT IN AN INSTANT.

The Books of Moses

The first five books of your Bible, found in the Old Covenant, are traditionally attributed to Moses authorship and are referred to in Christianity as “the Pentateuch.” (*pent-tu,took*) To our Jewish friends they are the Torah. According to Jewish tradition the Torah was revealed to Moses, in 1312 BCE at Mount Sinai.

These books record the history of God's interaction with his people from creation through the burial of Moses.

USING 5 TABS OF THE SAME COLOR - PLACE A STICKY TAB ON THE FIRST PAGE OF EACH OF THE BOOKS OF MOSES

They are:

GENISES

EXODUS

LEVITICUS

NUMBERS and

DEUTERONOMY

USING 9 TABS OF A SECOND COLOR - PUT A STICKY TAB ON THE FIRST PAGE OF EACH HISTORICAL BOOK:

The Book of Joshua

Here the story of the nation of Israel crossing the Jordan river and moving forward to possess the Promised Land begins. It covers one hundred and ten years, during which Joshua, whose name in Hebrew, means “Yahweh is salvation” led the children of Israel. his epitaph can be found in Chapter 24, verse 31.

“As long as Joshua lived, the people of Israel served the Lord, and after his death they continued to do so as long as those leaders were alive who had seen for themselves everything that the Lord had done for Israel.”

Judges & Ruth

THE BOOK OF JUDGES is composed of stories from the lawless period of Israel's history between Joshua's death and the establishment of the monarchy.

THE BOOK OF RUTH is set in the violent times of the Judges and tells the story of a Moabite woman who married into the Jewish lineage of Jesus.

Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah

These books provide a history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Here you will find Samuel, the prophet, King Saul, and David – the giant killer made King.

USING 11 TABS OF ANOTHER COLOR - PUT A STICKY TAB ON EACH:

JOSHUA

JUDGES

RUTH

1 SAMUEL

2 SAMUEL

1 KINGS

2 KINGS

1 CHRONICLES

2 CHRONICLES

EZRA (and

NEHEMIAH

Esther & Job

Two short books are tucked between the History Books and the Psalms.

Psalms, Proverbs, and the writings of Solomon.

PSALMS The ancient Hebrew name for the Book of Psalms was “The Book of Praises.” As you probably already know The Psalms are a beautiful, comforting and inspiring portion of God's Word. It is almost in the middle of your Bible, so it naturally falls open- ready to praise - when your heart wants to give God glory and honor.

PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, THE SONG OF SONGS

The writings of Solomon – King of Israel – son of David. Wisdom, and madness. Joy and depression. Rich in imagery. Fact or allegory?

USE A SPECIAL COLOR TAB TO MARK BEGINNING OF EACH:

ESTHER

JOB

PSALMS

PROVERBS

ECCLESIASTES and

SONG OF SONGS

The Prophets

PUT A STICKY TAB AT THE BEGINNING OF ISAIAH

In your journal, make a note to remind yourself to complete an index for the books of the Prophets in some meaningful way during the coming week. And remember—if the book you're looking for wasn't written by Moses, or Joshua, if it isn't history (Judges, Kings or Chronicles) and it's in the Old Testament, it's probably after Psalms and before the Gospels, in other words, among the writings of the Prophets, between Isaiah and Malachi.

Additional Study Aides

In the reference materials at the back of your Bible you will find a variety of study aids, maps, and perhaps a limited Concordance.

PUT A STICKY TAB ON THE PAGES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO YOUR STUDY HABITS.

The Assignment

Understanding Your Bible | Week One - Part Four

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life -- whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." _Matthew 6:25-34 NLT

Where is the Kingdom of God?

In these verses the Apostle Matthew quotes Christ, who told his followers exactly what their first priority must be.

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else."

As a follower and disciple of Christ this must be the first priority today - exactly as it was when Jesus spoke these words in the first-century A.D. Once you have decided to follow Jesus, it is needful to follow his instructions to seek the Kingdom of God above all else...FIRST...before everything else. When we get this priority in order He will give us everything else we need.

Figuring out how to follow these instructions often becomes a sticking point for Christians. Especially new Christians.

"How can I do it?" they'll ask.

"Where will I find the time?"

"Where is the Kingdom of God, anyway?"

Here's what Jesus told the religious leaders of his day about it...

"The kingdom of God does not come with signs to be observed or with visible display, nor will people say, Look! Here [it is]! or, See, [it is] there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you [in your hearts] (within your soul) and among you [surrounding you]. _ Luke 17:21 AMP

Jesus was making it clear to these religious zealots that the Kingdom of God, which is a spiritual Kingdom, is already a spiritual reality within the heart of every human being. He was trying to open their understanding, to make them see that any external evidence of God's Kingdom flows from within the heart and soul of those who have received Christ as Savior and Lord.

Every one of us knows what the actions and words associated with our nature were before Jesus entered into our lives.

The Bible says:

*"What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these." _
Galatians 5:19-21*

So there is no need to spend time dwelling on those negative actions and emotions. Instead let's move on quickly to the really important stuff.

How to change our old [negative] human nature into a positive Christ-like nature?

Today's world travels at blinding speed and every day we are surrounded by swirling masses of information pointing us away from Jesus and toward self-gratification and self-sufficiency. How is it possible to get out of the fast lane, racing through a negative world, and change the direction life has been taking us? How can we move toward a life that will give external evidence that we are God's own children to those who know and love us?

The Bible tells us the answer is found "within."

In Matthew chapter 12:33-35 Jesus tells the Pharisees,

To have good fruit you must have a healthy tree; if you have a poor tree, you will have bad fruit. A tree is known by the kind of fruit it bears. You snakes—how can you say good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good person brings good things out of a treasure of good things; a bad person brings bad things out of a treasure of bad

things.

In verse 34 - The Amplified Bible says "*whatever is in your heart determines what you say.*"

The old King James translation puts it this way. "*for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*"

It logically follows then, if our hearts are abundantly filled with negatives; self-pity, self-loathing, fear, bitterness and anger, our mouths speak those things. If, on the other hand, our hearts are filled with the things of God; love, joy, peace, forgiveness, grace and abundance, our mouths will speak of those things. And, by the words we speak, our lives are either blessed or cursed, acquitted or condemned.

Paul wrote to his beloved children in the church at Ephesus, saying:

"Assuming that you have really heard him and been taught by him, as [all] Truth is in Jesus [embodied and personified in him], strip yourselves of your former nature [put off and discard your old unrenewed self] which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; and be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude], And put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, in true righteousness and holiness."_ Ephesians 4:21-24 AMP

It has been said the human mind is a lot like a computer. Back in the day the catch phrase was GIGO, "Garbage in/Garbage out." In today's world we are bombarded with garbage! Everywhere we look we see opportunities to fill the mind, heart and soul with trash.

Paul told the church in Rome:

"Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect in his sight for you." _Romans 12:2 AMP

It makes perfect sense to assume that in order for our actions to reflect the adoption as one of God's Kingdom Kids there is a need to get some new thoughts, ideals and attitudes going on in life.

Christ's instructions are to **seek first** his kingdom. It follows, therefore, most of the information available to us about God and his Kingdom can be found in God's Word.

Again, it follows, in order to seek first his Kingdom and his way of doing and being right it is necessary to go to the Word, find a Bible, dust it off, open it up and learn what God has to say about what's going on in life.

For the next week, your assignment is to work on establishing God's first priority in your life.

No matter how you choose to study, here is the assignment for the first week.

Set aside a quite time with Jesus every day.

Make it a time when your mind is alert, your heart is open to the Lord, and you won't be distracted every two seconds. It's called quiet time for a reason. Turn off the cell phone, the email, and social media. Nothing is as important as these few minutes

alone with the Lord. None of life's little interruptions are so important they will not keep for 30 minutes. Thirty minutes with God will smooth out any minor crisis you may be experiencing!

Commit yourself to this one thing, and unless there is an earth shattering major crisis, follow through on your commitment without fail.

Take a little time to put yourself in a reverent mood. Be still for a few minutes to cultivate his presence. Follow God's admonition:

"Be still and know that I am God"_Psalm 46:10

Before you begin read Psalm 119:18 & 34 as a prayer.

*"Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.*

*"Give me understanding, so that I may keep your Word
and observe it with all my heart."*

Remember, as your quiet time with the Lord begins—He speaks to you through his Word, and you speak to him in prayer.

Look up, write down in your journal, and read aloud these scriptures. You can spread them out over the week or read them all every day. The important thing is to plant them (like seeds) firmly in your heart.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Galatians 3:26

Galatians 4:7

Galatians 5:1

Galatians 5:16-17

Galatians 5:22-24

Galatians 2:20-21

Also, personalize the prayer from Ephesians 1:3-8; 1:16-23 and 3:14-21. Word these verses as a single prayer and work it out so you are asking God to accomplish these things in your own life. Speak this prayer aloud to the Lord every day during your quiet time.

Next, start thanking God for what He's going to do in your life through his Word, keeping in mind the Word always accomplishes God's purpose. *"It never returns to him empty."*
_Isaiah 55:11

By the time you've spent a week working with these scriptures every day, allowing the Lord to show you the enormity of their meaning for you personally, a growth process will have been accelerated in your heart. You will grow to a greater recognition of who you are in Christ.

By putting the Word of God first in our lives we can all develop a positive Christ-like nature to replace the negative worldly nature or UN-renewed nature that has been holding us back and keeping us down.

It is also recommend that you take a few minutes as you end each day to examine the small wonders God has blessed you with during the day. Write them down in your journal, along with your prayers and praise reports. Each day holds many tiny miracles and great moments of beauty. Learn to see them. Learn to thank God for them. Then before you close your eyes to sleep pray the prayer Jesus taught his followers:

"Our Father Who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us daily our bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us [who has offended us or done us wrong]. And bring us not into temptation but rescue us from evil. For yours is the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN



*No one can please God without faith,
for whoever comes to God
must have faith that God exists
and rewards those who seek him.*

_Hebrews 11:6

Understanding Your Bible | Week Two - Part One

|| Personal NOTE || Sometimes I think preparing a Bible study for a group of strangers is a lot like serving fresh artichokes at a dinner party. Now I personally love fresh artichokes, they are one of my favorite foods and I serve them often when they are in season. But some people simply do not like artichokes. My mother, for example, thought they were too expensive, too much trouble to prepare and flatly stated, “They’re just not worth the effort.” I once prepared fresh artichokes to serve some folks who believed they understood everything there was to know about artichokes because they enjoyed the pickled variety from a jar they bought at the grocery store. When we served whole, freshly cooked artichokes, those folks wouldn’t admit their lack of knowledge. Not to us. Not to themselves. So... instead of eating the flesh of the leaves, discarding the “choke” and then enjoying the heart of the thing, they ate the whole globe – choke and all!

Sometimes people can think like that about God's Word, too. For some it's just not worth the effort. Others already know everything they want to know and aren't interested in enjoying the meat or the heart as it was intended. They just choke it all down once and wonder why it isn't useful to them. Oh well...to each his own I guess. I believe in order to really get the most out of anything you must believe there will be a reward if you're willing to look for it ||



Depending upon your interests your Bible can be an Archaeological record, a Chronological History, a Spiritual Guide or your Personal Owner's Manual. The Bible can be all of these things and so much more. However, many times Bible promises are conditional. Over and over God's Word says 'IF' you will do this or that, then I (God) will do this or that in return.

In Joshua 1:8 it is written:

This Book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe and do according to all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall deal wisely and have good success.

The IF here is implied. 'IF' you will speak My Word day and night, do My Word, and live your life based on My Word...then, you will make your way prosperous, deal wisely and have good success.' Notice it does not say God will do these things for you? It says if you will then you will make...

It is important to note here too: the word meditate in English means to ponder, but in Hebrew, the language of the Old

Testament, it is the word *hagah*, which means to utter or mutter under your breath.

When you meditate on God's Word speak it out instead of simply giving it mental assent. When God's Word is spoken you will make your way prosperous and have good success. God watches over His Word to perform it. (Jere.1:12) The Hosts of Heaven act on God's Word. (Heb. 1:14) God's Word {spoken} always accomplishes God's purpose (Isaiah 55:11)

Another point to be made: you may have memorized all the Books of Your Bible, but what do you know about them? With these things in mind, take time today for

A Quick Review

In week one you worked on indexing your Bible to help you find things more quickly and USE it more effectively. Today add something about each book to your knowledge. Remember, too, practically every Bible available will have some information you can add to your Bible knowledge *if* you are interested. Writing this collected information in your Bible, or in your Journal, will help you if, or when, someone asks you a question about the Bible.

The books of Moses are: GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY - These first five books together constitute a unit in themselves and the group was known to the Jews as the *torah*, or the 'Law'. The earliest and most reliable witness to this title is found in the book of Ecclesiastics, and when the Christian era opened the term was already in common use, as in the New Testaments, Matthew 5:17, Luke 10:26 and Luke 24:44

The book of JOSHUA is the history of the Israelite invasion and conquest of Canaan, the land God promised Abraham, a land

flowing with milk and honey. (Genesis 24:7)

JUDGES & RUTH record stories from Israel's lawless period that extended from the end of the conquest around 1400 B.C., until Saul was anointed king in approximately 1050 B.C. Generations of Israelites who read this book after the time of the Judges were reminded of their ancestors' rebellion against God and of their own need for his divine deliverance.

