

S T U D Y G U I D E

**52 WEEKS
THROUGH
THE BIBLE**

J A M E S M E R R I T T



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

All Scripture quotations are taken from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Published in association with The Christopher Ferebee Agency

52 WEEKS THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Copyright © 2017 by James Merritt

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

All rights reserved. No part of this electronic publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The authorized purchaser has been granted a nontransferable, nonexclusive, and noncommercial right to access and view this electronic publication, and purchaser agrees to do so only in accordance with the terms of use under which it was purchased or transmitted. Participation in or encouragement of piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of author's and publisher's rights is strictly prohibited.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

52 Weeks Through the Bible

This discussion guide has been prepared to help you get the most out of *52 Weeks Through the Bible*, whether you are reading the book alone or as part of a group. Each chapter of this guide features three main sections.

In the first section, “Explore the Word,” you’re invited to interact with some selected Bible passages that highlight the nature, purpose, and blessings of God’s word, the Bible. Sometimes these passages will echo the texts featured in the corresponding chapter of the book; sometimes they will introduce new but related selections. In all cases, however, the texts and the discussion questions connected with them are designed to get you thinking about the amazing book God has given to us.

The second section, “Some Words About the Word,” directs you to three key quotations taken from each chapter of *52 Weeks Through the Bible*. A series of discussion questions after each quotation encourages you to delve a little deeper into some of the main themes of the chapter.

The final section, “Apply the Word,” offers ideas to help you put into practice what you have learned. I encourage you to take the truths you have encountered and find ways to let those truths transform you into the image of Christ.

I pray that as you read the book and interact with this discussion guide, week by week you’ll come to know, appreciate, and love the Scriptures more than you did the week before—and that your growing appreciation for God’s word will lead you to a deeper love relationship with God himself.

Let's Take It from the Beginning

Explore the Word

1. Read Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15.
 - a. How does the creation of humankind differ from God's creation of all other creatures (v. 26)? What does it mean to be made in God's "image" and "likeness"? What is the significance of God ordaining that humans rule over his creation?
 - b. Who is created in God's image, according to verse 27? Why is this significant?
 - c. What instructions did God give his human creations (v. 28)? What did he do to help them in their new tasks?
 - d. What work did God give Adam to do (2:15)? How is this significant?
2. Read Ephesians 2:10.
 - a. How does the apostle describe us in this verse?
 - b. What reason does Paul give for our creation?
 - c. When did God have in mind what he wants us to do? Why is this significant?

Some Words About the Word

1. We all need the answers to three questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?
 - a. How would you answer the question, Who am I?
 - b. How would you answer the question, Why am I here?
 - c. How would you answer the question, Where am I going?

2. God has always existed in a relationship as Father, Son, and Spirit in one. Out of that, God created us—you and me and everyone you know—*in* a relationship and *for* a relationship.
 - a. In what ways would you say you have been created *in* a relationship?
 - b. In what ways would you say you have been created *for* a relationship?
 - c. How do you think your current relationships reflect the quality of personal interaction that exists within the Trinity? In what ways do you believe your relationships fall short of that quality of personal interaction?
3. The beginning of God's big story tells us the hole in our soul can be filled only by the one who created us. Jesus the creator came to earth to live among his creation, die on a cross, and then be raised from the dead to fill that hole with grace, forgiveness, and love.
 - a. How would you describe the hole in your own soul? How have you tried to fill that hole?
 - b. Why couldn't Jesus have filled this hole without coming to earth, dying, and rising again?
 - c. How does Jesus fill your life with grace? How is your life different because of the forgiveness Jesus offers? How does your life reflect the love Jesus came to give us?

Apply the Word

1. Write a paragraph in which you describe your purpose for being on earth. What do you think God wants to accomplish through you?
2. Who in your neighborhood do you think needs to know the grace and forgiveness of God? What can you do this week to show them some of that grace and forgiveness?

Paradise Lost

Explore the Word

1. Read Genesis 3:1-12, 17-24.
 - a. What question did the serpent first ask Eve (v. 1)? How did he twist God's original instruction?
 - b. How did Eve respond to the serpent (v. 3)? How did her answer deviate from God's original instruction?
 - c. How does Satan reply to Eve's answer (v. 4)?
 - d. How did Satan finally try to turn God's promised curse into a blessing (v. 5)? How does Satan often follow this pattern (question, deny, reversal of God's word) even today?
 - e. What three things did Eve take into consideration before she ate of the forbidden fruit (v. 6)? What didn't she take into consideration that she should have?
 - f. What happened as a result of Adam and Eve's sin (v. 7)?
 - g. Describe the fallout of Adam and Eve's sin (vv. 8-12, 17-19). How does this fallout still affect us today?
 - h. What does verse 21 imply about God's response to Adam and Eve's sin?
 - i. Why did God no longer want Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of life (vv. 22-24)?
2. Read Matthew 4:1-11.
 - a. How did Satan's temptation of Jesus parallel his temptation of Adam and Eve? How did it differ?

- b. How did Jesus's response to Satan's temptation differ from that of Eve? What can we learn from this?

Some Words About the Word

1. We each have within us a desire to improve this world because we know deep down it is not what it was meant to be.
 - a. If you could improve this world, how would you do it?
 - b. As you look at your own current circumstances, how would you say your own world is not now what it was meant to be?
2. Never put a question mark where God has put a period. You don't have to like what God says in his word, but don't ever doubt what God says in his word.
 - a. Describe a time when you created a problem for yourself by putting a question mark where God had put a period.
 - b. Be honest here. What are some things God has said in his word that you don't really like?
 - c. What parts of the Bible are you most prone to doubt? Why do you think you doubt them?
3. They got what they wanted, but they didn't want what they got. Adam and Eve now knew some things God never intended for them or any other human to know: Shame. Fear. Guilt.
 - a. Describe a time when you got what you wanted, but you didn't want what you got.
 - b. How would your personal world change if shame were never a part of it?
 - c. How big a role does fear play in your life?
 - d. How does guilt sometimes make your life a struggle?

Apply the Word

1. What can you do this week to start increasing your confidence in God's word? What books can you read? What conversations can you have? What DVDs can you watch?
2. Pick a passage of Scripture that you are most prone to doubt. Read that passage over and over again for the next several days. As you do so, ask God to help you understand its meaning, see how it fits into his plan, and renew your confidence in it.

To the Rescue

Explore the Word

1. Read Genesis 3:14-15.
 - a. How did God curse the serpent in verse 14?
 - b. Verse 15 is often called the *euangelion*, the first mention of the gospel. Who is the “offspring” that will crush the “head” of the serpent? What does it mean that the serpent will strike the “heel” of this offspring?
2. Read Romans 5:12-19.
 - a. What effects did Adam’s sin have on himself? On other human beings (vv. 12-14)?
 - b. How does Paul both compare and contrast the work of Adam and Jesus in verses 15-19? Create two columns, “Adam” and “Christ,” and compare the two side by side.

Some Words About the Word

1. God is light and God is life. From the beginning God was with Adam and in Adam. But when sin moved in, God moved out—and so did his life and light. From that moment every baby leaves the womb in spiritual darkness and spiritually dead.
 - a. Why did God “move out” when sin “moved in”?
 - b. In what areas of your life do you wish you had more of God’s light? In what areas of your life do you wish you had more of God’s life?
 - c. Describe what spiritual darkness looks like to you. What does it mean, in practical terms, to be spiritually dead?

2. How many of our sins were still out in the future when Jesus died? All of them. God had already factored in our sins and included them in Christ's death. We can know we've always been forgiven and are right with God because God has forgiven all of our sins—past, present, and future.
 - a. What does it mean that “God had already factored in our sins and included them in Christ's death”?
 - b. Has God forgiven *all* of your sins? How do you know?
 - c. Does knowing that God has forgiven all of your sins encourage you to sin less or to sin more? Explain.
3. Ancient records of debt were written on papyrus, a paper-like material. The ink used had no acid in it and could not soak into that paper. Since the ink remained on the surface, you could take a wet cloth and just wipe it off. When Jesus died, we are told he “cancelled that record of debt.” That word *cancelled* means “to wipe off.” When Jesus Christ died on the cross, God wiped our debt clean.
 - a. What kind of debt did you owe to God?
 - b. How could the death of Jesus cancel your debt?
 - c. Is your own debt to God wiped clean? Explain.

Apply the Word

1. What did it cost God to send his Son to earth to die for your sins? Take out a sheet of paper and write down all the costs you can think of. When you have written as many things as you can identify, spend some time thanking God for what he has done to make a way for you to be with him forever.
2. Sometimes it helps us to understand the depths of God's love for us by hearing how the gospel is presented to people from another culture. Read a book or article that describes how missionaries presented the good news of Jesus to a culture radically different from your own.

Happily Ever After

Explore the Word

1. Read Revelation 21:1-5.
 - a. Why do you think God will create a new heaven and earth (v. 1)?
 - b. How is the New Jerusalem described in verse 2? How does this remind you of Ephesians 5:25-27?
 - c. In what way does verse 3 sound like a return to the Garden of Eden? In what way does it sound even better?
 - d. What part of the promise of verse 4 impacts you the most? Why?
 - e. Who speaks in verse 5? What promise does he make? How does he reaffirm the promise?
2. Read Isaiah 65:17-19.
 - a. List the ways in which this passage prefigures Revelation 21:1-5. What points do they have in common?
 - b. What concepts does this passage add to the one in Revelation?
 - c. How do these two passages, taken together, strengthen your faith and add depth to it?

Some Words About the Word

1. A perfect God lives in a perfect world and wants his people living in a perfect world as he did in the beginning. Everything around us—the atmosphere, the planets, even

our resurrected bodies—are going to be upgraded beyond what you and I can imagine.

- a. What does it mean to you that God is perfect?
 - b. Why does God want his people to live in a perfect world? What's wrong with a little imperfection?
 - c. What kind of upgrade are you most looking forward to? Why?
2. This New Jerusalem will be forty times the size of England, ten times the size of France, larger than India—and that is just the ground floor. Remember, the city stands as tall as it does wide. If God were to stack the floors in this city like an architect would in a building, this city would be over 600,000 stories tall. What is God saying? There will be plenty of room for everybody that loves him.
- a. Choose a single word to describe your impression of this city. Why did you pick this word?
 - b. Who do you hope your neighbors will be in this city? Why them?
 - c. If you could decorate your living space in this city any way you wanted, what would it look like? Explain.
3. In heaven there will be no more tears, mourning, crying, or pain. No need for hospitals, hospices, or healthcare. No sadness...just gladness! Thomas Moore said, “Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.”
- a. How would your world look different if it lacked tears, mourning, crying, and pain?
 - b. If your current world never suffered from sickness, injury, or death, how would it look different from what it is now?
 - c. What sorrows of earth are you most looking forward to seeing healed in heaven? Why?