First and Second SAMUEL, First and Second KINGS, & First and Second CHRONICLES record the history of Israel from the time of the Judges to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

EZRA and NEHEMIAH follow the previous history books in chronological order and act as a sequel to them. Both are thought to have been written by Ezra, the priest who returned to Jerusalem with a group of Babylonian exiles in 458 B.C. Ezra clearly wanted his readers to recognize, in various historical events, the power and love God demonstrated toward his chosen people.

ESTHER is an account of God protecting his chosen people from extermination, probably around the time of Ezra in 460 B.C., thus preserving the Davidic line through which the Messiah would descend.

JOB is anonymous. The author's name is not given. Jewish tradition states that it was written by Moses, but there is nothing in the book itself to suggest Mosaic authorship. The book of Job sets up the problem of God's righteous followers suffering sickness, disasters and lack. The conventional answer given in Solomon's day to the question of why God's people suffer was, "they are being punished for their own sins or those of their forebears." This is the very answer Job's friends propose. Ancient readers of the text must have been astonished when they arrived at God's final answer to Job's questions. Thinking hasn't changed much in religious circles today. Many are still surprised to find out God is not a tyrant who punishes

with sickness, disaster and lack.

PSALMS is the “Book of Praises” a collection, or more precisely, a series of collections composed over a period of almost 1,000 years. Many were written by David. Some were written in the time of Moses (Psalm 90), others were probably written during Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Several were penned by Asaph, the recorder in the court of Hezekiah King of Judah.

PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES and SONG OF SONGS are the writings of David’s son, King Solomon.

The writings of THE PROPHETS, which make up the rest of the Old Testament, are spread throughout the centuries before the birth of Christ. If you’re looking for something that’s not found in the New Testament, or one of the books we’ve just talked about look between ISAIAH and MALACHI.

There is a period of about 400 SILENT years between the Old and New Testaments.

Understanding Your Bible | Week Two - Part Two

The Good News

Continue building an index of: The New Covenant.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—the four Gospels as they are known—give accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. In none of the books does the author identify himself by name, but the authorship was added later and represents the thinking of the early church.

Matthew

This Gospel was accepted and canonized as having for its author the Apostle Matthew, also called Levi, a former tax-collector, in Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14-15 & Luke 5:27-29. If this authorship is correct, what we have is an eye-witness account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Mark

The second Gospel was ascribed to John Mark, whose name does not appear in the Gospels. Some theologians think he was the young man present at the arrest of Jesus in Chapter 14: 51-52. While Mark himself was not one of the twelve, it may have been the first gospel written, and has all the earmarks of a firsthand witness who was, from all early accounts, none other than Simon Peter, from whom Mark obtained his information.

Luke

The third Gospel bears the name of Luke, “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14) friend and companion of Paul. Luke is the only known Gentile author in the New Testament. Clearly the same author wrote this Gospel and Acts. The purpose of the books is explicitly stated: to present an “orderly account” of the beginning, growth and spread of the Christian movement.

John

This Gospel names “the disciple whom Jesus loved...who has written these things.” The Gospels reveal that the Apostle John, his father and brother were fishermen at the sea of Galilee. John left his fishing business to follow Christ and was with him in nearly every important moment of his ministry. So, again we have an eye-witness account of the Savior’s life

The Acts of the Apostles

As a companion volume to the Gospel of Luke Acts continues the story of the Christian movement from the ascension of Christ to Paul's arrival in Rome some thirty years later. The book traces the development and spread of the church from the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to Paul's preaching the gospel in Rome, "openly and unhindered."

CHOOSE A NEW COLOR AND PUT STICKIE TAB ON THE 1st PAGE OF EACH BOOK:

MATTHEW,

MARK,

LUKE,

JOHN,

ACTS

Letters to the Early Churches

Paul wrote many letters to the early Christian Churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica. The Bible has preserved several of his letters. his personal correspondence to Timothy, Titus and Philemon have also survived. These letters, commonly known as "Epistles," i. e. the First Epistle of Timothy, make up approximately two-thirds of the New Testament. Other authors include Simon Peter, James -- the brother of Jesus, John -- the beloved, and Jude.

We won't take the time to TAB each letter right now. We'll come back to them in future studies. I've never been much on trying to "memorize" the sixty-six books of the Bible in order, or memorizing scriptures by chapter and verse. In my experience the best way to learn where something is in my Bible is to USE

my Bible.

I've always adhered to the verses in John's First Epistle that tell me:

"...But as for you, Christ has poured out his Spirit on you. As long as his Spirit remains in you, you do not need anyone to teach you. For his Spirit teaches you about everything, and what he teaches is true, not false. Obey the Spirit's teaching, then, and remain in union with Christ." _1 John 2:26-27

The Revelation

This strange and wonderful book of prophecy was written to the persecuted and harried Christians in the churches of the Roman province of Asia. The author, writing "in the Spirit" emphasizes the Lordship of Christ, the overruling sovereignty of God and his eventual, final victory over the forces of sin and evil. For centuries the book has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and misquoted. Finally today, in the times of the end, when all other prophecies pointing to Christ as Messiah have been fulfilled scholars are presenting entire conferences on its meanings and relevance for Christians today.

PUT A STICKIE TAB AT THE BEGINNING OF THE REVELATION
and finally...

cross references and foot notes

Your Bible, at first glance, may seem very simple. But in most Bibles there are study aids if you understand where to look for them and how to use them.

One important step in learning to make use of your Bible is finding out about the various helps, maps, and cross-references.

During your Quite Times use these cross references as often as you can. They will help you see how the Word agrees with itself and follows patterns and types. Always remember, the Word MUST agree with itself. Always. From Genesis to Revelation the Word must agree with itself. It is critical, for learning and doing God's Word that you allow Bible to interpret Bible...not man's doctrine, dogma or tradition to interpret Bible. Taking a single verse out of context and building a doctrine around it is the cradle where false teachers and false doctrines are born.

The foot notes are self explanatory. Learn to use them to expand you understanding of God's Word

Concordance

Many Bibles provide a Concordance to aid in your study. If you Bible does have a Concordance,

PUT A STICKIE TAB ON THE FIRST PAGE.

Using this Study Aid is invaluable in learning about practically any subject you may be interested in. For Example...scan down the page to ANGLES. Here we're being told they are (a) messengers and agents of God. The first scripture reference may be Gn 19: 1 and 15. Part of the verse may be printed next to Chapter and verse. How easy is that?

So...let's say you decide you want to do a subject study on ANGLES, or grace, or love, or peace. You can use this study method to learn more about any Bible subject. Just flip to your Concordance, and start working your way through the references. I guarantee you'll learn something. And then, to continue your study, use the Concordance in any other Bible you have access to. Most Bibles have at least a rudimentary Concordance, maps and other study guides to help you learn.

This brings us to the end of the Bible and ends the indexing

project for this week. You can, of course, expand on it in any way that makes sense to you. Hopefully you will take the time to expand on what we've done. The more you dig into this wonderful Book, The Word of God, the more you will want to know about Jesus. And the more you know about Jesus, the more your life, your nature and your circumstances will be blessed.

To Belong To Christ

“Feeling Down?

Neglected? Ignored? Unnoticed?

Not even close to how God sees you.

If you are feeling unnoticed and under-appreciated, take a look at how God sees you in I Peter 2:9:

“You are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.”

Or this description from Isaiah 61:10:

“He has covered me with clothes of salvation and wrapped me with a coat of goodness, like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding, like a bride dressed in jewels.”

When your self-esteem sags—remember what you’re worth. Remember that you were bought with a price, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ, the pure and perfect lamb.

Remember that. Meditate on it. Focus on it.

“Allow God’s LOVE to change the way you look at you.”

_11.18.11 Max Lucado.org

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” _Oscar Wilde

What happens when we live God's way?

He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard, characteristics such as affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates circumstances and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

Legalism [religion] is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good. It is crucified.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. _ Galatians 2:20

Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original." Galatians 5:22-25 (The Message)

I love the way The Message Bible translates this portion of Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. He's telling them how their actions and words will change *if* they belong to Christ and are lead by the Holy Spirit. It's an amazing transformation.

In the Amplified Bible translation of this same passage we find

what I like to think of as God's "ingredient" label for his kids.

But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit [the work which his presence within accomplishes] is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence). _ Galatians 5:22-23 AB

If you pick up a jar of fruit preserves in any market you'll always find a list of ingredients on the label: fruit, sugar, pectin, and usually a bunch of stuff no one can pronounce, listed in order of the quantity used. The ingredient used in the largest quantity is always listed first on food labels.

If you follow that analogy, it would seem God intended his kids to be filled, first and foremost, with love. It is a concept that falls right in line with our quiet time scriptures for the past week.

My prayer is that you have been spending a "quiet time" with Jesus every day; that through reading and hearing the Word [as you spoke it out loud] your heart has been touched and expanded. And, I continue to ask God to renew your heart, that you may be rooted deep in God's love for you.

Let's talk about establishing where you are with accepting God's love for you. And about accepting yourself.

Love One Another

Honestly, before we can truly love anyone else we must love ourselves. Here's what Jesus taught:

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbors as yourself. The

entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” _Matthew 22:37-40

LOVE! It is the most critical ingredient when it comes to making changes in the negative attitudes and self-images associated with our old self. The old nature, UN-renewed, will keep us from experiencing the very best God wants for each and every one of us.

Many people, who have been around religious circles for awhile, have heard an illustration preached from Psalm 23 that speaks of a shepherd who will break the legs of discontented sheep that habitually wander away from the flock in order to keep them from straying.

Do you think such preaching teaches about God’s love?

NO!

The erroneous teaching: *“The Lord is my Shepherd, He breaketh my legs,”* brings needless fear of God’s punishment. It says nothing of his grace, love and mercy.

Such false teaching is what God’s Word refers to as “leaven”. Leaven or yeast has an effect on the whole loaf. Jesus cautioned his disciples,

“Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” _Matthew 16:6

In Leviticus 2:11 God’s Law says:

“No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire.”

The leaven of the Pharisees was their doctrine of legalism. Legalism judges and condemns people who fail to keep God’s laws. The leaven of the Sadducees was their doctrine of

humanism. Humanism discounts the supernatural and teaches that everything can be explained away using reasoning or science.

When God told his people in Leviticus 2:11, “*No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven,*” we are reminded that the way we appreciate Jesus, our grain offering, must not be mixed with wrong teachings. For example, when we talk about “*suffering with Christ*” (Romans 8:17), we must know that it is not about suffering sicknesses or lack, things which Jesus has redeemed us from at the cross, but suffering persecution, scorn and rejection for his name’s sake, which Christians are likely to face.

“This I command you, to love one another. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. _John 15:17-19 (RSV)

What you believe about Jesus is important because the Holy Spirit bears witness only to the truth.

When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come. _John 16:13

Ask the Holy Spirit to unveil the beauty of Christ and the perfection of his finished work to you when you read God’s Word. Learn from the Word how much God loves you, sending his Son to die for you. Learn how Christ has redeemed you from every curse and set you free to enjoy all of God’s blessings by

his sacrifice at the cross.

Clear away any *leaven* from your believing and the power of the Holy Spirit will be released for the breakthrough you need because you will have cultivated an understanding of God's LOVE for you.

Let the Love of God change your life.

Life changing LOVE has to be established in small steps.

- Step One – Recognize God's love for you personally
- Step Two – Develop real, genuine love for yourself because God loves you.
- Step Three – Give away your love to others,

God IS Love

We can learn a lot about love from the writings of John, the beloved apostle, by studying his first recorded letter to the Christians he loved and served. He calls them "my little children" and "beloved." His tone is warm and intimate as he shares his concerns for them. He fears they are being led astray by false teaching so he calmly and deliberately recalls the fundamentals of the Christian faith for them.

1 John is a love letter! A letter written by John, yes, but, a letter dictated by the Holy Spirit, (2 Timothy 3:16) which means it is as alive and as relevant today as it was in the first century AD.

You may be able to pick out some highlights from the letter as memory verses you've heard quoted, or quoted yourself.

The Assignment

Understanding Your Bible | Week Two - Part Four

For the coming week please pretend First John is the only book in your Bible. Not the Gospel of John which is toward the front of the New Testament grouped together with Matthew, Mark and Luke...the first of the three letters of John, back toward Revelation at the end of the New Testament.

Read it every day. Read it like a love letter and before you begin read Psalm 119:18 & 34 as a prayer.

"Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions. "Give me understanding, so that I may keep your Word and observe it with all my heart."

Have you ever received a love letter?

I know. I know! Snail mail and passing notes are old fashioned ideas. But let's just pretend you're an old fashioned person, and you've received a very special love letter in the mail. Pretend you've carried the letter around in your pocket, similar to some character out of a sappy old black and white movie, taking it out and re-reading it every time you got the chance. You've read it so often because in your heart you're fitting the words into your dreams and plans for the future.

As you read this week try to remember, John's letter it was written to you - by the Holy Spirit and he said, "I am writing this so that your joy may be complete."

On day one read the letter through for the first time. Think of it as a love letter you've just received. As with any love letter, savor every word. It is wonderfully exciting and full of promise.

On day two when you read the letter again, ask God to reveal his love to you personally in every verse. In Chapter 2, verse 20 He says, "*you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you know all the truth.*" Search out the truth. Make a list of verses that say "God loves ME."

The third day ask Jesus to give you his suggestions for ways to love yourself more. Place a photograph of yourself in the pages of your Bible and picture yourself in the promises throughout the letter. Paraphrase verses like 4:19-21, inserting personal pronouns. In place of "his brother" or "he" say "me, myself or I."

As followers of Christ, we are commanded to LOVE. We are commanded to love ourselves and take that love to others. In and of ourselves, in our human nature it is impossible to fulfill this commandment. Only IN CHRIST, who loved so much that he gave his life for our salvation, is it possible to love at all. Ask him to give you his love, so you can give it away

On day four of this week read the letter again and look for ways you can show God how much you love him. Ask him to show you those things that are pleasing to him—not more things you can DO to stay busy—but quiet, gentle, loving things that will make your personal relationship with him more intimate.

Read about Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha in Luke's Gospel:

"As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him in her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down at the feet of the Lord and listened to his teaching. Martha was upset over all the work she had to do, so she came and said,

Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself Tell her to come and help me!

The Lord answered her,

"Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from her."_ Luke 10:38-41

Pray for understanding of the powerful truth Christ taught these two sisters. Martha worried and fretted over the work to be done while Mary sat at the Lord's feet. Jesus knew strengthening her intimate relationship with her Lord and Savior was the one thing we all need most.

On day five read the letter again with an eye toward ways you can LOVE others as you learn to love yourself more.

On the sixth day read your Love letter again. By now, at least in your imagination, the pages will be creased and wrinkled from handling them. Phrases will be highlighted and there will be notes in the margins. God's love will be more real to you than ever before.

Eventually, as you continue to study God's Word and personalize his message, you will collect a beautiful packet of love letters, tied with a ribbon and kept where you can enjoy them often.

Very soon the love of God will be growing toward perfection in your heart and mind. Through the Word your relationship with God the Father - God the Son, Jesus your Lord and Savior - and God the Holy Spirit, your comforter, counselor and friend, will be a sweet assurance for your future.

Don't hesitate to read different translations, every day if you chose. Look up cross-references and read footnotes as you study.

Read the entire letter out loud at least once, so that more than one of your senses gets involved. If there are phrases you don't understand, use a Bible Dictionary and look up the underlying meanings.

While reading this week you are going to get this "love letter" so deeply ingrained in your spirit you'll never again have to wonder "does God love me?" This letter was written "so your joy could be complete."

Knowing, without a doubt, God loves ME, brings peace and amazing joy.

Oh! Don't forget to continue praying "your" prayer from Ephesians every day, too.

Here is a personalized prayer, taken from Ephesians 1:3-10, 16-23; 3:14-21 in my Harper's Study Bible.

Blessed be the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed me in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose me in him before the foundation of the world, that I should be holy and blameless before him. He destined me in love to be his child through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on me in the Beloved. In him I have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of my trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon me. For he has made known to me in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

I give thanks and ask that the God of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give me a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of my heart enlightened, that I may know what is the hope to which he has called me, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he

accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant me to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in my inner being, and that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith; that I, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that I may be filled with all the fulness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within me is able to do far more abundantly than all that I ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

I've used this amazing prayer for years, both for myself and my family, but also for those God placed in my life as students of his Word.

If there is someone in your life who struggles with following the Lord, insert their name in this prayer and faithfully speak it for them every day for awhile. You will be amazed at what happens. I promise.





week three



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God._ Ephesians 2:8

Understanding Your Bible | Week Three – Part One

Salvation

The word salvation is derived from the Greek word *soteria*, meaning "safety" or "soundness."

This term is comprehensive and includes elements such as justification, regeneration, sanctification, glorification, redemption, propitiation, grace and forgiveness. Scripture states that salvation is of God - by and through Christ - not of the works of men. Salvation has three aspects: past present and future; that is, as a believer in and follower of Christ you have already been redeemed from the guilt and penalty of sin; you are now being delivered from its presence and being perfectly conformed to the image of God's beloved Son.

And remember, as believers we are to "Learn what we teach!" Practice what we preach; act as though we are set apart, every minute of every day. In Christ we have the freedom to "be who we were meant to be; not judging others and not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to.

No one's life is without troubles. The most unlovely people are often the ones who brag the longest and loudest about their "ministry." The goal is to bring people into the kingdom, not drive them further away. It's not about how you "should" act to convince God to work in your life. It's about how God works in you life regardless of how you act. You are his blood bought child.

At the new birth we do all the dying we'll ever do! When our spirit leaves this "earth suit" we will step out of this realm into the realm of the spirit, to be with Christ. He said, "I go to prepare a place for YOU."

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. _1 John 5:4

Let's Review

Last week you began indexing The New Covenant - We talked about The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts of the Apostles and The Revelation of John.

This week you can start indexing the Letters of the New Covenant.

The Epistles

Romans

Paul probably wrote this letter to the ROMANS toward the end

of his third missionary journey in about A.D. 56 or 57, while he was staying in Corinth or Philippi. Since he had never been in Rome the letter is more formal and less personal in tone than his other letters. Paul wrote to introduce himself to the church in Rome. In it he develops and defends the truth of the gospel, encouraging believers to rely solely on God's grace for salvation. Following a logical progression of thought, he begins by stating that all people are sinners but then asserts that believers are free from sin's control, the demands of the law and fear of God's punishment. He makes the point that armed with such freedom, believers can grow in their relationship with Christ and live in the power of the Holy Spirit. This letter presents a summary of the content of his teaching and preaching based on his experience after his conversion.

One commentary states, " the eighth chapter is so eloquent it has been called "The Gospel of the Holy Spirit." Time and again the Spirit of God has used this chapter to call God's people back to the foundational truths of the Christian faith." The chapter begins with one of my all time favorite Bible verses,

"There is therefore now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND ROMANS QUICKLY.

A few more verses you could highlight to further cultivate your personal relationship with Christ are:

1:16 I have complete confidence in the gospel; it is God's power to save all who believe, first the Jews and also the Gentiles.

2:1 Do you, my friend, pass judgment on others? You have no excuse at all, whoever you are. For when you judge others and then do the same things which they do, you condemn yourself.

6:3-4, 9 For surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life.

10:17 So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ. The Old King James Version translates it this way:

10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

8:28, 31 "we KNOW that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose....If God is for us, who can be against us?"

First and Second Corinthians

The city of Corinth was an influential trading port, populated by 250,000 free persons and as many as 400,000 slaves. History shows us the city, like many port cities, was filled with vile practices and loose living. In fact, it was so vile the Greeks of the day coined a verb to describe any life-style devoted to complete immorality - *to corinthianize*. Paul established a church in Corinth during his second missionary journey, probably in the fall of A.D. 50.

PLACE A STICKIE TAB HERE TO QUICKLY LOCATE THE CORINTHIAN LETTERS

First Corinthians

By A.D. 55, when Paul wrote the letter we know as **FIRST CORINTHIANS**, the church was collapsing in on itself. There was idolatry, adultery, strife and division tearing it apart from

within. Paul had received reports of sexual misconduct, misunderstandings of Christian beliefs, and the abuse of spiritual gifts among some of the Corinthian believers. Paul wrote to draw the Christians he loved back to their first faith in Jesus.

Today First Corinthians helps us maintain a Christian life-style in a sinful society. In this letter we find the earliest reports of the Lord's Supper (11:20-34), the great hymn of love (ch 13), and the gospel of the resurrection (ch 15). Paul also lays out directions for public worship and the significance of spiritual gifts.

Second Corinthians

The letter we know as SECOND CORINTHIANS seems to have been written a few months after the first letter, probably before the onset of winter in A.D. 55 while Paul was in Ephesus. Apparently the problems he addressed in his previous letter continued to plague the church. False teachers had infiltrated the congregation in his absence, challenging both Paul's personal integrity and his authority as an apostle. In this letter he shares matters concerning his personal ministry more openly than in any of his other letters. We also find some of his most significant statements on giving, on the ministry, and the Christian hope preserved in this letter.

Second Corinthians teaches dependence on God in every situation. Learning to accept criticism, growing despite conflicts, living a godly life and finding a hope for the future in the midst of present trouble are all found in the heart of the letter: God's strength is sufficient—in any time and in any situation.

A few verses to highlight are:

1 Corinthians 1:4-5 I always give thanks to my God for you because of the grace he has given you through Christ

Jesus. For in union with Christ you have become rich in all things, including all speech and all knowledge

1 Corinthians 2:12 We have not received this world's spirit; instead, we have received the Spirit sent by God, so that we may know all that God has given us.

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of words but of power.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; 5 love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; 6 love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. 7 Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.

2 Corinthians 5:17; 21 Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. 21 Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God.

Galatians

Galatia is an area in the highlands of what is modern day Turkey. Paul wrote his letter to the GALATIANS in about A.D. 50. There are a couple of theories regarding the precise dates and some question as to the cities where the letter was read, but the content is a hard-hitting reminder to believers that Christ alone is the way to salvation. The apostle writes to warn against the teaching of some Jewish Christians in the church who were insisting that believers needed to follow the old Jewish laws and rituals in order to be members of the body.

The letter offers Paul's defense of the true gospel by clearly stating legalism and religious ritual do not mix with God's gospel of grace. He details the practical significance of living by

grace and under the control of the Holy Spirit.

This letter points out, to anyone who cares to study it, the basic principle that man is saved through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul uses strong language to make his point,

1:9 *"If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be damned eternally."*

Let's briefly look at

5:17 *For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do.*

This verse is much misunderstood in modern religion. It is taught as referring to a constant warfare between the flesh (the old nature or the human nature) and the Spirit; making one a victim of the flesh and helpless to live right. This is NOT the thought at all. It does describe the Galatians, or anyone else who has fallen from grace and is seeking perfection through self-effort and good works. Those actions do not reflect the normal life of a Christian in grace, living and walking in the Spirit. Paul makes this clear in verses 16-24, Romans 6:14-23, Romans 8:1-13, 2 Corinthians 10:5-7, Ephesians 6:10-18 and 1 John 3:8-10 & 5:1-4.

These Galatians Christians had fallen from grace in the sense that they had accepted the word of false teachers and deprived themselves of the ministry of the Holy Spirit who ministers daily grace for daily living.

In 5:18 Paul simply told them, *"If the Spirit leads you, then you are not subject to the Law."* He pointed out that if they would receive again the gospel of the grace of God and permit again the work of the Spirit in their lives as they had at first, the flesh would be crucified again and they could live the true life-style

Christ purchased for them once more.

If, for whatever reason, your life has fallen victim to similar thinking because of erroneous teaching, it's time to re-think your walk, and "live by the Spirit."

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND GALATIANS EASILY.

Some other verses to highlight are:

2:16 Yet we know that a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires. We, too, have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be put right with God through our faith in Christ, and not by doing what the Law requires. For no one is put right with God by doing what the Law requires.

3:13-14 But by becoming a curse for us Christ has redeemed us from the curse that the Law brings; for the scripture says, Anyone who is hanged on a tree is under God's curse. Christ did this in order that the blessing which God promised to Abraham might be given to the Gentiles by means of Christ Jesus, so that through faith we might receive the Spirit promised by God.

3:29 If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.

5:22-24 But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature with all its passions and desires.

Ephesians

The letter to the EPHESIANS was written by Paul, probably

during his two-year imprisonment in Rome about A.D. 60. It may have been a circular letter intended for various churches located in the area around Ephesus, where Paul had worked for three years on his third missionary journey. In some of the oldest manuscripts the words *at Ephesus* are missing. If this is the case, the word church means the "church universal" and this seems likely since the letter dwells profoundly on the person of Christ and the church as the household of God; the body of Christ.

In the letter Paul prays eloquently for these believers whom he considers his children and encourages them to live and walk "in the Spirit." He helps them discover what this new life "in Christ" is about. He tells them how to live "in Christ" and how to face the struggles of life through Christ's power. Here, Paul paints a clear picture of God's love for every member of the body of Christ. No matter what our skills or abilities may be, we are necessary. God's family would not be complete without any one of us. Recognizing such a purpose and calling is meant to fill us with joy and encourage us to live each day as true children of God in Christ.

Much like a sports team that has overcome raw individual skills and learned to appreciate and complement each other's talents, the body of Christ is supposed to play as one team, too. In unity. Whether a local congregation or the worldwide body of believers the church is made up of people of all temperaments and backgrounds who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and are committed to serving and obeying him. If they appreciate the gifts God has bestowed on various individuals, recognize their unique role in God's Kingdom and work together as one body, mighty things can happen. This was Paul's message for the church in Ephesus, and it remains God's message for the church today.

Similar to our modern world, Ephesus was a center for pagan worship. Temples designed for worship to a variety of gods

stood as a testimony to rugged individualism. In everything from commerce to worship people were in it for themselves, wanting only to achieve their own interests. How appropriate that they should receive Paul's letter about the unity of believers in worshiping and working together to serve the one true God.

As believers we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places by virtue of our union with him. As such we have a share in his royal status and authority; and through our intercessory prayers and evangelistic witness Christ's kingdom is advanced. Plus, with him and other believers we constitute a heavenly commonwealth (Philippians 3:20); so while we are living in the world, WE are NOT OF the world. Spiritually also, our life is hid with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3). As HE is, so are we in this world. (1 John 4:17)

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE TO HELP YOU LOCATE EPHESIANS

Some verses to highlight are:

1:7-8 LB So overflowing is his kindness toward us that he took away all our sins through the blood of his Son, by whom we are saved and he has showered down upon us the richness of his grace - for how well he understands us and knows what is best for us at all times.