Apply the Word

1. How does what you have been reading about heaven help to expand your understanding of your future home?
2. Talk to some elderly followers of Christ about what they look forward to most about their eternal home. What do you learn?

Yes, God

Explore the Word

1. Read Genesis 12:1-5.
 - a. What command did God give to Abraham in verse 1?
 - b. List the promises God made to Abraham in verses 2-3.
 - c. How did Abraham respond to God's command (vv. 4-5)?
How old was Abraham when he responded to God's call?
Why do you think the Scripture gives us this detail?
2. Read Galatians 3:6-9.
 - a. How does Paul use Abraham as an example of genuine faith?
 - b. Who does Paul consider "sons of Abraham" (v. 7)? Why?
 - c. How did God announce the gospel ahead of time to Abraham (v. 8)?
 - d. What does it mean to be a person of faith in the way Abraham was a man of faith (v. 9)?

Some Words About the Word

1. Abraham is the prototype of how everyone can have a relationship with God, and he becomes the father of the nation of Israel because of his yes to God. A yes to God is always the best and right answer to whatever he asks you to do.

- a. In what ways does Abraham give us a pattern for having a relationship with God?
 - b. How might it have been difficult for Abraham to say yes to God? How could he have talked himself out of saying that yes?
 - c. What is God asking you to do right now? If you haven't yet said yes to him, what's holding you back?
2. A relationship with God doesn't come through religion or personal righteousness. But when our faith meets God's grace, God counts it as righteousness. Faith is the key that unlocks the door to God's house, the passport that makes you a citizen of God's kingdom, the password that gets you into God's family.
- a. Why can't a relationship with God come through religion or personal righteousness?
 - b. What does it mean to place your faith in God? What is the connection between God's grace and your faith?
 - c. What is so important about faith? Why does God value it so highly?
3. Do you know why we should always say yes to God? God wants to work through our yes to accomplish his best. When we say yes to God, we get blessed and we become a blessing.
- a. Describe a time when you said no to God. What happened?
 - b. How is God working to accomplish his best for your life right now? What do you see him doing?
 - c. How are you becoming a blessing to others? How has God blessed others through you in the past week?

Apply the Word

1. Name the one area of your life where you most need to say yes to God. What can you do, starting today, to get to that yes? What goal can you set for next week? Next month? Next year?
2. Think of someone in your sphere of influence who needs to be blessed by God. What can you do for them to become that blessing? What planning will it take?

In the Crosshairs

Explore the Word

1. Read Genesis 45:1-13.
 - a. Why do you think Joseph took so long to reveal himself to his brothers?
 - b. Why were Joseph's brothers so terrified at his presence (v. 3)?
 - c. Why did Joseph ask his brothers to come close to him (v. 4)?
 - d. Who sent Joseph to Egypt, according to Joseph (v. 5)? Why was he sent there?
 - e. What further detail in verses 6-7 does Joseph reveal about the reason he was sent to Egypt?
 - f. How did Joseph craft his words in verse 8 to reassure his frightened brothers?
 - g. List the various elements that Joseph wanted his father to know (vv. 9-11).
 - h. How did Joseph end his speech to his brothers (vv. 12-13)? Why do you think he ended it in this way?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-13.
 - a. How does Paul describe himself and his fellow apostles in verse 9? What is his point?
 - b. What three comparisons does Paul make between himself and the Corinthians in verse 10? What point is he trying to make?

- c. List seven ways Paul describes himself and his companions in verses 11-13. What is his point here? Why bring this up?

Some Words About the Word

1. God uses three things to fulfill his plan for us: pain, problems, and people.
 - a. How has God used pain to fulfill his plan for you?
 - b. How has God used problems to fulfill his plan for you?
 - c. How has God used people to fulfill his plan for you?
2. If you understand that God takes both the good and the bad, both friends and enemies, both fairness and unfairness to accomplish his purpose in your life, then you cannot be bitter.
 - a. Where is bitterness most likely to seep into your life? What prompts you to become bitter?
 - b. How has God used both the good and the bad in your life to accomplish his purpose?
 - c. If you are struggling with bitterness in some area of your life, what can you do to free yourself of its grip? How can others help you win this struggle?
3. The presence of problems never means the absence of God. And when people are doing their worst to you, God is doing his best for you.
 - a. Why do we sometimes think the presence of problems *does* mean the absence of God? Describe a time when you thought a problem in your life meant God's absence.
 - b. How are people doing their worst to you right now? How do you think God might be doing his best for you even in those situations?
 - c. Think of someone you know who even now is being attacked in some way by others. What can you do to

encourage that person? How can you be Jesus's hands and feet to that individual?

Apply the Word

1. How does what you have learned about Joseph help you to better appreciate him?
2. Suppose you could interview Joseph toward the end of his life. What would you ask him? What advice would you solicit from him? How would you hope that your time spent with Joseph could help you with your own trials?

The Way to Freedom

Explore the Word

1. Read Exodus 12:1-20.
 - a. How did the Passover change ancient Israel's calendar (vv. 1-2)? Why do you think God commanded this change?
 - b. While the Passover was designed as a national event, it was also designed as a family event (vv. 3-4). How and why?
 - c. List the requirements for choosing an animal to be sacrificed (v. 5). What is significant about these requirements?
 - d. Verse 6 implies that Hebrew families are to get especially close to the animal chosen for sacrifice. Why?
 - e. Describe what the Hebrews were to do with this lamb when the time came for sacrifice (vv. 7-10). What significance do you see in these details?
 - f. How were the Hebrews to be clothed for the Passover meal (v. 11)? Why?
 - g. Who did God plan to judge on the night of the first Passover (v. 12)? Why?
 - h. In what way was the Passover lamb's blood a sign (v. 13)?
 - i. List the details given for how the Passover was to be celebrated (vv. 14-20). What is the significance of these many details?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.
 - a. What is the significance of yeast in this passage?

- b. Why does Paul call Jesus our Passover lamb (v. 7)? How was he sacrificed?
- c. What feast does Paul have in mind in verse 8? How does he counsel the Corinthians to relate to it? Why?

Some Words About the Word

1. The exodus, the clearest picture of redemption in the entire Old Testament, teaches us that no one is beyond God's redemption and forgiveness.
 - a. How is the exodus the clearest picture of redemption in the entire Old Testament?
 - b. How does the exodus teach us that no one is beyond God's redemption and forgiveness?
 - c. What element in the story of the exodus means the most to you? Why?
2. God's direction is not up for debate or discussion. It is his way or no way. Israel had to learn on this night, as we must learn on this day when we are out of options, that God is not only our best way out, he's our only way out.
 - a. Describe a time when it seemed that God's direction to you made no sense. What happened?
 - b. Why do you think a loving and merciful God sometimes gives his people directions that seem unreasonable, dangerous, or nonsensical?
 - c. Is God giving you right now some direction that you have been resisting? If so, what has caused you to want to debate it or discuss it? What "options" would you prefer that you doubt he wants you to choose?
3. History was made that night by people who believed and followed God. You can believe what God says, but it doesn't matter if you don't do what God says. You can accept God's option as being true, but it won't work unless you apply God's provision and let it work in your life.

- a. Name an area of your life in which you find it hard to do what you believe God is telling you to do.
- b. Why does God insist that action follow belief?
- c. How is God providing for your needs that you wish he were doing in a different way? How do you think he wants this particular provision to work in your life?

Apply the Word

1. Pretend for a moment that you were part of the Israelite nation being freed from Egyptian slavery through the Passover. What would you have feared? What would you have had a hard time understanding? How would you have reacted to the requirements God laid down for the Passover? What would you have thought when you heard the wailing of the Egyptian families who lost their firstborn?
2. If you have never done so, plan to attend a Passover seder this year at which the Christian significance of the celebration's elements is clearly explained.

Catch-22

Explore the Word

1. Read Exodus 14:1-32.
 - a. Describe the Lord's commands to Moses in verses 1-2. Do they make good military sense? Explain.
 - b. What reason does the Lord give for his command (vv. 3-4)? What is the main purpose for these unusual commands?
 - c. What prompted Pharaoh to pursue the Israelites (vv. 5-9)? Describe the underlying cause.
 - d. How did the Israelites respond when they saw Pharaoh's army approaching (v. 10)?
 - e. What did the Israelites say to Moses when they saw Pharaoh approaching (vv. 11-12)? How do these words often mirror our own when we find ourselves in a tight spot *because* we followed God's leading?
 - f. How did Moses answer the people's fear and complaint (vv. 13-14)?
 - g. How did God respond to Moses's (unrecorded) prayer (vv. 15-18)? What part does glory play in the exodus?
 - h. Describe God's tactics as recorded in verses 19-20.
 - i. How do verses 21-22 fulfill the prophecy of verse 16?
 - j. Describe God's unorthodox military tactics in verses 23-25.
 - k. What did the Egyptians think of this turn of events (v. 25)?
 - l. How did this story end (vv. 26-29)?

- m. What was the result of all these unusual divine tactics (vv. 30-31)?
2. Read Acts 9:10-19.
- a. What did the Lord instruct Ananias to do (vv. 10-12)?
 - b. How did Ananias react (vv. 13-14)?
 - c. What did the Lord say in response (vv. 15-16)?
 - d. What did Ananias end up doing (v. 17)? How did the encounter turn out (vv. 17-19)?

Some Words About the Word

1. They have followed God out of Egypt and are painfully aware that this decision has led them into a corner. This wasn't a navigational error. They hadn't miscalculated or taken a wrong turn. God had *led* them to this dead end. God will do that in our lives, too, so we will learn to trust him and follow his ways.
 - a. Describe a time in your life when you followed what you believed to be God's leading—and it led to a dead end. What happened?
 - b. Do you think you trust God more today than you did a year ago? Explain.
 - c. What makes it most difficult for you to follow God's ways? Where do you tend to struggle the most? Why?
 - d. How has God used scary incidents in your life to build your trust in him and in his guidance?
2. You will never experience the greatness of God, the power of God, the love of God, or the glory of God until you allow God to put you in a place where only he can make a way out.
 - a. Describe a time when God put you in a place where only he could make a way out. What happened?
 - b. Why do we have to become small in order to clearly see how big God really is?

- c. When have you most powerfully experienced the greatness, power, love, and glory of God?
3. The greatest thing that happened was not the Red Sea parting or the Red Sea closing, but that God had kept every promise he made.
 - a. Name five of God's promises that mean the most to you. Why are these promises so important to you?
 - b. God has made many promises in his word...but why? What do you think prompts him to make so many promises?
 - c. The New Testament tells us that all God's promises are "Yes" in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). What does this mean? How does this affect you personally?