2:6 In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world.

4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

6:10 Put on all the armor that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks.



Grace

If life is all about "because I have to" where's the joy in that?

People in the world often reject Christ because they believe the Christian life is all about rules and regulations—all about stifling, suffocating ritual.

This happens because religion confuses Christ with legalism. Legalism is joyless because it's endless. There is always another class to attend, another job to do, another mouth to feed.

Grace! It makes all the difference.

In Christ - "gone are the exertions of law-keeping, gone the disciplines of legalism, gone the anxiety that having done everything we might not have done enough. We reach the goal not by the stairs but by the lift . . . God pledges his promised righteousness to those who will stop trying to save themselves." _11.30.11 Max Lucado.org

Grace offers peace and rest

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ _John 1:17

Grace may be defined as the "unmerited favor of God" toward a sinner; it is "everything for nothing to those who deserve the exact opposite." Grace is an attribute of God. The supreme revelation of the grace of God is found in the incarnation, ministry, and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers -- most of which are never even seen -- don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes." _Matthew 6:32-34 (The Message)

Study Grace

Perhaps the most significant study you can do, as a child of God, is to learn exactly what God's GRACE means to YOU personally.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, [Jesus] full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

John 1:16 And from his [Jesus'] fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Carefully study these verses until you have a personal understanding of what they mean to YOU.

For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. _Romans 3:20-25

Righteousness comes through Faith

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins;

The Living Bible translates Romans 3:20-25 as follows:

20 Now do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners.

21-22 But now God has shown us a different way to heaven --not by "being good enough" and trying to keep his laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says he will accept and acquit us--declare us "not guilty"--if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like. Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us "not

guilty" of offending him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in his kindness freely takes away our sins.

For God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from his wrath. In this way he was being entirely fair, even though he did not punish those who sinned in former times. For he was looking forward to the time when Christ would come and take away those sins.

Using all of the study methods you have learned up to this point, continue uncovering what God's Grace means in your life.



The Assignment

Understanding Your Bible | Week Three - Part Three

This week the first thing to do is look at Matthew 6:33 a little more closely. You'll remember this verse was quoted from the teachings of Jesus. It lays out God's first priority for the life of believers.

In the Amplified translation we see:

"But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all his kingdom and his righteousness (his way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides." _ Matthew 6:33 AMP

This says we need to spend some time searching out what his way of doing and being right is all about. I've been working on this in my own life for nearly four decades now and here's what I've come up with:

The first thing to do when seeking God's way of doing and being right is to dump all of our previously-conceived notions on the subject of righteousness!

Righteousness is a word foreign to our modern way of life. It is an old-fashioned word, often associated with religion! And, what we are NOT doing here is studying about religion. What we are working toward is a personal relationship with God - as Abba - Father; Jesus - as Lord and savior, and the Holy Spirit - as comforter, counselor and friend.

Religion, just as it did in Jesus' day, will cause your God-image to drop like a rock. Religion crucified Christ.

Religion kills Christians!

It is impossible for true followers of Christ to live up to all of the demands made by religion. We cannot continually be righteous, live our lives God's way, while trying to live up to all those "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" rules imposed upon us by the world's legalistic view of who or what we should be.

It won't work.

Not at all. Not ever. Period.

When we try, we fall short. When we fall short we feel guilty. When we start feeling guilty, we take on the condemnation that has been feeding our negative thinking all along. When we start thinking in negatives again, we're right back to the defeated mind set we're trying to change. And so...like some dizzying amusement park ride, around and around we go.

Remember -

"There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. " Romans 8:1

God's way

So, this week you're going to plant God's Word deeply in your heart so you can see what his way of "doing" and being "right" is really all about.

Jesus' life on earth was the perfect example for us. He was human and so He can sympathize with us because, "*He was tempted in every way, as we are.*" Hebrews 4:15 Yet, we know he lived his life God's way, doing right and pleasing the Father in all things.

During the coming week, your goal is to read through John's Gospel twice.

The book contains twenty-one chapters, so that works out to

reading six chapters each day for seven days.

I know. That sounds like a lot. But really, it isn't. If it were a riveting mystery novel or a "top-ten best seller" you could probably read the whole book in a day or two. Right?

Granted, you may have read the Gospel of John before. You may even have verses from the book committed to memory. The thing is – this time, approach it a little differently.

As you read the Gospel of John this week you'll be looking for some new ideas. Remember, you are God's child. The things Jesus did—He did for you. The things He taught are to benefit you, personally. His victory over death, hell and the grave is YOUR victory.

In the first Epistle of John, chapter 4, verse 17 from Young's Literal Translation we are told:

... because even as He is, we - we also are in this world; 1 John 4:17

In John's Gospel, chapter 8, verses 31-32, the author quotes Jesus telling his followers:

"If you abide in my Word (hold fast to my teachings and live according to them), you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." John 8:31-32 AMP

And in chapter 10, verse 10 He said,

"I came so that you may have life and have it more abundantly. "

As you read this week please keep in mind the Lord was not always speaking to believers. Many times He was talking to his enemies. Watch closely for those verses where He spoke love, comfort and encouragement to his followers. Those verses are your promises. Make a note in your Bible when you find a

promise. Also, watch for and make note of the verses that are teachings He wanted his followers to incorporate into their daily lives.

By seeking out the promises and the precepts in the Lord's teachings you can begin to understand how much you have been offered, and how little God expects in return.

God's LOVE is patient and kind.

God's love is not demanding.

God's love never fails.

God's love will never fail YOU.

God loved you enough to send his one and only Son to purchase your salvation; purchase it by dying on a Roman cross.

Last week, as you studied First John, you learned God IS love.

The second time you read John's Gospel, take it chapter by chapter, or section by section.

At the end of each chapter or section ask yourself these questions:

1. Is anything here speaking to ME, right now?

2. Is there anything here that will help me do things differently, do things God's way?

3. What is being said here about MY personal relationship with Christ?

By the end of the week you will have completed an outline of the promises, the teachings and your personal insights into Christ's example for your life.

Review this outline carefully.

And often.

You will gain amazing strength and power from your findings. You might want to read it aloud, listening to every promise to internalize it further. Then, if you're comfortable with the idea, share what you've learned with someone else.

Don't forget to keep praying "your" prayer from Ephesians every day.





So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:

They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one.

None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. Romans 8:31-39 The Message

Understanding Your Bible | Week Four - Part One

Do you think anyone or anything is going to be able to drive a wedge between you and Christ's love for you?

_Romans 8:35

I Am Sure!

The modern English of The Message translation gives strong support to Paul's position, but the Amplified Bible translates verses 38-39 with even more power and assurance.

In this translation Paul says "I am sure..."

For I am persuaded beyond doubt (I am sure) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things impending and threatening nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. _Romans 8:38-39

So, for me at least, last week's assignment simply served to reinforce what I've always taken as a personal guarantee from Jesus - "IT IS FINISHED."

In him you and I can have perfect peace, joy unspeakable and absolute assurance of God's love for us, because Christ paid for it. ALL of it.

Last week you began indexing the Letters of the New Testament. We talked about Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians.

This week we'll begin with Philippians and continue to

Index Your Bible

Philippians

The letter to the church of the PHILIPPIANS is believed to be one of four letters Paul wrote from prison. Scholars suggest different places and dates for the writing, but the most widely held view is that Paul wrote Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians during his two year imprisonment in Rome between A.D. 59 and 61 (Acts 28, 30).

There does not appear to be a single overriding concern behind this epistle. For the most part it is simply a pastoral communication between Paul and a church that was especially dear to him, probably the first he established in the European region. It would seem that Paul had developed a bond of love and mutual confidence with this church that was unequaled elsewhere - consequently this is the most personal of Paul's letters not written to an individual.

Writing from prison, with Timothy to aid him, Paul emphasizes thanksgiving, joy, assurance, love, grace, righteousness and glory. It can be said this letter to the church at Philippi is all about "How To Live Above Your Circumstances."

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND PHILIPPIANS QUICKLY.

Also, as we did last week, let's highlight a few verses to help with cultivating your personal relationship with Jesus.

1:6 And so I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus.

2:9-11 For this reason God raised him (Jesus) to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honor of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

4:4-7 May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice! Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

Colossians

The letter to the COLOSSIANS has been called the twin epistle of Ephesians. Written about the same time, the content of the two letters is very similar. Timothy was associated with Paul in Rome in the writing of these two letters while Paul was a prisoner there. However, in this letter Paul is addressing a group he did not know personally. The city of Colosse was located about one hundred miles east of Ephesus in the Lycus valley. Apparently this area was evangelized by Epaphras, Timothy and others (Acts 19:10) while Paul was living and teaching in Ephesus. Epaphras brought a report to Paul, under arrest in Rome, on the situation of the churches in the Lycus Valley. Apparently some religious teachers were insisting that they had additional knowledge that was necessary for salvation. These teachers began pressuring the believers in the church at Colosse, to incorporate Jewish and pagan beliefs into the gospel message. We should note – very similar erroneous messages are being pressed upon believers today.

In this brief letter, Paul charts a course of faith for the Colossians – and for us - as he shows the dangers of mixing the gospel message with worthless beliefs, and he reminds them that Christ is Lord of all and is completely adequate for all of life's situations. Paul warns the Colossians to reject any system that would belittle the person of Christ and stand fast in their faith, holding to the hope contained in the gospel. As Paul reminds the Colossians, we need to remember - in Christ we have been raised to newness of life – and in him all grace and virtues are to be found. Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Hold fast to him who is the source of life and spiritual growth.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND COLOSSIANS QUICKLY.

Some verses to highlight in this letter are:

1:27 God's plan is to make known his secret to his people, this rich and glorious secret which he has for all peoples. And the secret is that Christ is in you, which means that you will share in the glory of God.

2:6-7 Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Keep your roots deep in him, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving.

3:15 The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful.

First and Second Thessalonians

Paul wrote two letters to the church at Thessalonica that have survived. They are, in the opinion of most scholars, among the earliest he wrote, probably in A.D. 51- 52. The letters fit with

what we know of Paul's missionary work from Acts 17 - 18, his second missionary journey. Thessalonica was a major military and commercial sea port of about 200,000 located along an important Roman road connecting Asia Minor with the Adriatic Sea.

ADD A STICKIE TAB SO YOU CAN FIND THE THESSALONIAN LETTERS QUICKLY.

First Thessalonians

The letter known to us as FIRST THESSALONIANS was written during Paul's year and a half of ministry in Corinth. Timothy reported to him that the church he had planted in Thessalonica was doing fairly well and that they were steadfast in the faith, but also relayed the need for additional teaching in matters relating to the end times and Christian ethics.

The Thessalonians were new believers in a predominately pagan society. The Greeks despised manual labor and viewed it as fit only for slaves. Much like our modern society, a wide range of sexual values and practices existed in both the Greek and Roman societies. Moral standards were generally low, and chastity was regarded as an unreasonable restriction. First-century pagans viewed death with horror, as witnessed by inscriptions on tombs and references in literature of the day. So, Paul writes to supplement his former teachings concerning these problems. He gave particular attention to the hope of Christ's return, which offers comfort and encouragement in times of death as well as daily life. The subject of the second coming of Christ seems to permeate the first letter. His theme appears to be "facing the future with hope."

Second Thessalonians

This letter was written a few months after the first letter, while Paul was still in Corinth. Some people who heard the letter read misunderstood Paul's teaching and the contents of his first letter. They wrongly concluded that the coming of Christ had already begun and as a result they were failing to live with the Christian perspective Paul taught in all his letters. They became lazy believers, sitting and watching the sky for his return while depending on others to supply their needs and to do their work. Paul wrote this second letter to urge them to stand strong despite the pressures of a godless society. He exhorts them to mind their own business, to carefully choose their friends, and to persevere in work and service until Christ returns. His good advice to the Thessalonians is good advice for us today as well.

Some verses to note are:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 Amplified Bible (AMP) And we also [especially] thank God continually for this, that when you received the message of God [which you heard] from us, you welcomed it not as the word of [mere] men, but as it truly is, the Word of God, which is effectually at work in you who believe exercising its superhuman power in those who adhere to and trust in and rely on it].

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 God did not choose us to suffer his anger, but to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us in order that we might live together with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us unflinching courage and a firm hope, encourage you and strengthen you to always do and say what is good.

On Your Own

It is my sincere hope that, as you have touched on the history of each "book" in your Bible, a hunger to learn more about the circumstances and situations surrounding each one has developed in your spirit and that you will continue to search out more and more information on your own. Most Bibles will contain at least a brief introduction for every book. By combining these snippets of knowledge, you will amass more and more understanding. Knowledge regarding God's Word builds strength—spiritual strength. In today's world, more than ever before, spiritual strength is necessary, and it is wise to heed the words of Jude:

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.



*I'm asking God to give you a gift from the wealth of his glory. I pray that he would give you inner strength and power through his Spirit. Then Christ will live in you through faith. I also pray that love may be the ground into which you sink your roots and on which you have your foundation. _Ephesians 3:16-17
GW*

Are You Sure

God does not want your heart filled with worries and fears, tossed and turned by every challenge that comes your way. He wants your heart at rest and established by his Love, through Christ Jesus.

The NIV translates Ephesians 3:16-18:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

When we start thinking the answers to life's challenges depend on our own ability to obey God, our hearts will not be at rest. No one, except Christ, can obey God perfectly and when you and I try to perfect our life by good works our hearts will be filled with worry and anxiety and fear.

When we depend on God's grace, that is, his undeserved,

unmerited favor, the opposite happens. Our hearts become established, rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.

When we understand that the one and only thing that can qualify us to receive God's blessings is faith in the finished work of Christ, our hearts becomes established. When our hearts are established we can live without the fear of our troubles swallowing us up. We can live with full assurance that Christ's blessings will be apparent in our daily walk.

God wants our hearts established. God wants us to live knowing that his righteousness, healing, prosperity and protection belong to us, all paid for by Jesus' finished work at the cross. God's blessings are sure in the life of a believer because they are not dependent on our ability to keep the law, but Jesus' perfect obedience.

Under the old covenant, men received God's blessings only if they were able to keep all his laws. (Deuteronomy 28:1-2) Under the old covenant, if you sinned and failed to keep even one law, you were disqualified from receiving his blessings. But today, under the new covenant, our sins no longer disqualify us because God Himself has said,

"I will forgive their sins and will no longer remember their wrongs." _Hebrews 8:12

The Assignment

This week's assignment it to work on making certain your heart is established by God's grace.

Because of his grace, you have full access to his blessings. You no longer have to worry about whether you're good enough. You can stand firmly on the promises made in his Word and enjoy his blessings because Jesus has paid the price. "IT IS FINISHED!"

If you are IN CHRIST, your part is to believe and receive! Here are some verses that will build your faith in God's love for you.

Hebrews 11:6 No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him.

Romans 5:17 It is true that through the sin of one man [Adam] death began to rule because of that one man. But how much greater is the result of what was done by the one man, Jesus Christ! All who receive God's abundant grace and are freely put right with him will rule in life through Christ.

Romans 6:3-4, 11, 14 For surely you know that when we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life. In the same way you are to think of yourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned, but living in fellowship with God through Christ Jesus. Sin must not be your master; for you do not live under law but under God's grace.

Romans 6:23 For sin pays its wage--death, but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.

In him there is life. In him there is fullness of joy. In him there is no condemnation, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets me free from the law of sin and death.

What does it mean to be IN Christ?

During the coming week your assignment is to search through the Letters of the New Covenant that you have indexed so far (Romans through Second Thessalonians) for verses which speak of who and what you are IN UNION WITH CHRIST JESUS.

- Use every tool you have access to:
- Use every translation of the Bible
- Use every Concordance
- Use cross-references and footnotes
- Even use the internet (BibleGateway.com)
- Look for phrases like "in Christ" - "through Christ" - "in him"
- Highlight the verses
- Make a note of them in your personal journal.

Your goal is to gain a firm grasp on what God has prepared for those who love him; for those whom God loves.

By the end of the week expect to be able to say, with Paul:

For I am persuaded beyond doubt (I am sure) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things impending and threatening nor things to come, nor powers,

Nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation

will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

I'm asking God to give you a gift from the wealth of his glory. I pray that he would give you inner strength and power through his Spirit. Then Christ will live in you through faith. I also pray that love may be the ground into which you sink your roots and on which you have your foundation." _Ephesians 3:16-17 GW



Bee of Sweet Spirit



week five



When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come. _John 16:13

Understanding Your Bible | Week Five - Part One

Inner Strengthen

Does God's Word mean more to you today than when you first believed? Do you hunger for God's Word? Do you USE God's Word to strengthen and guide you day by day? Has your faith increased as you've grown in understanding through God's Word? Much of what we've seen so far in the New Testament was dictated by the Holy Spirit to help us know "how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is."

"When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. _Ephesians 3:14-18

As you work your way through each weekly study, designed to help build a stronger understanding of how to USE your Bible, to become more familiar with the Lord Jesus, certainly your faith is growing. The Word of God ALWAYS accomplishes the thing for which he sent it, (Isaiah 55:11). Overall the goal here is to unwrap God's GIFT of faith, through Jesus Christ, for faith comes by hearing /reading the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Consider, if you will, the message in 1 John 4:13-17:

"We are sure that we live in union with God and that he lives in union with us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and tell others that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If we declare that Jesus is the Son of God, we live in union with God and God lives in union with us. And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us. God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them. Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on the Judgment Day; and we will have it because our life in this world is the same as Christ's.

The Revised Standard Version puts 1 John 4:17 this way:

In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world.

The Word will always unwrap God's gift of faith, through Jesus Christ. God empowers you through His Spirit and through His Word. By giving God's Word first place (first priority) in your life, the world and the cares of the world will fall into line behind and beneath what God says about it.

Today please read: Psalm 23, Psalm 91, and Psalm 103

As you read, please USE the study methods you've learned to glean as much as possible from every word. The blessings will

be enormous.

Understanding Your Bible | Week Five - Part Two

Index Your Bible

Over the past four weeks you've looked at both the Old and New Testaments, The Gospels and Acts and some of the surviving letters to the first-century churches. This week you will continue indexing the New Testament Letters, by finding out a little about "The Pastoral Epistles" so called because they deal with the qualification and duties of church ministers and administrators.

The letters to Timothy and Titus

There are two letters in the New Testaments that are addressed to Timothy. He was Paul's young disciple, who occupied a special place in the apostle's heart. Timothy was Paul's coworker, emissary, traveling companion and "true son in the faith." (1 Tim. 1:2). Born at Lystra of a Greek father and a Jewish mother, Timothy was taught the Scriptures from childhood by both his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5) and these studies allowed him to develop a "sincere faith." When Paul came to Lystra on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3) he enlisted Timothy as aide. He was then associated with Paul till the end of Paul's life

First Timothy

This letter is essentially a letter of encouragement to Paul's aide, Timothy. At the time of this writing, probably about A.D. 63 to A.D. 65, Timothy was working in Ephesus as an overseer

of the church Paul had planted there. He was sent to combat false teaching that was infiltrating the church and to establish the governing leaders of the body. Although it is not entirely a personal letter, Paul seems to have used the occasion to construct a letter on the nature of Christian ministry in the face of opposition and heresy. Paul viewed the opposition his young protege was enduring from a prophetic perspective, pointing out that the Spirit had foretold such apostasy. With loving support and step by step instructions Paul leaves a wonderful legacy of trustworthy guidelines for the church that we, too, can follow to keep on the right path in faith and godliness.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND THE LETTERS TO TIMOTHY QUICKLY.

Also, as you've been doing, highlight a few verses to help with cultivating your personal relationship with Jesus.

1 Tim. 1:15 This is a true saying, to be completely accepted and believed: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners....

1 Tim. 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people; for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct. This is good and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth.

1 Tim. 4:11 Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, {in years or in the faith} but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity {emphasis is mine}

Second Timothy

Paul wrote this letter from a Roman prison in about A.D. 67. A careful reading of the letter gives us a picture of an old man, feeling alone, abandoned and betrayed. He seems to sense that his opportunities for preaching the Gospel are about at an end for he tells Timothy:

"As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing. _2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul is longing to see Timothy again, asking him to come to Rome and to bring the books and parchments he left in Troas. Winter is approaching and he asks for his warm cloak, then he assures his young disciple,

"But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear. And he rescued me from certain death."

The Greek here is "*from the mouth of a lion.*" Except for his Roman citizenship Paul would probably have been thrown to the lions in Nero's amphitheater rather than remaining incarcerated. (v:17)

Throughout this poignant letter Paul remains teacher and mentor and friend, offering guidance, sharing the wisdom gained during the years of his ministry and encouraging Timothy to stand firm in the faith. Despite Paul's difficult circumstances, his concern for Timothy and the church in

Ephesus reminds us that in spite of threats to our values and beliefs, we can run the race of faith and finish well.

Some valuable verses to highlight are:

2 Tim. 1:7 For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.

2 Tim 3:1-5 Remember that there will be difficult times in the last days. People will be selfish, greedy, boastful, and conceited; they will be insulting, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and irreligious; they will be unkind, merciless, slanderers, violent, and fierce; they will hate the good; they will be treacherous, reckless, and swollen with pride; they will love pleasure rather than God; they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its real power. Keep away from such people.

2 Tim. 4:1-5 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and because he is coming to rule as King, I solemnly urge you to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience. The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends. But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances; endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Good News, and perform your whole duty as a servant of God.

Titus

This letter was written to one of Paul's Gentile converts from

Antioch, shortly after Paul left him in charge of the believers on Crete. In Gal. 2:1-3 we find him accompanying Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to lay Paul's Gospel message before the Church Council. During his travels with Paul over a period of about fifteen years, Titus became one of the apostle's most trusted associates. After Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28) they ministered together on Crete for a brief period. When Paul moved on, he left Titus behind to continue the ministry, organize the churches on the island, teach sound doctrine and appoint elders.

Paul wrote to encourage Titus and give him further instructions for accomplishing his task; stressing that believers' actions should reflect their faith. Apparently the believers on the island of Crete were slipping into the sinful practices of a godless society so Paul strongly warns them about false teachers and instructs them in true Christ like conduct.

Today it is plain, the way we relate to others is a clear reflection of our faith and beliefs. How we live in a godless society is as important as what our position in a church or a corporation says about us as Christians.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE TO QUICKLY FIND TITUS.

And highlight this passage for future study.

1:15-16 Everything is pure to those who are themselves pure; but nothing is pure to those who are defiled and unbelieving, for their minds and consciences have been defiled. They claim that they know God, but their actions deny it. They are hateful and disobedient, not fit to do anything good.

Philemon

Along with Colossians, Philippians, and Ephesians, this letter is

classified as one of the "Prison Epistles" written from Rome in about A.D. 60 during Paul's first imprisonment there.

Oneismus, a slave, had stolen goods or money from his master and fled to Rome where, through Paul's ministry, he was converted to Christianity. Paul sent him back to his master, Philemon, and sent this letter along with him promising to personally pay back whatever he owed his master. The letter is addressed primarily to Philemon, Paul's fellow-worker and dear brother who, *"has brought me great joy and much encouragement!"* The brief letter is also addressed to Apphia (possibly Philemon's wife) Archippus and the members of the church that met in Philemon's household. Paul pleads with them to be lenient with this runaway slave. Under Roman law Philemon could have punished Oneismus with almost any degree of severity. Approximately a third of the first-century Roman population was made up of slaves, who had no legal status whatsoever. A runaway could be severely whipped, branded on the face, chained, forced to wear an iron neck collar or restrained by having both legs broken. Slaves could also be sold to the mines or sentenced to death. Paul wanted Philemon not only to forgive his slave, as a Christian brother, but to grant him grace and forgiveness, and *"welcome him back just as you would welcome me."*

Philemon is a brief, yet passionate, letter but it emphasizes that Christian relationships must exude forgiveness and acceptance. Whether others have betrayed us, offended us or turned away from us for any reason, we can look to God for the grace to show them what Christ has shown us—gracious forgiveness, willing acceptance and abundant love.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND PHILEMON QUICKLY.

And highlight Paul's prayer in verses 4-7

"...every time I pray, I mention you and give thanks to my God. For I hear of your love for all of God's people and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus. My prayer is that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in our life in union with Christ. Your love, dear brother, has brought me great joy and much encouragement! You have cheered the hearts of all of God's people."



Learn to USE your Bible - Week Five - Part Three

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in My name,
He will teach you all things..."* _John 14:26

Last week you looked at your position IN Christ. This week you'll be looking at Christ IN *you*.

If you've ever wondered where you can turn to get the help you need, wonder no more. Just turn to God who has already promised you the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom He has sent in Jesus' name to dwell in you.

The Teacher In You

The Holy Spirit will teach you all things.

Yes, all things!

Can you really believe that? Or are you one of those people who believe that you should seek God's counsel for spiritual things, but consult "*professional*" help for everything else in your life?

God does not want us to run to and rely on worldly wisdom.

Please, don't misunderstand me here, there is nothing wrong with going to a doctor or hiring a financial consultant, but God wants us to come to him first (Matthew 6:33) for counsel and direction. That is why He sent the Holy Spirit, to teach us all things. Jesus told his disciples:

"However, I am telling you nothing but the truth when I say it is profitable (good, expedient, advantageous) for you that I go away. Because if I do not go away, the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengthener, Standby) will not come to you [into close fellowship with you]; but if I go away, I will send him

to you [to be in close fellowship with you]." _John 16:7
AMP

The Spirit of Truth

But when He, the Spirit of Truth (the Truth-giving Spirit) comes, He will guide you into all the Truth (the whole, full Truth). For He will not speak his own message [on his own authority]; but He will tell whatever He hears [from the Father; He will give the message that has been given to him], and He will announce and declare to you the things that are to come [that will happen in the future]. _John 16:13
AMP

The Apostle John wrote:

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things... the anointing which you have received from him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things..." _1 John 2:20, 27

From these scriptures we can conclude that God teaches us through the anointing of the Holy Spirit *within*. His is a continuous anointing. In any particular situation, He is guiding and directing you from within. The Holy Spirit, our Comforter, Counselor and friend is the power behind the Church, and the power behind every believer whose life is centered IN Christ Jesus. In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his followers,

"But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In the Book of Joel, believed to have been written in the fourth or fifth century B.C., we find a prophecy of the outpouring of God's Spirit.