Apply the Word

1. List the ten promises from God that are most precious to you. Why these ten? Why are they precious to you? (If you have a hard time identifying ten promises, spend some time looking for them. Ask others which of God's promises mean the most to them.)
2. Faith often grows when we tell others what God has done for us. Tell someone else about the most "exodus-like" episode in your life. Who will you tell?

The Need to Succeed

Explore the Word

1. Read Joshua 1:1-9.
 - a. What did the Lord tell Joshua in verses 1-5? How do you think Joshua might have responded to these instructions?
 - b. What “formula” for success did God give Joshua (vv. 6-7)?
 - c. How did God reiterate and emphasize his “formula” for success in verse 8?
 - d. Why might Joshua have felt discouraged or terrified as he began his turn as the leader of the Israelites? How did God respond to this (v. 9)?
2. Read John 14:15-21.
 - a. What two things does Jesus connect in verse 15?
 - b. What promise does Jesus make in verses 16-18? Why does he make this promise?
 - c. How does Jesus distinguish his followers from others in verses 19-20? How does he describe his relationship with his followers?
 - d. According to verse 21, what characterizes a true follower of Jesus? What promise does Jesus make to his genuine followers?

Some Words About the Word

1. The late-nineteenth-century Scottish minister George MacDonald once said in a sermon, “In whatever man does

without God, he must fail miserably—or succeed more miserably.”

- a. Describe a time when you have “failed miserably” by trying to accomplish something without God.
 - b. What does it mean to attempt something and “succeed miserably”? Why can this be worse than failing miserably?
 - c. Why do we feel so tempted to attempt *anything* without God? Why do we try to leave him out?
2. God guarantees to fulfill only *his* purpose for your life. We don’t create our purpose, we discover and pursue it.
- a. How have you pursued God’s purpose for your life?
 - b. Have you discovered God’s purpose for your life? If so, what do you think that purpose is? If not, what do you think it would take to discover that purpose?
 - c. How do you think God is fulfilling his purpose for your life?
3. The Bible is not about your personal fulfillment, accomplishments, or happiness. The Bible is about God’s presence with you, how you fit into his plan, and how you can be fulfilled through his purposes, not your own. God will feed your need for success with the only success that matters—his.
- a. How would you respond to a Christian who said, “I know this is wrong according to the Bible, but it will make me happy—and God wants me to be happy”?
 - b. How has God’s word ushered you into his presence? How has it helped you to discern his plan for you? How has it shown you how to find a satisfying sense of purpose?
 - c. How has God fed your “need for success” by inviting you to become a co-laborer with him in what he is doing in the world?

Apply the Word

1. Talk to two or three people in your church about their definition of *success*. What do you discover? How closely do these definitions fit with what you see in Joshua 1:8-9?
2. What would success look like for you in this coming year if you operated according to the standards given to Joshua? Identify and write out five things that would be different.

Out on a Limb

Explore the Word

1. Read Judges 19:1-30.
 - a. Compare verse 22 with Genesis 19:3-5. What do you think the author is trying to suggest by using such similar statements?
 - b. What does this whole vile episode suggest about the era recorded in the book of Judges? Why does the phrase “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25) help to explain much of the debauchery the book describes?
 - c. Why do you think God includes stories like this one in the Bible?
2. Read Romans 1:16–2:16.
 - a. How does Paul summarize the gospel in 1:16-17?
 - b. Against what does God reveal his wrath (v. 18)?
 - c. How has God made his nature clear to everyone (vv. 19-20)?
 - d. How does humankind often respond to this revelation (vv. 21-23)?
 - e. Describe the cycle of degradation outlined in verses 24-32. What does the phrase “God gave them up” refer to? How many times is it used?
 - f. To what do the riches of God’s kindness, tolerance, and patience lead (2:4)?
 - g. Describe the nature of God’s judgment as portrayed in 2:5-11.

- h. What general principle is laid out in 2:12-15?
- i. When are the results of this principle made known (2:16)?

Some Words About the Word

1. You cannot have true morality without God. When you try to make right and wrong a matter of human choice or human reason, you are out on a limb that will break every time.
 - a. Why is it impossible to have true morality without God?
 - b. While it is possible to choose one's morality, what would make any one choice "better" than any other choice? For example, what would make one culture's choice to value genocide better than another culture's choice to value all human life?
 - c. What is the problem with making human reason the foundation for morality?
2. If a universal standard of right and wrong exists, someone with universal authority has established it. Humans have opinions or a pretense of power, but they don't have universal leverage. Without an objective right or wrong, we do what is right only in our own minds.
 - a. Why does a universal standard of right and wrong require someone with universal authority to establish it?
 - b. Have you ever changed your mind on some moral issue, perhaps once considering it right but now considering it wrong? How does this illustrate the problem of rejecting a universal authority?
 - c. Cultures change over time, so that the majority of people within a culture change their minds about what is right and wrong. So does what is right and wrong really change, or only what people think about it?
3. God is necessary for true morality. Rightness and wrongness

are founded on God, and only with God can we know that evil and wrong will be punished and goodness and righteousness will be rewarded.

- a. What do you think the world would look like if God delighted in evil rather than in good?
- b. Why is punishment and judgment necessary in a moral universe?
- c. What place does the giving of rewards have in a moral universe? How are those rewards important?

Apply the Word

1. Do a little study on Hitler's Third Reich. What did his government consider "moral"? How did it arrive at this "morality"? Where did this lead the nation of Germany? What ultimately happened?
2. What would you say are our nation's top ten moral issues today? What does our society say about these things? Where does it get its standard of morality? Where do you think our society is headed if these perspectives remain unchanged?

The Beauty of Suffering

Explore the Word

1. Read Job 42:1-6.
 - a. What lesson had Job learned by the end of his ordeal (vv. 1-2)?
 - b. Why is it always foolish and dangerous to “judge God” for the hardship that befalls us (see vv. 3-4)?
 - c. How did Job ultimately respond to God’s questions (see vv. 5-6)?
 - d. What can we learn from Job about how to respond when hardship overcomes us?
2. Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.
 - a. What mistake do Christians often make about their suffering (v. 12)?
 - b. How should Christians react to their suffering (v. 13)? Why?
 - c. How can an insult actually be a blessing (v. 14)?
 - d. What are some unacceptable ways a Christian could suffer (v. 15)?
 - e. Why does shame sometimes accompany suffering? What is Peter’s counsel on this matter (v. 16)?
 - f. In what sense has the time come for God’s judgment on Christians (v. 17)?
 - g. Why does Peter bring up the fate of unbelievers (vv. 17b-18)?

- h. How should Christians react to their God-ordained suffering (v. 19)? How is this possible?

Some Words About the Word

1. You never have to *understand* what God is doing if you can *trust* God to control rightly.
 - a. Describe the last time God was doing something in your life that you didn't understand. How did you express your trust in him despite your lack of understanding?
 - b. Think of someone you know whom you believe has a deep trust in God. What helped him or her to develop that kind of trust?
 - c. When do you find it easy to trust that God is controlling events rightly? When do you find it more difficult to trust that God is controlling events rightly? How do you deal with the latter?
2. If we can accept that God is more interested in our holiness than our happiness, then we can begin to accept that God's grace, not our suffering, is the point.
 - a. Why do you think God is more interested in our holiness than our happiness?
 - b. Think of your favorite Bible character. How does this character's life, as described in Scripture, illustrate the idea that God was more interested in his/her holiness than in his/her happiness?
 - c. What is the relationship between God's grace and human suffering? How can God be considered gracious when he allows deep suffering?
3. If the most important value in life is our comfort, our well-being, our welfare, our health, our prosperity, then suffering and evil make no sense. But the supreme value in the entire universe is none of those things. It is the glory of God.

- a. How would you “explain” suffering and evil to someone who asked you about them?
- b. Why is God’s glory the supreme value in the entire universe? What is so valuable about it?
- c. What does the Bible mean by God’s *glory*? What is it? How can *you* best reveal God’s glory to the watching world?

Apply the Word

1. Volunteer some of your time to a community organization that works with suffering people. It might be a rescue mission, a hospice, or something else. How can you bring a taste of God’s love to these suffering people?
2. Make an appointment to speak to a staff member at your church who works with people in pain. What kind of suffering touches your church right now? How do the members of your church minister to these people? How might you get involved?

How to Say Yes to the Giant

Explore the Word

1. Read 1 Samuel 17:1-54.
 - a. Describe the scene reported in verses 1-3.
 - b. Describe the giant as reported in verses 4-7.
 - c. Describe Goliath's challenge in verses 8-10.
 - d. How did Israel respond to Goliath's challenge (v. 11)?
 - e. How is David introduced in verses 12-15?
 - f. Why does the writer include the time reference in verse 16?
 - g. How did David arrive on the battlefield (vv. 17-22)?
 - h. How did David react to the situation that had been frightening the army of Israel (vv. 23-27)?
 - i. How did David's brothers react to David being on the battlefield (vv. 28-29)?
 - j. How did David convince Saul to let him fight Goliath (vv. 31-37)?
 - k. How did Saul want to equip David for the battle (vv. 38-39a)? How did David insist on being equipped (vv. 39b-40)?
 - l. How did Goliath react to David as his challenger (vv. 41-44)?
 - m. How did David reply to the giant (vv. 45-47)?
 - n. How did the battle unfold between the two (vv. 48-51)?
 - o. What happened afterward (vv. 52-53)?
 - p. How did the episode end for David (v. 54)?

- q. What lesson does this story most teach you? Why?
2. Read Ephesians 6:10-20.
- How do believers grow strong (v. 10)?
 - What is the “armor of God” (vv. 11, 13)?
 - Describe the nature of our real opponents (v. 12).
 - List each piece of armor that Paul mentions, and describe its use (vv. 13-17).
 - What does it mean to pray “in the Spirit” (v. 18)? How can you best do this?
 - What is the connection between prayer and effective evangelism (vv. 19-20)?

Some Words About the Word

- We fear our giants because we forget what we ought to remember and we remember what we ought to forget. We tend to remember our failures and forget our victories. We tend to remember our low points and forget our high points.
 - What do you tend to forget that you ought to remember? What do you tend to remember that you ought to forget?
 - What personal failures do you have a hard time forgetting? Why? What victories do you have a hard time remembering? Why?
 - What low points do you need to forget? What high points do you need to remember?
- Do you know how many times David talks about God? Nine. His God thoughts outnumbered his giant thoughts 9 to 1. You would face life differently if your God thoughts outnumbered your giant thoughts.
 - Think of a major challenge now facing you. How would consciously thinking about God more than about the challenge help you to overcome it?

- b. How can you train yourself to think nine times more about God than you do about the giants facing you?
 - c. How would you face life differently if your God thoughts outnumbered your giant thoughts? Get specific: What in particular would change?
3. Giants are God's reminder that if we will take care of our faith, he will take care of the fight. If we will be concerned for his glory, he will be concerned for the victory.
 - a. What does it mean for you to "take care of" your faith? What does that look like?
 - b. How have you seen God "take care of the fight" in your life? How have you seen him do this in the life of a friend or family member?
 - c. Rate yourself 1-10 on how concerned you are for God's glory (1 = not concerned at all; 10 = consumed by it). How is your level of concern for God's glory reflected in the way you live?

Apply the Word

1. Dream about the places in your life where you might need to say yes and unlock the potential God has for you. Take a full week to do this dreaming.
2. How can you increase the "God thoughts" in your life? Develop a plan for doing this, and then put it in motion.

Just the Two of Us

Explore the Word

1. Read Psalm 37:3-11.
 - a. What does it mean to you to trust in the Lord (v. 3)?
What is the connection between trusting in the Lord and doing good?
 - b. How do you delight in the Lord (v. 4)? When you delight in the Lord, what happens to the desires of your heart?
 - c. Have you committed your way to the Lord (v. 5)? Explain. What promise does verse 5 make?
 - d. What is the difference between “righteousness” and “justice” (v. 6)? How are these two things connected in your own life?
 - e. How easy is it for you to “be still” before God and to “wait patiently” for him (v. 7)? Explain.
 - f. What does it mean to *fret*? What does this passage say about our fretting (vv. 7-8)?
 - g. What two promises does verse 9 make?
 - h. How are the promises of verse 9 illustrated in verses 10-11?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 11:2-3.
 - a. Why was Paul jealous for the Corinthians (v. 2)?
 - b. What idea is the image of a pure virgin supposed to convey?
 - c. What circumstance did Paul say he feared (v. 3)? What caused this fear?

- d. What does sincere and pure devotion to Christ look like? Would you say that you have a sincere and pure devotion to Christ? Explain.

Some Words About the Word

1. As you spend time with God, he changes you so that you become more like him. The benefit is that the more of God you have in you, the more other people will respond favorably to you. Spending time with God gives him the chance to change you so he can use you to change other people.
 - a. How much time do you spend with God on a typical day? A typical week? What does this time with him look like?
 - b. When you have spent significant time with God, how have you seen him change you?
 - c. In what ways do you think you're more like God today than you were when you first came to faith in Jesus? In what ways would you like to become more like God? How do you think that transformation can best happen?
2. Delight needs to come before desire. When you delight in the Lord, your desire will be his desire.
 - a. Name the five things in your life that you most delight in. Why do you delight in these five things?
 - b. How much would you say that you "delight" in God? Explain your answer. How could you delight more in him next year than you have this year?
 - c. Think back over your life as a follower of Jesus. How have your desires changed over that time? What do you think accounts for those changes?
3. God does not want what is merely good for you. He does not even want what is better for you. He wants what is best

for you. When you spend time with God learning what he wants, you always get God's best.

- a. Describe three of the best gifts God has ever given to you. What was so good about these gifts? How did those gifts change you?
- b. When was the last time you asked God to show you, from his word, what he wants for you?
- c. Why do you think that *God's* idea of what's best for us and *our* idea of what's best for us often don't look the same?

Apply the Word

1. Make a list of the things that keep you from spending time with the Lord. Then go through the list and figure out how you can overcome each challenge. Ask someone to hold you accountable, if that would help.
2. What things do you delight in? What gives you real pleasure? What is it about these things that delights you? What can you learn about yourself through this exercise that could help you to more thoroughly delight in God?

The Way to the Will

Explore the Word

1. Read 2 Chronicles 1:7-12.
 - a. If God were to appear to you in a dream and ask you the same question he asked Solomon (see v. 7), how would you reply? Why?
 - b. How had God shown great kindness to David (v. 8)?
 - c. What did Solomon mean when he asked God to confirm his previous promise to David (v. 9)?
 - d. What did Solomon ask for (v. 10)? How did this request already demonstrate wisdom?
 - e. List the things that God mentioned Solomon had *not* asked for (v. 11). Why did it impress God that Solomon had not asked for these things?
 - f. How did God respond to Solomon's request (v. 12)?
2. Read James 3:13-18.
 - a. What kind of life does true wisdom inspire (v. 13)?
 - b. List the things in a person's life that indicate he or she does *not* possess true wisdom (vv. 14-16).
 - c. What characteristics does true wisdom nurture in a person's life (v. 17)?
 - d. What promise is given in verse 18? To whom is this promise given?

Some Words About the Word

1. God gives you wisdom not so you can show others how much you know but so you can show others how to live.
 - a. Describe the wisest Christian you know. What makes this person so wise?
 - b. Imagine that someone was watching you very carefully over the past week. Through your life, what did you show that person about how to live?
 - c. Who in your life shows you most effectively how to live for God? What makes that person's life so effective as a good model for you?
2. God doesn't give wisdom to the people who think they know it all. He gives it only to the person who admits he doesn't know enough.
 - a. How does the presence of arrogance demonstrate the absence of wisdom?
 - b. How does God tend to give wisdom to his people? Describe the process you think he uses.
 - c. When did you last ask God for wisdom? Why did you think you needed it?
3. Getting into God's word daily is so important for making wise decisions because the choices you make end up making you. Choose to get to know God's word and it will change you, the way you think, and the things you care about.
 - a. Describe the three biggest decisions you've made in your life. How did those decisions end up "making" you?
 - b. What choice can you make today that will help you to get to know God's word better? How can you effectively follow through on that choice?
 - c. Think of a time that an insight from God's word had a dramatic impact on your life. How did God use that insight to change you, the way you think, and the things you care about?

Apply the Word

1. Many Christians have a habit of reading through one chapter of Proverbs each day. If you do not have this habit, try it for a month.
2. For the next two weeks, look for clever sayings and wise quips you see in the culture around you—on billboards, bumper stickers, advertisements, etc. Write down the most memorable ones. How do they compare to what you find in Scripture?

Getting into Position

Explore the Word

1. Read Proverbs 3:5-6.
 - a. What does it mean to trust in the Lord “with all your heart”?
 - b. What does it mean to “not lean on your own understanding”?
 - c. How can you “acknowledge” God in all your ways?
 - d. What promise is given in verse 6? Are you experiencing this promise? Explain.
2. Read Acts 16:6-10.
 - a. Why did Paul and his companions not preach the word in the province of Asia (v. 6)? What does this suggest about God’s guidance?
 - b. Why did Paul and his companions not enter Bithynia (v. 7)? What does this suggest about God’s guidance?
 - c. How did God lead Paul and his companions after they seemed to reach a dead end (v. 9)?
 - d. How does verse 10 strongly imply that God’s guidance often comes through multiple people, and not just one?

Some Words About the Word

1. God won’t offer you his will as just one of the options for you to choose from. He will not show you his will until you say, “All systems go!”
 - a. Is there some aspect of God’s will for your life that

- you've been asking about for a long time? If it still hasn't become clear to you, what do you think is preventing it from becoming clear?
- b. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = every time), how would you rate your willingness to say yes to God, regardless of what he asks you to do?
 - c. How does God typically reveal his will for you? How do you typically react when you believe he has shown you his will?
2. When you agree to follow God's guidance no matter what—even if it means changing your major, leaving your boyfriend, refusing a higher-paying job, or having some hard conversations—then he will fill in the details of what to do.
- a. Describe some aspect of God's will that the Lord seems to be revealing to you. What has he shown you so far? What hasn't he shown you yet? What actions might you need to take for him to show you the next step?
 - b. What will it take for you to agree to follow God's guidance no matter what?
 - c. Describe a time that God slowly revealed his will for you after you followed whatever part of his will he had already shown you.
3. When you put God in his rightful place, he will put you in the right place. That doesn't mean that life will always be easy or tough times won't come. It does mean that you will always be where God can protect you and provide for you as you walk in the paths he directs.
- a. Do you believe you are in the right place? Why or why not?
 - b. Describe a time when you believed you were in the right place, even though times were tough.
 - c. How has God protected you and provided for you as you have walked in the paths he has directed?

Apply the Word

1. Who is your favorite character in Scripture? How did God lead this person? What can you learn from this person about being led by God in your own life?
2. Imagine that God did *not* lead his people and that he did *not* promise to guide them. How would your decision-making be different from what it is now? Would you be in the same place you are now? Explain.

Difference Maker

Explore the Word

1. Read Ecclesiastes 3:10-14; 12:13-14.
 - a. Describe the “business” God has laid on men (3:10).
 - b. What does it mean that God has “put eternity” in the hearts of men (v. 11)? Why can’t we humans fathom God’s work from beginning to end?
 - c. What kind of life does the writer believe human beings should strive for (vv. 12-13)?
 - d. What does God do so that men will “fear” him (v. 14)? Why does he want people to fear him?
 - e. What final conclusion does the writer make at the end of his book (12:13)?
 - f. What reason does the writer give in verse 14 for following his guidance in verse 13?
2. Read Acts 2:22-39.
 - a. How does Peter summarize the events related to the crucifixion of Jesus (vv. 22-24)? What would you say are the key elements?
 - b. For what reason does Peter quote the Old Testament in this part of his sermon (vv. 25-28)?
 - c. How does Peter interpret the prophecy of David (vv. 29-31)? How does he apply it to Christ?
 - d. What eyewitness testimony does he give (vv. 32-33)?
 - e. What does Peter conclude (vv. 34-36)?
 - f. How does Peter’s audience respond (v. 37)?

- g. What answer does Peter give to the audience's question (vv. 38-39)?

Some Words About the Word

1. Without God, right and wrong become a matter of emotions (you do what you feel is right or wrong), intellect (you do what you think is right or wrong), or opinion (you do what others you respect say is right or wrong). No ultimate, final objective right and wrong can exist apart from God.
 - a. How easy is it for you to mistaken God's view of right and wrong for your own view of right and wrong?
 - b. How do you think our culture determines what is right and wrong?
 - c. Suppose you're at a party where the clear group consensus is that it's perfectly fine to hook up for the night. What do you do?
2. Richard Wurmbrand, a Christian pastor tortured for his faith, observed, "My communist torturers often said, "There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish.""
 - a. If these communist torturers were correct in concluding that there is no God, then were they right that "we can do what we wish"? Explain.
 - b. How does this statement by Wurmbrand's torturers help to explain why the twentieth century was by far the bloodiest the world has ever known?
 - c. Wurmbrand was tortured for about 17 years in an underground cell. He refused to recant his faith. What do you think kept him so committed to his Savior? Suppose you were jailed today under similar circumstances. How do you think you would respond? Explain.