Afterward I will pour out my Spirit on everyone: your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your old people will have dreams, and your young people will see visions. At that time I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, both men and women. _Joel 2:28-29

This scripture was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:15-18 as being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. On that day over three thousand souls were saved and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. On *that* day, the body of Christ, the new-born church, began forming in the earth.

"These people are not drunk, as you suppose; it is only nine o'clock in the morning. Instead, this is what the prophet Joel spoke about: This is what I will do in the last days, God says: I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. Yes, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will proclaim my message."

Peter told this predominately Jewish crowd,

"Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit." _Acts 2:30

The Church Builder

In Acts chapter 9 we read of the conversion of Saul (Paul) and are told in verse 31,

"And so it was that the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a time of peace. Through the help of the Holy Spirit it was strengthened and grew in numbers, as it lived in reverence for the Lord." _Acts 9:31

God's Gift For Everyone

In Acts chapter 10 we find an account of Peter visiting in the home of a Gentile, the Roman centurion Cornelius, confirming God's Gift of the Holy Spirit is for every believer.

Peter, who was uncertain that God wanted Gentiles (non-Jews) to hear the Good News, went to the home of Cornelius after hearing from the Lord in a vision.

And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the

third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." _Acts 10:38-43

When these non-Jewish believers were told the Good News about Jesus, the Holy Spirit proved to Peter, and to us, the gift of the Holy Spirit comes to indwell anyone who accepts Christ.

While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. _Acts 10:44-48

In the Amplified Version of the Bible we find verses 44-48 translated as follows:

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on **all** who were listening to the message. And the believers from among the circumcised [the Jews] who came with Peter were surprised and amazed, because the free gift of the Holy Spirit had been bestowed and poured out largely even on the Gentiles. For they heard them talking in [unknown] tongues (languages) and extolling and magnifying God. Then Peter asked,*

“Can anyone forbid or refuse water for baptizing these people, seeing that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

If, as a believer, you have become caught up in the *religious* dispute that often surrounds "speaking in tongues" I urge to you pay special attention to the emphasized words in these verses, and then prayerfully consider God's plan for your own walk with Jesus.



Bee of Sweet Spirit

The Assignment

Going forward remember, before you begin each day's Quiet Time to repeat the personalized prayer from Ephesians and read Psalm 119:18 & 34 as a prayer.

*"Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.*

*"Give me understanding, so that I may keep your Word
and observe it with all my heart."*

This week the assignment is to search out as many scriptures as you can find that will clarify the role of the Holy Spirit in your life. As in previous weeks, use your Concordance, all the Bible Translations you have available, cross-references and foot-notes. Here are a few suggestions:

Acts 10:34-48

Acts 11:15-18

Acts 19:1-7

The noted New Testament Greek scholar Dr. Kenneth Wuest (1893 - 1962) writes of the Holy Spirit in this manner:

"Believers in this Christian era are priests in the New Testament sense. They are anointed with the Holy Spirit once and once only, at the moment they are saved. This anointing is the coming of the Spirit to take up his permanent residence in their hearts, thus providing the potential equipment for their service as priests. The baptism by the Spirit is for the introduction of the believer into the Body of Christ, the anointing with the Spirit is his coming to dwell in the believer and the fullness of the Spirit is for power for service."

From my decades of experience, I can assure you that God will grant any request sincerely made by one of his children for the indwelling of this wonderful Comforter, Counselor and friend.

In Luke's Gospel we find this promise.

"Would any of you who are fathers give your son a snake when he asks for fish? Or would you give him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" _Luke 11:11-13

*My prayer is that God, from the wealth of his glory, will give you power through his Holy Spirit to be strong in your inner being, and I pray that Christ will make his home in your hearts through faith. I pray that you may have your roots and foundation in love, so that you, together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love. Yes, may you come to know his love – although it can never be fully known – and so be completely filled with the very nature of God. Now to him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of: to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever! Amen.
_Ephesians 3:14-21*

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." _Matthew 28:18-20 (RSV)



week six

Understanding Your Bible | Week Six - Part One

Know Him

"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be in you! "I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive.

At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and you're in me, and I'm in you. "The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and make myself plain to him." _John 14:17-22 The Message Bible

As you begin the sixth week of your study, my sincere hope and prayer is that you are closer to the Lord Jesus; more familiar with him and with the Holy Spirit than ever before. The above verses from The Message Bible speak eloquently of what it means to LOVE the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior and KNOW his Holy Spirit as your Comforter, Counselor and Friend. When you KNOW and LOVE God as Father, Jesus as Savior and the Holy Spirit as Comforter, Counselor and Friend, you come alive!

When, as believers, we KNOW and LOVE the Jesus of the Bible we know absolutely that Jesus is in the Father, that we are in Christ and that the Holy Spirit of God is IN us.

When we USE the Bible as an Owner's Manual for life, our knowledge grows, and as it grows our love also grows. As our knowledge and love for the Lord Jesus grow, his promise is to love us and make himself plain to us.

What an enormous blessing!

Before you move on to indexing the Books of Hebrews and James I want to share three quotes with you that have touched my life greatly:

Many years ago, during a Woman's Conference, I heard Muriel Cook, a great woman of God, ask, "*Where does your mind go in the quiet moments? That will tell you who you love.*"

A few years later, at another conference, Coleen Townsend Evans; the first female chair of a Billy Graham Crusade, speaker and author of inspirational books, read Psalm 121 to us...

*I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot be moved,
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade
on your right hand.*

*The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.*

*The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.*

And then she said,

"Get rid of the idea that your spiritual state and condition depend on yourself. It is Christ's responsibility to keep you where you belong. Don't be a do-it-yourself Christian."

And not too long ago I heard a young evangelist whom I respect greatly say:

*"There are three rules for building your faith:
1) Mediate on how much He loves you.
2) Mediate on how much He LOVES you. And
3) Mediate on how much He loves YOU."*

I pray that these deep and significant truths will impact your thinking as they have mine.

Before moving on, consider the following verses. They will reinforce your thinking.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 3:5-7 My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.

Psalm 9:10 And those who know thy name put their trust in thee, for thou, O Lord, hast not forsaken those who seek thee.

Psalm 37:5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

John 16:26-28 In that day you will ask in my name; and I

do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father. I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome.



Index Your Bible

As you continue indexing your Study Bible, please be encouraged by The 'living and active' Word of God. When strength fails and we grow weary and discouraged, we need someone to come alongside us, show understanding, cheer us up, and inspire us to have the endurance and commitment to move on.

- ◆ When bills pile up and money runs short, we need encouragement.
- ◆ When the whole world seems against us, we need encouragement.
- ◆ When friends or family turn against us, we need encouragement.
- ◆ Our strength and resolve weaken and we long for someone to lift us up and comfort us.

The 'living and active' Word of God inspires courage and hope. The Word of God brings a beautiful gift of renewal through encouragement.

The humble will see their God at work and be glad. Let all who seek God's help be encouraged. _Psalm 69:31-33

Everything written long ago was written to teach us so that we would have confidence through the endurance and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. May God, who gives you this endurance and encouragement, allow you to live in harmony with each other by following the example of Christ Jesus. _Romans 15:4-5

This week we will add the following books to your index:

Hebrews

This Book is anonymous. There is no sure indication of author, place of writing, date or recipients of The Letter to the Hebrews. It seems almost certain that Paul was not the author, but whoever wrote the letter was obviously well known to the original recipients. The letter bears evidence that the author was a second generation Christian, one who was well versed in the Old Testament, who may have been a Jew, who was a friend of Timothy's and who probably belonged to Paul's circle of friends.

Persecution was a real threat to the Jewish Christians of the first-century. Many found themselves torn between their new found faith in Christ and their Old Testament way of life. By demonstrating the superiority of Christ to all of the Old Testament rituals and sacrifices, this letter counsels the early believers to stay true to the gospel of grace – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The author appears to have been especially concerned that some of them might “turn back” (verse 10:38) although there seems to have been no danger of their embracing paganism. It is probably more likely that at least some of the readers were tempted to revert to Second Temple Judaism. Against the magnificence of Herod's temple, the worship service carried out in house churches must have felt weak and insignificant indeed. The writer tried to warn his struggling audience that the glory of the earthly temple was but a shadow, soon to disappear.

Old habits are comfortable. But settling for second best was not God's plan for the Jews of the early church or for believers today. Jesus removes our sin, guarantees our access to God, the Father; and promises to always be with us, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The message of Hebrews is clear: Persevere in

your faith because Jesus is all you need.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FIND HEBREWS EASILY.

And, as you have in the past few weeks, pick out a few prominent verses to highlight:

Hebrews 1:14 What are the angels, then? They are spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation.

Hebrews 4:12 The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart.

Hebrews 11:6 No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews, chapter 11 may be considered the Faith Hall of Fame and the names of those listed are worth studying individually as you progress in the Word.

James

The book may be one of the earliest New Testament letters, probably written around the same time as Paul's letter to the Galatians, about A.D. 48. This letter was written by James, who in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 6, verse 3, is identified as a half-brother of Jesus.

James was among the group gathered on Pentecost (Acts 1:14); he took over the leadership of the Jerusalem church after Peter

left Palestine (Acts 12:17). It seems he was more concerned about Christians observing the Jewish Law than Paul, but in this letter does not present a deep seated ill-will toward the Gospel of Grace that Paul preached.

This letter does not contain any personal references or greetings to individuals, but is addressed to “all God's people scattered over the whole world.” James' purpose in writing was to encourage his readers, who were not only scattered, but also largely poor and oppressed. The letter has a strongly moral tone: it is a communication intended to urge the recipients to live a godly and morally excellent life-style within a morally bankrupt society.

A brief study of the Roman world in the first-century will help put this letter in the proper perspective for today's reader.

James presents a strikingly direct approach to Christian living. Some of these scattered believers had apparently incorporated worldly habits into their Christian faith. They practiced favoritism, there were quarrels and boasting, a lack of patience with fellow believers and other divisions among them. Recognizing that it is possible to believe all the right things and still live the wrong way, James tells them to put their faith into action through their words and deeds. He reminds his readers that those who submit to God will come under God's care, and that prayer needs to be a priority in their lives.

According to James, if we truly believe what Jesus says, we will show it by living godly lives. Living in faith should pair adoration with action and supplication with service. Such a faith will make a difference to us and to others. How we live and what we do really does matter to God.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN FIND JAMES QUICKLY.

And highlight the following verses for future reference:

James 2:1 My friends, as believers in our Lord Jesus

Christ, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance.

James 2:23-24 And the scripture came true that said, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous. And so Abraham was called God's friend. You see, then, that it is by our actions that we are put right with God, and not by our faith alone."

James 3:13-18 Are there any of you who are wise and understanding? You are to prove it by your good life, by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.

James 4:11-12 Do not criticize one another, my friends. If you criticize or judge another Christian, you criticize and judge the Law. If you judge the Law, then you are no longer one who obeys the Law, but one who judges it. God is the only lawgiver and judge. He alone can save and destroy. Who do you think you are, to judge someone else?



Understanding Your Bible - Week Six - Part Three

*“God gave the Law through Moses,
but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” _John
1:17*

Our High Priest

In Hebrews 2:13-17 we are told:

He also says I will put my trust in God. And he also says, Here I am with the children that God has given me.

Since the children, as he calls them, are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. He did this so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death, and in this way set free those who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. For it is clear that it is not the angels that he helps.

Instead, he helps the descendants of Abraham. This means that he had to become like his people in every way, in order to be their faithful and merciful High Priest in his service to God, so that the people's sins would be forgiven.

In the Old Testament God saw the right-standing of the nation of Israel wrapped up in the right-standing of their high priest. As the high priest was before God, so the entire nation was before God. If the high priest sinned, he brought guilt on his nation, and God would reject the entire nation no matter how law-abiding the people were or how faithful they were in bringing their sacrifices and obeying God's law.

On the other hand, if the high priest was without fault and blameless before God, the whole nation was accepted by God, although the people were sinful and disobeyed the law.

Unfortunately, the high priests of Israel often failed because, like any human being, they were imperfect. Thank God today, you and I have Jesus as our High Priest. He is a High Priest who is one-hundred percent man and one-hundred percent God. Jesus is one-hundred percent perfect in the Father's eyes.

As our High Priest, Jesus Christ's standing before the Father is always right. He is always acceptable and pleasing to the Father. He is the Beloved Son. Therefore, we can never lose our acceptance with God because as our High Priest, Jesus always brings righteousness on his people.

In heaven right now, Jesus our High Priest is seated at the right hand of God the Father (Romans 8:34). This means God does not look at you or me and see our sins and short-comings. He looks at Jesus. If Jesus is good, you and I are good. If Jesus is accepted, you and I are accepted. If God sees Jesus as perfect, then He sees you and me as perfect. If Jesus is righteous, then you and I are righteous. And we know that Jesus our High Priest is good, accepted, perfect and righteous, which means God sees you and me, hidden in Christ, that way too!

Because of Christ, you and I cannot lose our right standing with the Father because of Jesus is our High Priest. To lose our standing, Jesus would have to lose his standing first. But we know that we have in Jesus a High Priest who is perfect and who cannot fail. As a result we need never be afraid or conscious of our faults when we come before our Heavenly Father, because our standing is completely wrapped up in Jesus, our High Priest. We can come to God boldly, confess our mistakes, and receive all that we need from him!