3. If God does exist, then our ultimate concern ought to be how to know that God, obey that God, worship that God, and love that God supremely. An equal concern should be how many others we can get to know, love, worship, serve, and obey that God as well.
 - a. Is your ultimate concern how to know God, obey him, worship him, and love him supremely? Would those who know you best agree with your answer?
 - b. What are you doing to help others to know, love, worship, serve, and obey God?
 - c. Suppose you were called into God's presence at this moment to "receive what is due for what [you have] done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10). What do you think you would receive from the Lord? What changes might be required in your life for you to receive something you'd like better?

Apply the Word

1. Describe in a paragraph what it means to you to fear God. What does this look like in your life? How would you explain it to someone else? What role does the fear of God play in your life?
2. If you have the opportunity, read Richard Wurmbrand's classic book *Tortured for Christ*. What do you learn from him about serving God regardless of the cost?

Seeing Clearly

Explore the Word

1. Read Isaiah 6:1-13.
 - a. Describe in your own words the scene Isaiah witnessed (vv. 1-4). What central attribute of God does he emphasize in this passage?
 - b. How did Isaiah respond to this scene (v. 5)? Why did he respond like this?
 - c. What did the Lord do in response to Isaiah's cry of despair (vv. 6-7)?
 - d. Why does the Lord's question in verse 8 come after the events of verses 6-7 and not before?
 - e. What so changed Isaiah's attitude from verse 5 to verse 8?
 - f. What kind of ministry would Isaiah have, according to verses 9-10?
 - g. How did this prophecy affect Isaiah (v. 11)?
 - h. What response did the Lord give to Isaiah's question (vv. 11-12)?
 - i. How is the second part of verse 13 a veiled reference to the promise of the Messiah?
2. Read 1 Peter 1:13-25.
 - a. What does a holy life look like, according to verses 13-16?
 - b. What connection does Peter make between the way Christians are to live and the coming judgment of God (v. 17)?

- c. How does Peter characterize the way of life handed down from his readers' forefathers (v. 18)? To what does he contrast the blood of Christ? Why does he make this contrast?
- d. How does he picture the redeeming work of Jesus (vv. 19-20)?
- e. Where does Peter say his readers have placed their faith (v. 21)? How was this made possible?
- f. How have Peter's readers purified themselves (v. 22)? What instruction does he therefore give them?
- g. What does the word of God accomplish, according to verses 23-25?

Some Words About the Word

1. More often than any other attribute—mercy, grace, love, compassion, power, or knowledge—God is described throughout Scripture as *holy*. This is his chief attribute.
 - a. Do you agree that God's chief attribute, according to the Bible, is holiness? Explain.
 - b. What does it mean to describe God as holy? Why would the Bible declare that without holiness, "no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14)?
 - c. Would you describe yourself as holy? Why or why not?
2. When you see the real God, you see the real you. You will never see yourself for what you are until you see God for who he is.
 - a. What does it mean to see "the real God"? What other God is there to see?
 - b. Why does seeing God for who he really is change the way you see yourself?
 - c. How would you describe yourself in light of the biblically revealed nature of the real God?

3. Once you see God for who he is and experience the freedom he offers, you'll want to surrender everything you are to everything he is. The measure of the depth of your relationship to God is the extent of your surrender.
 - a. What kind of freedom have you experienced through your relationship with God through Jesus?
 - b. What does it mean to surrender everything you are to everything he is? Where are you in this journey?
 - c. How would you describe your relationship to God?
 - d. Think of a person whom you believe has an exceptionally close relationship to God. In what ways does this person demonstrate a willing surrender to God?

Apply the Word

1. Define, in your own words, what it means to be holy. How does your life illustrate holiness to others?
2. Leaders in the church talk a lot about surrender. What does this word mean to you? Why do you think leaders use the word so much? In what ways have you surrendered your life to Jesus? In what areas of your life do you need to surrender more? How would your life look different if you were more surrendered?

Breaking the Prayer Barrier

Explore the Word

1. Read Jeremiah 33:1-3.
 - a. Where did Jeremiah receive the revelation outlined in this passage? What does this imply about hardships in the life of the believer?
 - b. How does the Lord describe himself in verse 2? Why is this important?
 - c. What command and promise does God give his people in verse 3? Does this still apply today? Explain.
2. Read Philippians 4:6-7.
 - a. Instead of feeling anxious, what does Paul counsel us to do? Is this counsel easy for you to follow? Explain.
 - b. What promise does God give those who follow the counsel of verse 6? What does it mean to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus?

Some Words About the Word

1. There are two parts to prayer—our part is to call and God’s part is to answer. God would never ask us to call to him if he were not going to listen to us.
 - a. How would you describe your prayer life? How satisfied are you with it?
 - b. Is it important for you to “feel” that God hears your prayers? Explain.

- c. How do you know that God listens to your prayers?
What keeps you going in prayer when it feels as though you're being ignored?
2. Baptist evangelist F.B. Meyer once wrote, "The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer: it is unoffered prayer."
 - a. At what time of day are you most likely to pray? What circumstances are most likely to prompt you to pray?
 - b. When are you most likely to forget to pray? How can prayer become more of a daily habit for you?
 - c. Why do you suppose that God prompted James to write, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2)?
3. Prayer is not meant to be a one-way conversation like a monologue. It is meant to be a dialogue. When we pray, God will show us things that are inaccessible to human intelligence or even human investigation.
 - a. Are your prayers more like a monologue or a dialogue? Explain.
 - b. Describe a time in prayer when God showed you things that were "inaccessible to human intelligence or even human investigation."
 - c. How would you describe prayer (and how it works) to someone who had never heard of prayer and what it is supposed to do?

Apply the Word

1. Identify what you see as the biggest need in your community, and commit to praying for it every day for a month.
2. If you don't already keep a prayer journal, start one. Write down the date you pray for something, and then fill in the date when you see an answer to your prayer. What do you learn about your prayer life after a month of keeping your journal?

The Devil Is in the Details

Explore the Word

1. Read Ezekiel 28:11-17; Isaiah 14:12-15.
 - a. Ezekiel calls this passage a *lament* (Ezekiel 28:11). What is a lament? What is he lamenting?
 - b. How is the devil described in verses 12b-15a? List the characteristics you note.
 - c. What happened to the devil's original perfection (v. 15)? What happened as a result (v. 16)?
 - d. What lay at the heart of Satan's downfall (v. 17)?
 - e. What names does Isaiah use to describe Satan before he fell (Isaiah 14:12)? What do these names say about him?
 - f. What ambition brought him to ruin (vv. 13-14)?
 - g. What happened as a result of his illicit ambition (v. 15)?
2. Read John 8:44.
 - a. What terms does Jesus use to describe the devil?
 - b. How does Jesus connect the idea of "murderer" to rejection of the "truth"?
 - c. Why is "liar" an apt description of Satan? In what ways has he lied to you?

Some Words About the Word

1. We learn of two spiritual beings in the Bible, one good and one evil, but they are not equal opposites. God can do anything, knows everything, and is everywhere. The devil is *none* of the above, but he does have great power and

worldwide influence. He is your number one enemy and he wants to destroy you mentally, emotionally, spiritually and even physically, if you allow him to do so.

- a. How does your view of God differ from that of the dominant culture in your area?
 - b. How does your view of the devil differ from that of the dominant culture in your area?
 - c. How have you seen the devil or his associates try to destroy you mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or physically?
2. The devil does everything he can to make sin attractive, making us think all the time that what we are doing is bringing us pleasure, when all we are doing is bringing ourselves pain and hurt and heartache and even death.
- a. How does the devil try to make sin look attractive to you?
 - b. How do you resist the devil's attempts to get you to disobey God?
 - c. What do you think Scripture means when it speaks of "the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25)? Why does no one ultimately ever get away with committing sin?
3. Satan is always going to try to get you to surrender some area of your life to him. When you do, he'll take that area and use it as a stronghold to beat you down. Concede the decision to God; the devil cannot take from you what you have already surrendered to God.
- a. What area of life is Satan currently trying to get you to surrender to him?
 - b. What is a stronghold? How does it usually get built? What does it take to destroy a stronghold? What happens when a stronghold is not destroyed?
 - c. What critical area(s) of life do you still need to surrender to God? What's keeping you from a full surrender?

Apply the Word

1. Read over the four Gospels and write down every instance you see of demonic activity. What do you learn about the work of demons?
2. Read the book of Revelation. What role will demons play as history comes to an end?

A Line in the Sand

Explore the Word

1. Read Daniel 1:1-21.
 - a. How are Daniel and his friends described in verses 3-4? List the traits you see.
 - b. Why did Daniel believe he would defile himself if he ate the food assigned to him from the king's table (v. 8)?
 - c. How did Daniel match his resolve with very practical wisdom (vv. 12-13)? What does this suggest for us?
 - d. Why do you think the writer tells us how God blessed Daniel and his friends only *after* he described how Daniel committed himself to honoring God (v. 17)?
 - e. How does verse 20 compare with verse 17? How did God honor the young men's commitment?
 - f. Why is verse 21 important? What does it tell us about the nature of Daniel's commitment?
2. Read Acts 4:1-31.
 - a. Why were Peter and John thrown in jail (vv. 1-3)? Had they done anything wrong to deserve such treatment?
 - b. What question did the religious leaders ask Peter and John (vv. 5-7)? Why did they want to know this?
 - c. Describe the answer that Peter and John gave (vv. 8-12). Was this the answer the religious leaders expected? What they hoped for? Explain.
 - d. What problem did the religious leaders now have (vv. 13-16)? What "solution" did they devise (vv. 17-18)?

- e. How did Peter and John respond (vv. 19-20)?
- f. What was the feeble response of the religious leaders (vv. 21-22)?
- g. How did the Christians respond to this incident (vv. 23-28)?
- h. What requests did they make of God (vv. 29-30)?
- i. How did God respond (v. 31)? What should this incident teach us today?

Some Words About the Word

1. Never cross a line that God has drawn. The world will tempt you, but when you stay on the God side, you will stay on the good side.
 - a. Name a line that God has drawn in your life.
 - b. How does the world tempt you to cross the line you named above?
 - c. What habits, practices, and disciplines can help you to stay on the good side of the line named above?
2. If you wait until you are tempted to determine your boundary, it's too late. It's too late to decide your ethical standards when you are filling out your first income tax return. It's too late to decide your sexual boundaries in the heat of the moment or your alcohol limits when you're already at the party. Build your boundaries early. Build them now and resolve to guard them.
 - a. In what areas of life do you most need boundaries? Have you decided on your boundaries in those areas? If so, how did you make your decisions? If not, why not?
 - b. What can you do practically to guard the boundaries you have set? What do you need to practice? What do you need to avoid?