The Living Bible, which is no longer in print, Translates Ephesians 1:7-8 this way:

*“So overflowing is his kindness toward us that he took away **all our sins** through his Son, by whom we are saved, and he **has** showered down upon us the richness of his grace, for **how well he understand us and knows what is best for us at all times.**”*

In John chapter 1, verse 17, we find these words,

“God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Grace may be defined as the “unmerited favor of God” toward a sinner. It is everything for nothing to those who deserve the exact opposite.”

The Richness of God's GRACE!

You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we’re in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam to Moses. Even those who didn’t sin precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the One who will get us out of it.

Yet the rescuing gift is not exactly parallel to the death-dealing sin. If one man’s sin put crowds of people at the dead-end abyss of separation from God, just think what God’s gift poured through one man, Jesus Christ, will do! There’s no comparison between that death-dealing sin and this generous, life-giving gift. The verdict on that one sin was the death sentence; the verdict on the many sins that followed was this wonderful life sentence. If death got the upper hand through one man’s

wrongdoing, can you imagine the breathtaking recovery life makes, sovereign life, in those who grasp with both hands this wildly extravagant life-gift, this grand setting-everything-right, that the one man Jesus Christ provides?

Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said yes to God and put many in the right.

*“All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers. But sin didn’t, and doesn’t, have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. **When it’s sin versus grace, grace wins hands down.** All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that’s the end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into life—a life that goes on and on and on, world without end. _ Romans 5:20-21 MSG*

The Assignment

For your Daily Quiet Time in the coming week:

First repeat your personalized prayer from Ephesians.

Next read Psalm 119:18 & 34 aloud, as a prayer.

“Open my eyes to see

the wonderful truths in your instructions.

*“Give me understanding, so that I may keep your Word
and observe it with all my heart.”*

And finally, spend time searching the Scriptures for more information about what the **Grace of God** means to YOU as a believer.

Look for GRACE :

in the Concordance of any Bible you have in your possession. Follow the cross-references and foot-notes to gain a better insight into each verse. Read the surrounding verses for each reference. Lifting a single scripture out of context is often the beginning of false doctrine.

Here are a few verses to begin:

Grace is an attribute of God:

Exodus 22:2;7, 33:19

Nehemiah 9:17

1 Peter 5:10

The supreme revelation of the grace of God is found in the incarnation, ministry, and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Scripture teaches that:

Justification is by grace: Romans 3:24; Titus 3:7

Salvation is by grace at every point: Ephesians 1:7 , 8

Election is by grace: Romans 11:5, 6

Faith is the gift of grace: Acts 18:27; Ephesians 2:8, 9

Spiritual Gifts are of grace: Romans 12:6

Comfort, Hope, and Strength spring from grace: 2
Corinthians 12:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:16

The Greek word translated grace or favor is *charis* and is used 156 times in the New Testament. Some verses containing the word are: John 1:13-18; Acts 13:43, 14:3, 20:24; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 1:12, 4:15

As you continue throughout this week please read with an eye toward how this Message Of Grace applies to you personally. It can, and will refresh and renew your faith and your excitement for the things of God.

Jesus came to bring us grace and truth. (John 1:17) He told his followers I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I have come that you might have LIFE and life more abundantly. Receive it! Believe it. And as James taught – live like it.

“And now I commend you to the care of God and to the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the blessings God has for all his people.” _Acts 20:32



week seven

Understanding Your Bible | Week Seven - Part One

“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.” _John 4:24 The Message

Your Bible Now

How remarkable that the God of the universe would actually want to communicate with us! We are creatures of a material, physical world which we relate to through our five senses. God is a spiritual being (John 4:24). We in our physical state cannot see him, hear him, or touch him, so how can he communicate with us?

God Speaks Through the Bible

Over several centuries, God inspired a select number of people to write down what he felt we needed to know about him and

the way he expects us to live. Many of their writings have been collected into the book we know today as 'The Holy Bible'. It is holy because the Bible contains the sacred words of Almighty God as dictated by The Holy Spirit.

In a miraculous way, the Bible speaks to each of us. It is alive! (Hebrews 4:12) The truths found between the covers apply across generations, across cultures, across all of life's experiences. It meets each of us, at the point of our need.

The Owner's Manual

As I mentioned before, anyone buying a new electronic gadget (smart phone, tablet, computer, whatever) receives an owner's manual with it. Most of us read just enough to allow us to get the device up and running, in order to perform the basic tasks, and we let it go at that. But if we want to thoroughly understand our equipment, taking advantage of everything it is capable of, we must read the entire manual. Most people never get around to that, and so miss out on a lot the features their device has to offer.

When it comes to reading the Bible, a lot of people read just enough to get by and let it go at that. They miss out on so much of what God's Word has to offer them that way.

Over the past six weeks you've been building a new appreciation for your Bible—your Owner's Manual. The goal has been learning to understand and use your Owner's Manual every day, taking full advantage of God's promises and provisions, so you can completely enjoy everything God has to offer you personally.

God told Joshua:

“Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey

everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.” _Joshua 1:8 New Living Translation (NLT)

Continually doesn't mean reading the Bible occasionally. Every so often. When you get around to it. The Bible is for daily reading and daily meditation.

By taking God's instructions seriously you will prosper and succeed in a way that is impossible by any other means.

If you've gained nothing else while reading through the weeks, I pray you have gained a hunger for God's Word and insight to know that reading the Bible is a delightful experience. As David wrote in Psalm 19:10

They (God's Words) are more desirable than the finest gold; they are sweeter than the purest honey.

An interesting side note on daily Bible reading: The Proverbs are divided into thirty-one chapters, one chapter for each day of each month. So, even if you can not take time for an in-depth study, you can mediate on a different Proverb verse every day.

These are the proverbs of King Solomon of Israel, David's son:

He wrote them to teach his people how to live—how to act in every circumstance, for he wanted them to be understanding, just, and fair in everything they did.

*“I want to make the simpleminded wise!” he said. “I want to warn young men about some problems they will face. I want those already wise to become wiser and become leaders by exploring the depths of meaning in these nuggets of truth.” _ Proverbs 1:1-6
TLB*

Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life among the natives so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives. _1 Peter 2:11-12 (MSG)

"The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best— as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes. _Matthew 6:7-13 (MSG)

"No chance at all," Jesus said, "if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you trust God to do it." _Luke 18:27 (MSG)

Jesus said..."I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." _John 16:32-33 RSV

Finish Your Bible Index

The Letters of Peter

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” was the simple and unpretentious way in which the author introduced himself to the readers of his first letter. He addressed the elders as “a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.” He wrote from “Babylon,” probably a pseudonym for Rome. His scribe was Silvanus, most likely the same as Silas in the book of Acts, (ch 15-18) who was also called Silvanus in Paul's epistles.

In the second letter the author identifies himself as Simon Peter, “servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” It is interesting to note that Simon means “reed” in the Greek...one who could be tossed and bent by every changing circumstance and emotion. Jesus changed his name to Peter which means “rock” in the Greek. A study of his life and ministry proves how he lived up to both names.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE SO YOU CAN QUICKLY FIND PETER'S LETTERS.

First Peter

Peter, one of the original twelve apostles, wrote the letter we know as FIRST PETER to the churches in the northern part of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) probably about A.D. 63. The “Babylon” mentioned in chapter 5, verse 13, as the letter's place of origin was in all likelihood a code name Peter used for Rome, in a manner similar to the reference to Babylon used in Revelation 18 to represent a godless human culture.

Peter's letter was addressed to believers who faced suffering and persecution at the hands of the government under Emperor Nero. Nero's attitude shifted the Roman Empire from tolerance toward Christianity to violent opposition. According to tradition, both Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome in the late sixties.

The dominate theme throughout the letter is suffering, which is mentioned sixteen times. Christianity was not a popular religion in Peter's day. Believers faced discrimination, slander, confiscation of property and even death. These hardships caused some early Christians to wonder if God had abandoned them. Peter's letter offered encouragement and promised God would *"restore, establish and strengthen them."*

Peter knew what it was like to be afraid for his life. As Christ was arrested and tried, Peter denied knowing the Lord three times rather than risk sharing his punishment, despite his boast, *"Lord I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."*

As an old man, having learned through the Holy Spirit, how to stand firm in an evil world, he could offer hope and inspiration to other Christians who were facing persecution for their faith.

The First Letter of Peter becomes a survival manual for all who live in a shattered and hopeless world. Peter promises that trials are only temporary. He reminds his readers of their royal identity and God's ability to redeem every situation, and that they are created to be loving and hospitable to others, even when they are faced with trying times.

Persecution, trouble, pain and suffering can rob us of our peace and tear apart our faith. Peter's words urge us to live in the confidence, patience and hope that come to all who place themselves in God's care.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." _Romans 8:28

As you've done before, here are a few verses to highlight. However, this letter is so filled with the message of grace and truth, it is difficult to pick out just two or three verses.

First Peter 1:23 For through the living and eternal word of God you have been born again as the children of a parent who is immortal, not mortal.

First Peter 2:9 But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light.

First Peter 5:10-11 But after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who calls you to share his eternal glory in union with Christ, will himself perfect you and give you firmness, strength, and a sure foundation. To him be the power forever! Amen.

Second Peter

The opening statement: *“From Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ—To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have been given a faith as precious as ours,”* identifies both the writer and recipients of THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER. Very likely it was written from Rome some time between A.D. 65 and 68, just before Peter's death, and was actually addressed to the same readers Peter encouraged in his first letter.

The central theme of this letter is knowledge: the words “know” and “knowledge” occur more than sixteen times. The letter is a reminder of the truth of the Gospel, against the harmful, secretive attacks of false teacher who were bringing destructive teachings into the early church.

As Peter faced the end of his life, he predicted impending calamities and expressed concern about his readers remaining

faithful and continuing to grow in discipleship. The letter refers to enemies of the faith, but in such broad terms that it is hard to imagine Peter had a specific heresy in view. Instead the letter is probably a general warning to the churches, a warning that remains valid even in the twenty-first century.

False teachers, promoting moral compromise and doctrinal errors infiltrate the Christian community and dupe the believers into following their enticing words. Peter writes to expose the dangers and destructiveness of their teachings. He shares some practical guidelines for detecting false teachers and their doctrines. Urging believers to stand firm in their faith.

It seems that as our society grows increasingly lawless, complacent and godless, much like society in Peter's day. In this letter Peter reminds us that as Christians, our faith combats the influences of the world around us. Peter urges us to be salt and light to a dark and dying world by actively living godly lives as we come to KNOW Christ Jesus through God's Word.

Two verses to highlight in this letter are:

Second Peter 1:3-4 (New Living Translation) By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

The Letters of John

First, Second and Third John have from earliest times been attributed to John the Beloved Apostle, who wrote the fourth Gospel and the Revelation. The Gospel and all three letters may have been written about the same time, probably in the decade

between A.D. 85 and 95.

The content, style and vocabulary seem to indicate these letters were addressed to the same readers as the Gospel of John.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE TO FIND JOHN'S LETTERS

First John

John begins this letter with a strong affirmation that he who was from the beginning, the Son of God, became flesh and was known as Jesus. John and his fellow Apostles saw him, touched him, walked with him.

The heartbeat of this book—we can have fellowship with God and with his people—we can be part of the family of God. The test of that fellowship is simple. Do we love each other? Do we believe in Jesus as God's Son incarnate and confess that truth before others? Do our heart and conscience confirm our relationship with God? Does God's Spirit live within us?

Vivid images that contrast light and dark, truth and error, life and death, and love and hate fill the chapters of THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN.

The Apostle reassures believers that God will powerfully overcome sin as they seek his forgiveness. He warns them about loving “the world” and being influenced by false teachers. He reminds them that obedience to God brings a love for other believers and that true love is more than a good feeling.

Applying the simple truths of this letter to our lives will affect our interaction with God and with others. Genuine fellowship with God will be reflected in our lives as we learn to live and walk in the light of his love.

Some verses to highlight are:

First John 2:12 I write to you, my children, because your

sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ.

First John 3:1 See how much the Father has loved us! his love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God.

First John 4:16 And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us. God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them.

Second John

John wrote this letter shortly before he was exiled to the island of Patmos because of his faith. This short letter gives us an insight into church life in the latter part of the first century as responsible leaders do their best to counteract the extremely harmful effects of false teaching. False doctrine dilutes the Christian witness, and its effects are felt in the lives of believers. John's love of the truth and his concern for the spiritual welfare of his readers leads him to write this brief note to a church whose members are in real danger of abandoning the truth as it is in Jesus.

During the first two centuries the gospel was spread by traveling evangelists and teachers. Since inns were not readily available, believers customarily took these missionaries into their homes and supplied them with provisions when they were about to leave. The problem John addresses in this letter is that some of them added their own philosophies and false beliefs to the gospel message. He wrote this letter to expose their erroneous message and the ungodly conduct that resulted from it. He warned believers to withdraw from all contact with these teachers. Though God encourages his children to practice hospitality, John wants the believers to know when to close the doors. He asked his readers to refuse hospitality to any who did

not “*acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.*”

The best way for us to keep on target spiritually is to follow John's call to truth, love and obedience. To be certain of what we believe and to walk in it in love and without faltering is the true hallmark of Christianity.