- c. Describe a time when you kept a boundary you had set, and what happened.
3. You may be convinced you are in a place where you have no way out. All options leading out of your dilemma feel exhausted. You're one step away from doing what everybody else would do and deciding the way everybody else would choose. But you can still exercise your God-given boundaries, stay on God's side of the line, and find out what God's best is for your life.
 - a. Why do you think God inspired the apostle Paul to write that when a believer in Jesus feels tempted, God "will...provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13)?
 - b. Describe a time when it seemed you had come to a place where you had no way out—but you maintained your boundaries, and God did provide a way out.
 - c. One way to improve at keeping the boundaries you've set is to focus on one of the most problematic areas for you and concentrate on that, rather than trying to tackle several areas at once. Success in one area often breeds success in another. What one area would be most beneficial for *you* to concentrate on?

Apply the Word

1. Describe the boundaries you have placed around your life, based on your understanding of God's word.
2. What boundaries do you hear discussed at your church? What do you think about these boundaries? How close are your personal boundaries to the boundaries you hear discussed at church?

Take the Heat

Explore the Word

1. Read Daniel 3:8-30.
 - a. How did it become known that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had refused to bow down to the king's idol (vv. 8-12)?
 - b. How did the king respond to their refusal (vv. 13-15)?
 - c. Describe Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's reply to the king (vv. 16-18).
 - d. How did the king react to their reply (vv. 19-23)?
 - e. What changed the king's mind (vv. 24-25)?
 - f. What request did the king make (v. 26)?
 - g. Describe the effect that the fire had on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v. 27).
 - h. What impact did this episode have on the king (vv. 28-29)?
 - i. What impact did this episode have on the three Hebrew friends (v. 30)?
2. Read Acts 6:8-15; 7:48-60.
 - a. Describe the short ministry of Stephen (v. 8).
 - b. What happened because of his ministry (vv. 9-10)?
 - c. How did Stephen's opponents react to his defense of his ministry (vv. 11-14)?
 - d. Why do you think Luke (the author of Acts) included verse 15?

- e. Why did Stephen include the quotation from Isaiah 66:1-2 toward the end of his speech (7:48-50)?
- f. How did Stephen apply the message of his speech to his hearers (vv. 51-53)?
- g. How did his audience respond to his speech (v. 54)?
- h. What did Stephen say in verses 55-56 that prompted such anger in his audience? Why did they get so angry?
- i. How did the audience respond to these words of Stephen (vv. 57-58)?
- j. What were Stephen's final words (vv. 59-60)? What do these words indicate about Stephen's character?

Some Words About the Word

1. When you read accounts in the Bible, you are not reading just what God has said, you are reading what God is saying. You are reading how God wanted his people to live then and how God wants his people to live now.
 - a. What stories in the Bible resonate most with you? Why?
 - b. Read Romans 15:4 and 2 Corinthians 10:1-11. What do these passages say about what is written in Scripture and why it was written?
2. Warren Wiersbe says, "Real faith means obeying God regardless of the feelings within us, the circumstances around us, or the consequences before us."
 - a. How do your feelings tend to influence your obedience to God?
 - b. How do your circumstances tend to influence your obedience to God?
 - c. How do the possible consequences of your obedience tend to influence your obedience to God?
3. Real faith is not the confidence that God will work things

out the way you want. It is the confidence that God will work things out the way he wants.

- a. How would you describe your own faith? What kind of confidence does it give you?
- b. Is it wrong to pray that things work out the way you want? What does Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane tell you?
- c. How can you come to the place where, most of all, you want what God wants?

Apply the Word

1. Where in your life do you feel the most pressure to cave in to cultural pressure and do what you believe is clearly wrong? How can you fortify yourself to stand strong? Who can help you?
2. In our contemporary church culture, we tend to talk a lot about the unconditional love of God and very little about obedience to God. Why do you think that is? What do you see as the connection between God's love and our obedience?

The Fugitive

Explore the Word

1. Read Jonah 1:1-17; 4:1-10.
 - a. What message did God give Jonah to preach to the residents of Nineveh (1:1-2)?
 - b. How did Jonah respond to his divine assignment (v. 3)?
 - c. What did God do in response to Jonah's actions (v. 4)?
 - d. How did the sailors react (vv. 5-8)?
 - e. How did Jonah answer the sailors' questions (v. 9)?
 - f. How did the sailors react to Jonah's answer (v. 10)? Why did they react this way?
 - g. What did the sailors do when the sea continued to grow rougher (vv. 11-15)? What happened when they did this (v. 15)? How did the sailors respond (v. 16)?
 - h. What does verse 17 imply about God's preparations for this incident?
 - i. How did Jonah react to God's sparing of Nineveh (4:1-3)? How does Jonah describe God's character (v. 2)?
 - j. How did God try to teach Jonah a crucial lesson about his love (vv. 4-7)?
 - k. How did Jonah react to this lesson (vv. 8-9)?
 - l. What did God want Jonah to understand through this incident (v. 10-11)? What does he want us to understand?
2. Read Luke 15:11-32.
 - a. Describe the three main characters in this story.
 - b. Who is most like Jonah in this story? Explain.

- c. How does the father in this story illustrate the same lesson God wanted Jonah to learn?

Some Words About the Word

1. We don't resist God because he commands us. We resist him because he tells us to do things we don't want to do.
 - a. What things does God tell you, in his word, to do that you would rather not do?
 - b. What things do you believe God is telling you to do right now that you're resisting?
 - c. How can you come to the place where you cease resisting God's will for you and instead fully embrace it?
2. Those tough times you are navigating are not signs that God is absent. He doesn't allow tough times to happen in order to *pay* you back but to *bring* you back.
 - a. Describe a tough time in your life when it felt as though God were absent. What happened?
 - b. When tough times hit, do you ever feel as though God is "paying you back"? If so, why do you suppose you think such thoughts?
 - c. How has God used tough times to "bring you back"?
3. Every day that you run from God is a wasted day. Don't waste any more.
 - a. When are you most likely to run from God?
 - b. What typically happens in your life when you run from God?
 - c. Are you running from God now in any area of your life? If so, why?

Apply the Word

1. What part of the story of Jonah speaks most clearly to you? Why? If Jonah were to speak directly to you about your life, what do you think he'd say?
2. Who in your life most needs to hear a "Nineveh-like" message? What would you say to God if he asked you to deliver it? Would you be willing to pray about your availability?

For Goodness' Sake

Explore the Word

1. Read Micah 6:6-8.
 - a. What question does the prophet ask in verse 6a? How does he describe God in this verse?
 - b. What three rhetorical suggestions does he make in answer to his own question in verses 6b-7? What is his obvious answer to all three suggestions?
 - c. What does the Lord require of his people, according to verse 8? How is this “good”?
 - d. What does it mean to “do justice”? What does it mean to “love kindness”? What does it mean to “walk humbly with your God”? How do you carry out all three requirements?

2. Read Galatians 5:22-26.
 - a. Name each element of the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). How is each element visible in your own life?
 - b. Why is there no law against these elements of the fruit of the Spirit?
 - c. What is true of everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ (v. 24)? How would you describe this in your own words?
 - d. What does it mean to “live by the Spirit” (v. 25)? What does it mean to “keep in step” with the Spirit? Are you doing these things? Explain.

- e. How is the instruction of verse 26 related to the previous passage (vv. 22-25)?

Some Words About the Word

1. Our potential for goodness is animated by the Spirit who lives in us, and with this fruit, he wants you and me to live in such a way that our lives will taste good to others.
 - a. Who do you know whose life tastes good to others? What about this person's life tastes so good?
 - b. How do you think your life tastes to others? Are you satisfied with your answer? Explain.
 - c. In what area(s) of your life could your "fruit" taste better to others? What would it take for you to start growing such fruit?
2. When you love mercy you will live mercy. There is something liberating about being merciful and treating the lowest, the littlest, and the least with kindness and grace.
 - a. What do you think it means to "love mercy"? What does this look like in day-to-day life?
 - b. How do you normally treat the lowest, the littlest, and the least?
 - c. Think of someone in your sphere of influence who needs a touch of mercy. What can you do to show mercy to that person?
3. The last requirement of goodness is to "walk humbly with your God." This is the real source and secret of goodness.
 - a. What do you think it looks like to walk humbly with God?
 - b. Would you call yourself a humble person? Explain.
 - c. Why is humility the "real" source and secret of goodness?

Apply the Word

1. How can you be an agent of God's mercy in your community? Come up with at least three ideas, and then put one of them into action.
2. God instructs us to humble ourselves. What would it mean to humble yourself? What areas of your life call for more humility? How can you start this humbling of yourself today?

On the Ropes

Explore the Word

1. Read Habakkuk 3:1-19.
 - a. Why is it appropriate for the prophet to end his book with a long prayer?
 - b. How does the prophet describe God and his ways in verses 3-15? List all the traits and characteristics you note.
 - c. How did the prophet react to this display of God's majesty (v. 16)?
 - d. How do the prophet's words in verses 17-18 show a huge change in his perspective?
 - e. How does the prophet picture the Lord in verse 19? How is this significant?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.
 - a. What "treasure" does Paul describe in verse 7? Why is it contained in "jars of clay"? What does this mean?
 - b. Describe the conditions in which Paul found himself (vv. 8-9).
 - c. How does Paul summarize his life in verse 10? Why does he say his life looks like this?
 - d. How does Paul contrast his life with the lives of the Corinthians (vv. 11-12)? Why does he make this contrast?
 - e. What expectation does Paul describe in verses 13-14?
 - f. What benefit does Paul describe in verse 15?
 - g. Why did Paul not "lose heart" (v. 16)? What kept him going?

- h. Of what use are our struggles (v. 17)?
- i. What are we instructed to do as we go through life's struggles (v. 18)? Why?

Some Words About the Word

1. When we face tough times, we will take one of two paths: the path of fear or the path of faith.
 - a. When tough times hit you, are you more likely to take the path of fear or of faith? Explain.
 - b. Describe a time when you overcame your fear with faith.
 - c. List three Bible verses that could help you overcome your fear with faith. What do you find helpful about each verse?
2. You can stop driving yourself crazy with questions by looking back and seeing how God took care of things yesterday.
 - a. When hard times come, what kinds of questions come into your mind that tend to drive you crazy?
 - b. Look back over your life in the past year. How did God take care of you during difficult times? Be specific.
 - c. Describe the most significant time in your life when God sustained you through a very difficult time.
3. If your goal is to stay close to God, to be in the center of his will, and to glorify him no matter what, then you can praise God in every circumstance, knowing that every circumstance can bring you closer to him.
 - a. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not at all; 10 = with everything in me), rank yourself on whether it is your goal to stay close to God, be in the center of his will, and glorify him no matter what.
 - b. Outside of church services, how often do you take time to praise God?

- c. How could the worst circumstance you face right now bring you closer to God?

Apply the Word

1. Write a list of the ways God has come through for you in the past. What do you see when you look back and remember the works of God in your life?
2. What specifically would it take for you to develop a closer walk with God? What will you have to emphasize? What might you have to cut loose?

On the Money

Explore the Word

1. Read Malachi 3:6-18.
 - a. What divine characteristic is mentioned in verse 6? Why is this crucial to us?
 - b. What basic principle is laid out in verse 7?
 - c. What transgression is described in verses 8-9?
 - d. What remedy did God prescribe for Israel in verse 10? What promise did he give?
 - e. How did God expand the nature of this promise in verses 11-12?
 - f. What hard words had the nation spoken against God in verses 13-15? In what way are we sometimes guilty of the same thing?
 - g. How did faithful believers respond to these hard words (v. 16)? How would you describe them?
 - h. How did the Lord respond to these faithful believers (vv. 17-18)?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.
 - a. Describe the financial condition of the Macedonian churches (vv. 1-2). What characterized them *despite* their condition?
 - b. How did these churches respond to the need presented by Paul (vv. 3-4)?
 - c. What is the connection between grace and giving as laid out in verses 5-7?

- d. In verse 8, why does Paul make a distinction between a command and an urging?
- e. How did Paul describe Jesus's generosity (v. 9)?
- f. Describe Paul's advice to the Corinthians (vv. 10-11).
- g. What general principle did the apostle lay out in verse 12?
- h. What general principle did Paul lay out in verses 13-15?

Some Words About the Word

1. God has a lot to say to you about your money because your money says a lot about you.
 - a. What do you think your use of money says about you?
 - b. Be honest: Do you like hearing sermons about money? Explain.
 - c. If God were to have a face-to-face conversation with you about money, what do you think he'd say?
2. The first key to learning how to handle money is to remember, *It's not your money. It is God's.*
 - a. Why is the first key to learning how to handle money to remember that it belongs to God? What does it mean that it belongs to God?
 - b. If the thought were constantly in your head, *This money I have belongs to God*, how might your use of money change?
 - c. Does *anything* you have *not* belong to God? Your possessions? Your time? Your life? Explain.
3. God doesn't need your money. He gave it to you to begin with. God wants what your money represents: your heart. He wants you unattached to any other idol. If he is not first in your finances, priorities, time management, or any other area, then something else is in his place.

- a. How does it make you feel to realize that God doesn't need your money?
- b. Does God have your heart? Explain.
- c. Is God first in your finances? Your priorities? Your time management? If he's not, what else is in his place?

Apply the Word

1. Which of these signs may reveal that money is your master rather than your slave?
 - You feel far more excited about getting money than you are about giving it.
 - You place normal daily expenditures on credit cards because you don't have the cash.
 - You continue to borrow money to buy luxury and depreciating items.
 - You are consistently late paying your bills.
 - Your thoughts are dominated by get-rich-quick schemes.
 - You are dishonest in your financial dealings.
 - You find it difficult to give to God's work.
2. What one step can you take *this week* to becoming a better steward of the money God gives you to manage?

Gospel Truth

Explore the Word

1. Read Luke 1:1-4.
 - a. According to Luke, why did he write his Gospel (vv. 1-3)?
 - b. What sources did Luke apparently use to write his Gospel?
 - c. How does Luke describe his process of writing his Gospel?
 - d. What ultimate purpose did Luke have in mind for writing his Gospel (v. 4)?
2. Read Micah 5:2-6.
 - a. Where did Micah predict the Messiah would be born (v. 2)? How do we know this prophecy spoke of the Messiah?
 - b. How does Micah characterize the land of Israel at the time of Messiah's birth (v. 3)?
 - c. How does Micah describe the work of the Messiah in verse 4?
 - d. How does Micah describe what the Messiah is able to do for his people (vv. 5-6)?

Some Words About the Word

1. The Christian religion boils down to receiving life from and with Jesus. No other faith is so dependent on one human.
 - a. What does it mean to receive life *from* Jesus? Have you received this life? Explain.

- b. What does it mean to receive life *with* Jesus? Explain.
 - c. How is the Christian faith so dependent on Jesus himself?
2. More than a philosophical system, faith in Jesus is built on the historical Jesus dying a historical death and experiencing a historical resurrection. More than historical reliability, it is historical reality.
 - a. How would you describe the philosophical system of Christianity?
 - b. Why is it crucial for there to be a historical Jesus who died a historical death and had a historical resurrection?
 - c. Why is it important that the Christian faith be historically reliable? Why is it more important that it reflect historical reality?
3. The Christian faith is not a leap into the dark and a hope for the best. It is a rigorous faith that rests on the solid foundation of the most reliable facts.
 - a. Why do some people think that the Christian faith *is* a leap into the dark?
 - b. What's the difference between hoping for the best and having a firm hope?
 - c. In what way(s) is Christianity a rigorous faith? How would you describe its solid foundation?

Apply the Word

1. In half a page, describe the hope you have in Jesus. How, specifically, does this hope change the way you live?
2. Imagine that someone has challenged you about the historical evidence for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. How would you answer this person? What steps can you take *now* to be better prepared for such an encounter?

Don't Touch That Dial!

Explore the Word

1. Read Matthew 1:18-25.
 - a. How does Matthew describe Mary's pregnancy (v. 18)?
 - b. What did Joseph intend to do when he learned of Mary's pregnancy (v. 19)?
 - c. How did the Lord intervene to scrap Joseph's plans (vv. 20-21)?
 - d. Why did all of this happen as it did, according to verses 22-23?
 - e. How did Joseph respond to God's direction through the angel (v. 24)? What might have made this difficult?
 - f. Describe what you learn of Joseph in verse 25.
2. Read 1 Peter 1:10-12.
 - a. What phrase does Peter use to describe the salvation that the prophets wanted to know about (v. 11)? Why describe it like this?
 - b. What did the prophets want to know about (v. 10)? What two aspects of Christ's ministry did they want to know? Why both of these aspects?
 - c. What was revealed to these prophets (v. 12)? What so interested both the prophets and the angels?

Some Words About the Word

1. We need to learn that God acts in unusual ways.

- a. Recount at least three instances in the Bible where you think God acted in unusual ways.
 - b. Describe a couple times in your own life when it appeared to you that God was acting in an unusual way.
 - c. Why do you think God acts in unexpected ways?
2. If Joseph had changed the dial of his life, he would not have witnessed the greatest, most momentous, life-changing birth in the history of the world.
 - a. Why do you think God didn't tell Joseph about the coming birth of the Messiah at the same time that he told Mary? Why do you think he made Joseph wait to hear the news?
 - b. What do you suppose went through Joseph's mind when he heard the truth in his dream?
 - c. If Joseph had "changed the dial," what do you imagine God might have done in response?
3. When life is hard, times are tough, and you are thinking about giving up on the church, giving up on your marriage, giving up on truth, giving up on prayer, giving up on God, and giving up on yourself, don't touch that dial. God still acts in unusual ways. He still speaks in unusual times and still accomplishes unusual things in the lives of those who will stay tuned to him.
 - a. Would you say that you are "tuned in" to God? Explain.
 - b. Describe a time when you felt tempted to give up on one of the things listed above. What happened?
 - c. Is there any unusual thing you wish God would do in your life now? If so, describe it.

Apply the Word

1. Describe the ways you stay “tuned in” to God. Are you satisfied with the results? Explain. What could you do to improve your results?
2. Ask some of your Christian friends to describe some unusual things God has done in their lives. What do their testimonies do for your own faith?

Demons: The Bad Guys

Explore the Word

1. Read Mark 1:21-27.
 - a. Where did Jesus teach (v. 21)? Why there?
 - b. What amazed the people about Jesus's teaching (v. 22)?
 - c. How did a demon-possessed man respond to Jesus's presence (vv. 23-24)?
 - d. How did Jesus respond to the demon (vv. 25-26)? What does this demonstrate about Jesus's authority?
 - e. How did the people react to this incident (v. 27)?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.
 - a. How does Paul describe the false apostles of his day (v. 13)?
 - b. How does Satan often like to present himself (v. 14)?
 - c. Why, then, is it no surprise that his servants do the same thing (v. 15)? What will be the end of these servants?

Some Words About the Word

1. Demons are evil angels who rebelled against God and now work evil in the world.
 - a. How would you respond to someone who insisted demons were mythological, the creation of a more primitive and superstitious age?
 - b. Why do you think God continues to allow demons to do their evil work?

- c. If you were ever to face demonic opposition, what would you do?
2. The number one desire of every demon is to keep people from coming to the true God, hearing the true gospel, and placing their faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Why would demons want to keep people from coming to the true God through hearing the gospel?
 - b. What are some ways demons might try to keep people from coming to the true God?
 - c. If effective evangelism implies spiritual warfare, what are you doing to effectively engage in this spiritual warfare?
3. If you do not follow Jesus and do not have his Holy Spirit living within you, then you are defeated before you have even started. But the moment you come to the cross of Jesus Christ and trust him as your Lord and Savior, you will battle demons, but you will never be possessed or defeated by them.
 - a. Why is someone who doesn't follow Jesus or have his Holy Spirit living within defeated from the start?
 - b. Why can't a Christian be possessed by a demonic spirit?
 - c. How are Christians sometimes defeated by demonic forces? How can you get equipped to be on the winning side?

Apply the Word

1. The apostle Paul tells us that he was not unaware of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). What satanic "schemes" are you aware of in your own life? How can this knowledge help you to keep from being "outwitted" by the devil?
2. Read James 4:7. In what ways do we demonstrate we are submitting to God? In what ways can we resist the devil?

Angels: The Good Guys

Explore the Word

1. Read Revelation 12:7-12.
 - a. What battle is described in verses 7-8? Who are the main participants?
 - b. What was the outcome of this battle (v. 9)?
 - c. How does verse 10 describe one of the main activities of Satan?
 - d. How did the followers of Jesus overcome Satan (v. 11)? What could this overcoming cost them?
 - e. How are heaven and earth contrasted in verse 12? Why are they pictured in this way?
2. Read Hebrews 1:3-14.
 - a. How does the writer of Hebrews contrast Jesus with angels in verses 3-4? Why is this significant?
 - b. Why does the writer quote two Old Testament verses in verse 5?
 - c. What is the relationship of angels to Jesus (v. 6)?
 - d. How does the writer describe the ministry of angels in verse 7?
 - e. How does the writer contrast angels and Jesus in verse 13?
 - f. How does the writer describe the ministry of angels in verse 14?