Highlight this passage:

Second John verses 9-10 Anyone who does not stay with the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God. Whoever does stay with the teaching has both the Father and the Son. So then, if some come to you who do not bring this teaching, do not welcome them in your homes; do not even say, “Peace be with you.”

Third John

John's third letter gives us a look at three different people in the early church. Quite similar to John's Second Letter, it is addressed to John's friend Gaius, who is praised for his faith help and hospitality to traveling missionaries. The letter is brief and to the point. In it, John condemns, in no uncertain terms, a church leader who refuses to practice the love and hospitality John has requested for those who are helping to spread the Gospel of Christ. Another word of confidence is added for Demetrius, who has apparently become a victim of condemnation for an undisclosed reason. John takes a moment in verse 12, to vouch for him.

Highlight:

Third John 2 & 3 My dear friend, I pray that everything may go well with you and that you may be in good health—as I know you are well in spirit. I was so happy when some Christians arrived and told me how faithful you are to the truth—just as you always live in the truth.

Jude

The author of this brief letter calls himself “*a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.*” The most well known James of the early church was the Lord's half-brother who headed the Council in Jerusalem. Mark mentions both James and Jude (6:3), among the members of Jesus' immediate family tree, thus conservative scholars identify him as a half-brother of Jesus.

The date of writing may be about A.D. 65-70. The letter is not addressed to anyone in particular, but to Christians in general. The author had intended to write “*about the salvation we all share,*” but instead he writes to caution believers who might be drawn away from the gospel by the persuasive words of false teachers who were entering into the church.

Some religious teachers in the first century claimed that anything made of matter was evil but anything spiritual or intellectual was good. This philosophy, known as Gnosticism, perverted the grace of God, saying that believers can sin if they want since their spirits are already saved by grace, thus denying the Lordship of Christ. Jude writes this brief letter as a direct warning against these teachings, challenging believers to stand firm in their faith.

Jude's closing statement (24-25) is often used today as a doxology in church services. It points out beautifully that the Lord himself is the one who will keep us from falling, from becoming victims to false teaching. Realizing that, we must keep close to him and to his Word, the Holy Bible.

PUT A STICKIE TAB HERE TO FIND JUDE EASILY.

Some verses to highlight are:

Jude 1:3 urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.

Jude 1:20-21 But you, dear friends, must build each

other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

Revelation

You already have an index tab here from the beginning of the studies. And, since the study of this amazing prophecy is a series in itself we will move on with only this note:

It is never simple being a Christian. We are either facing persecution for our faith in a hostile society or facing apathy toward our faith in a comfortable society. In either case, believers need hope:

Hope that all of God's promises in the Bible are true

Hope that Jesus is who he says he is

Hope that believers will live forever with him in heaven, where peace and justice will finally prevail.

God gave us this book of Revelation to bring us the assurance that all these hopes will truly come to pass.

God will prevail.

Evil will be defeated once and for all.

Eternity will be everything we imagined and more.

Read the last chapter. We Win!

Some verses to highlight in Revelation are:

Revelation 1:8 I AM the first and the last, says the Lord God Almighty, who is, who was, and who is to come.

Revelation 1:17-18 NLT When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and

said, “Don’t be afraid! I AM the First and the Last. I AM the living one. I died, but look—I AM alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.

Revelation 21:6-7 And he said, “It is done! I AM the first and the last, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the right to drink from the spring of the water of life without paying for it. Those who win the victory will receive this from me: I will be their God, and they will be my children.”

Understanding Your Bible | Week Seven - Part Three

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, Where are you? _Genesis 3:8-9 (AMP)

Where Are You

In the beginning, God's plan for mankind was a close, loving relationship, the relationship of a father with his children. He came to the garden in the cool of the evening to spend time with the man he had created.

Adam and his wife hid.

God said, “Where are you?”

So wrong! A Holy God and the children he created, separated by evil; by lies, by rebellion and deception. But God genuinely wanted to spend time with them! Why else would he have been walking in the garden expecting to find them waiting?

God genuinely wants to spend time with you, too.

In Christ, Adam's sin is washed away and your Abba, Father says “Come boldly.”

In Christ you are once again God's child. He loves you. He KNOWS you. He numbers the hairs of your head. And, he wants you to KNOW him. How amazing is that?

The creator of the universe wants to meet with you.

Just you alone.

Every day.

To talk over the details of your life, to clam you fears and to guide your steps.

How can you say no to such an opportunity?

And yet we hide. We're too busy. We're too ashamed. We're too afraid. There are a million and one reasons God's children hide themselves from fellowship with Him.

They've been abused , and so trust no one.

They've been rejected, and so refuse to love again.

They've been.... You fill in the blanks.

So...what does God do?

Well, not what He did with Adam and Eve, that's for sure.

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. _Romans 5:15-18

No! Because of the Cross, God waits.

He waits for us to hear and respond to the still small voice that is the Holy Spirit, convicting us that He IS Waiting.

Unlike Adam and Eve, we have nothing to fear; we need only to believe, and accept.

But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." _Mark 5:35-37

But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she shall be well." _Luke 8:49-51

A New Point Of View

During this seventh week, and for every week that is to come, make it your priority to spend *A Quiet Time* alone with God each day.

There's not a right time.

There's not a correct place.

There's not a perfect way to study the Word.

There's no specific pattern for prayer.

The only requirement for Quiet Time with God is your willingness to make yourself available to him.

Know this—if you've been hiding from God, it does no good. He calls out to you, “Where are you?”

Jesus often slipped away to be alone with the Father. His prayer times varied. He prayed in the morning and late at night; on a hill side and in the upper room. He was perfectly certain of the Father's love, and answered prayer.

When they rolled away the stone sealing Lazarus in his grave four days Jesus looked up and said,

“I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me.

After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” _John 11:41-43

You too can be perfectly certain of the Father's love and answered prayer. Like Jesus and David rest in this promise.

*I love the Lord, because he hears me;
he listens to my prayers.
He listens to me
every time I call to him. _Psalm 116:1-2*

The Prophet Jeremiah wrote:

I (God) alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. _Jeremiah 11:29

Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell you wonderful and marvelous things that you know nothing about. _Jeremiah 33:3

Accept these Words.

Believe them.

Live by them.

Jesus will never fail you.

With these assurances in mind:

The Assignment

Read Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Oh? You've already read it?

That's good.

Read it again.

And this week you'll be looking for knowledge regarding:

Chapter One

- every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places
- wisdom and insight in the mystery of his will
- the guarantee of our inheritance
- a spirit of wisdom and of revelation

Chapter Two

- the great love with which he loved us
- the gift of God
- members of the household of God

Chapter Three

- insight into the mystery of Christ
- power to comprehend
- the power at work within us

Chapter Four

- the measure of Christ's gift.
- the unity of the faith
- your former manner of life
- grieving the Holy Spirit of God

Chapter Five

- let no one deceive you
- walk as children of light
- always and for everything give thanks

- washing of water with the word

Chapter Six

- in the strength of his might
- keep alert with all perseverance
- grace be with all who love our Lord

Be warned.

This study cannot be completed in one week.

Or one month.

Or even in one lifetime!

The Holy Spirit will reveal new truths with each and every reading. The mystery of the kingdom is that "Christ will dwell in your heart through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, will have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the *breadth and length and height and depth*, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.





and finally

Through The Word

In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word (Christ) was with God, and the Word (Christ) was God Himself.

He (Christ) was present originally with God.

All things were made and came into existence through Him (Christ); and without Him (Christ) was not even one thing made that has come into being.

In Him (Christ) was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.

And the Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it [put it out or absorbed it or appropriated it, and is not receptive to it]. _ John 1:1-5 (AMP)

For the past seven weeks you have studied **The Word**.

For the past seven weeks you have studied **The Christ – The Son of God**.

And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I

have no husband?" And the angel said to her,

*"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be called holy,
the Son of God. _Luke 1:34-36 (RSV)*

To Know The Word

is to KNOW "The Christ"

Saul, who knew Him not, met Him on the road to Damascus. Knowing 'The Christ' changed Saul 'the persecutor' into Paul 'the Preacher' the author of two-thirds of the New Testament.

For several days he (Paul) was with the disciples at Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he (Paul) proclaimed Jesus, saying "He is the Son of God." And all who heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests." _Acts 9:19-21 (RSV)

What Will Knowing The Christ Change IN You?

Look at some of the things Paul learned:

You are delivered, redeemed and forgiven:

... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has

delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
_Colossians 1:12-14 (RSV)

You are made righteous IN Christ and GRACE abounds

Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, _Romans 5:18-20 (RSV)

You have been set free and have eternal life IN Christ

But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. _Romans 6:21-23 (RSV)

The Word enables believers to change—IN Christ you are renewed

...assuming that you have heard about him (Jesus) and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, _Ephesians 4:21-23 (RSV)

Only remember

It is not your responsibility to work to earn your way to change.

“Get rid of the idea that your spiritual state and condition depend on yourself. It is Christ’s responsibility to keep you where you belong. Don’t be a do-it-yourself Christian.” _ Colleen Townsend Evans

The Index

You have developed a listing of names and topics along with notations on most of the book in your Bible. After seven weeks you have gained a workable understanding of your study Bible.

From Genesis to Revelation, you have learned a few basic facts about the books and also how to glean more information as time goes on.

The final step in this process is locating and marking the writings of

The Prophets

Starting with the Book of Isaiah, whose name means "*Yahweh is salvation*", and moving on through Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel - use the methods you've learned so far. Find out something about each author; the time period and characteristics of each book.

If you are a student of prophecy (not everyone is) dig deeply into the life and times of both the Major and Minor Prophets.

But remember

Then he (Jesus) said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

And understand this

Everything written about Jesus Christ in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms HAS been fulfilled. The only thing left is the catching away of the church (the body of Christ) before the '*man of lawlessness is revealed*' and then the **Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. _1

Thessalonians 5:23-24 (RSV)

Make A Commitment

There once was a farm family that enjoyed a hearty breakfast every morning before starting their chores. Homemade biscuits with gravy, crisp bacon and a couple of eggs was their normal fare.

One day in late fall, the little red hen and her friend the pig were talking about commitment. The proud little hen told her friend, "The eggs I produce every day are evidence of my commitment to the family. "

"No," the pig protested, "An egg a day is merely dedication. My contribution will be bacon for the family throughout the coming winter. That's commitment, my dear."

Are You Committed?

Or are you only dedicated to God's Word?

Many believers are dedicated to their 'Christianity'. Regular church attendance, participation in small groups and Bible studies, spending time with God in prayer and meditation are all dedicated activities. Much like the little red hen, the contributions they are dedicated to come naturally and require a certain amount of effort every day.

The truth is, when God calls you to, "Follow Jesus," you are expected to give your all.

Commitment requires sacrifice

Sitting across from the offering box, he [Jesus] was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins—a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, "The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all." _Mark 12:41-44 (MSG)

The achievement of any goal or purpose requires commitment—whether for good or for evil. The Bible speaks of commitment in both negative and positive ways.

And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal.
_1 John 5:15-17 (RSV)

*Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your vindication as the light,
and your right as the noonday.* _Psalm 37:5-6 (RSV)

Each alternative involves making a decision, turning oneself over to something or someone—and then reaping the consequences or reward of your commitment. Understanding commitment and learning to commit your heart and mind and body is central to a life of faith. In fact

Faith devoid of commitment is dead

Here are a few verses that show what it means to be committed to Christ.

- Matthew 4:19-20
- Psalm 37:5-6
- Proverbs 3:5-6
- Luce 14:26-28
- Romans 12:1-2

Those committed to God find renewed strength. (Isaiah 40:31)
Those committed to God will share in all his riches. (Hebrews 3:14)

If you want favor with both God and man, and a reputation for good judgment and common sense, then trust the Lord completely; don't ever trust yourself. In

everything you do, put God first and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success. _Proverbs 3:5-6 Living Bible (TLB)

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you that today I have set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Oh, that you would choose life; that you and your children might live! Choose to love the Lord your God and to obey him and to cling to him, for he is your life and the length of your days. You will then be able to live safely in the land the Lord promised your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." _Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Remember -

Jesus has fulfilled the law, the prophets and the psalms. But, some spiritual principles are like gravity—drop it and it will fall.

Every believer lives with the consequences of their daily choices.

Making a decision is arriving at a solution that ends uncertainty or that settles a dispute. It is distinguishing between options, some big, some little, some good, some...not so much.

You must choose between little things—chocolate or vanilla— or between great issues, such as who you will marry, which job you will take, which home you will buy. But the most important decision in your life will be

What Will You Do With Jesus?

Choosing to accept Him means your eternal destiny and your life on earth will be radically different from what they will be if you choose to ignore Him.

The most important choice you can make is to follow God. Joshua 24:15

The next is to seek God's wisdom first in any decision of importance. Psalm 25:4

Making Right Choices

Knowing and understanding God's Word, and taking away wisdom from it, gives you more options in decision making and provides you with the discernment needed to make healthy choices. A right decision is one that is consistent with the Word of God.

Understanding God's Word helps you choose the path that will be pleasing to Him. And, even if you don't always make the right choice, know—without doubt—God has the power to make your choice turn out in your best interest;

We are assured and know that God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.
_Romans 8:28 (AMP)

Your Assignment:

Write this down and put it somewhere that's easy to see as you walk with God every single day

“I set before you today blessings or curses. You choose.”

And Finally

*The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.*



Bee of Sweet Spirit

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