Some Words About the Word

1. Angels are created beings with a beginning, but they will live eternally. Angels do not have bodies like humans, so they cannot die. They are 100 percent pure, immortal spiritual beings.
 - a. Describe your mental picture of angels.
 - b. If angels do not have bodies like humans, then why, in the Bible, are they often described as appearing as humans?
 - c. If angels are 100 percent immortal, then how could any of them have fallen and become demons?
2. Angels are not omnipotent like God, but they are stronger than humans. They are not omniscient but have greater knowledge than humans, and though they are not omnipresent, they can travel more easily and quickly than humans.
 - a. In what ways are angels stronger than humans?
 - b. How do we know that angels have greater knowledge than humans?
 - c. How does it make you feel to know that angels can travel more easily and quickly than humans?
3. As powerful as the devil and his demons are, they are no match for God's angels. The angels are on the side of Jesus Christ. They worshiped him when he came into this world, they worked for him after he left this world, and they will war for him when he comes back to this world.
 - a. Why are Satan and his demons no match for God's angels?
 - b. What role will angels have when Jesus comes back to this earth?
 - c. What role do you think angels have played in your life?

Apply the Word

1. Read Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:8-14. What do these passages tell you about angels?
2. Suppose a skeptic were to tell you that angels are fictional, the creation of an earlier, primitive age. How would you respond?

There's More to Life

Explore the Word

1. Read John 10:7-10.
 - a. How does Jesus describe himself in verse 7? What does he mean?
 - b. How does Jesus compare himself to the religious leaders of his day (v. 8)?
 - c. What contrast does Jesus make in verse 10? How does he characterize the work of Satan? How does he characterize his own work?
2. Read Romans 8:15-21.
 - a. What kind of “spirit” had the Roman Christians received (v. 15)? In what way did this gift change the way they related to God?
 - b. How do genuine followers of Jesus know they really believe (v. 16)?
 - c. What does it mean to be an heir of God (v. 17)?
 - d. What perspective did Paul have on his sufferings (v. 18)?
 - e. What future event did Paul contemplate that helped him to deal with his sufferings (vv. 19-21)? How could doing the same help you?

Some Words About the Word

1. “Every man dies, but not every man lives.”
 - a. In your own words, what does the statement above mean to you?

- b. Do you think you are “living” in the sense intended above? Explain.
 - c. In what way(s) do you think you could be living more abundantly right now? How do you think it would be possible to achieve this greater level of living?
2. Though the disciples experienced violent deaths, we are sitting here today talking about them because they experienced the *more* of life. They fulfilled the purpose God had for them, and the only thing that gives life value is a purpose that will outlive your life.
 - a. How would you say that the disciples “experienced the *more* of life”?
 - b. Do you believe that you are fulfilling the purpose God has for you? Explain.
 - c. What *specific* purpose for your life can outlive your life?
3. We live for the one who gave his life so that we might have life and give it to others. Life begins when we give the life that will end in order to have the life that will never end.
 - a. How are you living for the one who gave his life for you?
 - b. If your life were to come to an end tonight, would you say that you had a fulfilled life? Explain.
 - c. Describe what comes to mind when you imagine “the life that will never end.”

Apply the Word

1. View at least a couple stories told by individuals transformed by Jesus (for example, see the website <https://www.cityrescue.org/stories/transformed-lives/>). How do these stories affect you?
2. Prepare your own story of how Jesus has transformed *your* life. Consider having it recorded for your friends and family.

Towel Off

Explore the Word

1. Read John 13:1-17.
 - a. What did Jesus know, according to verse 1? What did he intend to show his disciples?
 - b. Why does John mention the detail about Judas at the beginning of this story (v. 2)?
 - c. What did Jesus know, according to verse 3? How does this relate to the story that follows?
 - d. What did Jesus do, as described in verses 4-5? Why was this significant?
 - e. Describe the interaction between Jesus and Peter in verses 6-10.
 - f. How did Jesus explain the significance of his actions in verses 12-17?
2. Read Galatians 5:13-15.
 - a. In what way were you “called to freedom” (v. 13)?
 - b. How are you to use your freedom (v. 13)?
 - c. How can the whole law be summed up (v. 14)? How does this sum up the law?
 - d. What warning is given in verse 15? How is this connected to verses 13-14?

Some Words About the Word

1. The lower you go, the greater you become.

- a. Why does a person become greater when he goes lower? What does this mean?
 - b. In your own life, how can you go lower? What might this look like?
 - c. Who is it hardest for you to serve? Why?
2. A follower of Jesus surrenders his power for the good of others.
- a. What power do you have that could be surrendered for the good of others?
 - b. How can you more often surrender this power for the good of others?
 - c. Who in your life most needs to see you surrender your power for their good?
3. Always see how you can serve others, and don't worry about how others can serve you. Shift your thinking. Switch your perceptions, and then you'll be able to do the next thing.
- a. Do you spend more time thinking about how you can serve others, or about how others can serve you? Explain.
 - b. What specifically can you do to shift your thinking so that you better serve others?
 - c. What perceptions do you need to change so that you can become a more effective and God-honoring servant?

Apply the Word

1. In what area of your church could you serve where you are not currently serving? Ask how you could help in that area, at least for a limited time.
2. Where could you serve in your community—especially in an area that would stretch you, where you might feel uncomfortable? Commit this possibility to God in prayer. Spend at least a couple weeks in prayer about this.

The Warrior Rises

Explore the Word

1. Read Matthew 28:1-20.
 - a. Describe the events recounted in verses 1-10.
 - b. Why did the guards report to the chief priests (v. 11)? How did the religious leaders respond (vv. 12-14)? What was the result (v. 15)?
 - c. What two reactions does Matthew record to the disciples seeing Jesus (v. 17)? Why these two reactions?
 - d. What declaration did Jesus make in verse 18?
 - e. What command did Jesus give to his disciples, based on his declaration (vv. 19-20)?
 - f. What promise did Jesus give us in verse 20? How is this intended to help us fulfill the command he gave?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.
 - a. What compelled Paul to fulfill his ministry (v. 14)?
 - b. How are genuine followers of Christ to live, in view of Christ's death and resurrection (v. 15)?
 - c. How does a Christian's perspective on people change due to Christ's death and resurrection (v. 16)?
 - d. Describe the change that happens when someone comes to faith in Jesus (v. 17).
 - e. Describe the "ministry of reconciliation" outlined in verses 18-20. To whom has this ministry been given?
 - f. How does verse 21 describe the exchange Jesus made at the cross?

Some Words About the Word

1. When you understand why Jesus died on the cross and what happened after his death, then you understand why only he could give every one of us the ability to win our war.
 - a. What would you tell someone who asked you why Jesus had to die on the cross?
 - b. What would have happened had Jesus stayed in the grave?
 - c. Why does the resurrection show that Jesus can give you the ability to win your war?
2. Why do you think Barabbas is even in this story? Because you are Barabbas. I am Barabbas. We are all Barabbas. Jesus was not only his substitute, but he was *our* substitute. He died not only in Barabbas's place, but he died in *our* place.
 - a. Answer the question above: Why was Barabbas mentioned?
 - b. In what way did Jesus die in your place?
 - c. We're not told what happened to Barabbas after his release, but get creative and imagine some possible scenarios of what *could* have happened.
3. If you try to defeat sin in your own power, you will lose. If you die without this warrior, death wins. Come to the cross and surrender your life to him so that the warrior who rose from the dead will come into your life, fight your battles, and give you victory over sin and life after death.
 - a. How have you tried to defeat sin in your own power? What happened?
 - b. How can Jesus "fight your battles"? Does this mean you sit back passively? Explain.
 - c. Describe an area of your life in which Jesus has given you victory over sin. How did he accomplish this?

Apply the Word

1. How does reading this chapter help you to better appreciate what Jesus did for you?
2. Ask your pastor to help you connect with someone in your church who would be willing to be interviewed about how Jesus has transformed his or her life. And then follow through with the interview.

Set on Fire!

Explore the Word

1. Read Acts 1:1-9.
 - a. What had Luke written about previously (vv. 1-2)?
 - b. What “many proofs” did Luke have in mind in verse 3?
 - c. What command of Jesus is recorded in verses 4-5?
 - d. What question did Jesus’s disciples ask him (v. 6)?
 - e. How did Jesus respond to their question (v. 7)?
 - f. What command did he give them (v. 8)?
 - g. What happened after Jesus answered the disciples’ question (v. 9)? Why do you think Jesus didn’t remain on earth in physical form any longer?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10.
 - a. What did the Thessalonians “know” (v. 4)?
 - b. How did they know this (v. 5)?
 - c. How does Paul describe the lives of the Thessalonians after they placed their faith in Jesus (v. 6)?
 - d. Of what did the Thessalonians become a model (v. 7)? To whom?
 - e. Describe the kind of faith that had become known “everywhere” (vv. 8-10). List as many aspects of this faith as you can discern. Should any of these aspects of faith also characterize our own faith? Explain.

Some Words About the Word

1. Is your Christian faith a raging fire or a dull habit? Someone said, “We are not going to move this world by criticism of it, nor conformity to it, but by the combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God.”
 - a. Answer the question above, and explain why you gave this answer.
 - b. Why doesn’t criticism of the world move the world?
 - c. In what ways do you feel tempted to conform to this world?
 - d. Would you say your life has been ignited by the Spirit of God? Explain.
2. Are you a witness for Jesus Christ? If not, it’s because either you refuse to testify to the Jesus you have experienced, or you have never experienced Jesus.
 - a. Answer the question above.
 - b. Do you testify to the Jesus you have experienced? Explain.
 - c. Describe your experience of Jesus. How is he involved in your life?
3. When the spark of the Holy Spirit meets the kindling of a heart for God, it will ignite a fire for Jesus Christ.
 - a. How would you describe your own heart for God?
 - b. Are you “on fire” for Jesus? Explain.
 - c. Describe someone you know who you see as “on fire” for God. Do you admire this person? Explain.

Apply the Word

1. Consider what you have read in your Bible about the apostles after Jesus left them to carry on his work. What do you think made the apostles so effective?

2. Find a person who is active in reaching non-Christians, and ask for fifteen minutes of his or her time. Use that time to discover what gives the person such a burden and passion for sharing Christ with unbelievers.

Be Sure

Explore the Word

1. Read Romans 3:21-24.
 - a. What “righteousness” does Paul describe in verses 21-22? How is it gained?
 - b. What is the condition of every person born into this world (v. 23)?
 - c. How can individuals come into a right relationship with God (v. 24)?
2. Read Romans 10:5-14.
 - a. What kind of righteousness comes by fulfilling the demands of the law (v. 5)?
 - b. Describe the kind of righteousness that comes by faith (vv. 6-9).
 - c. Why does Paul make a distinction between the “heart” and the “mouth” (v. 10)?
 - d. What Old Testament support does Paul give for his position (v. 11)?
 - e. What distinction is erased in Paul’s understanding of the gospel (vv. 12-13)?
 - f. What is Paul pleading for in verses 14-15? Why does he make this plea?

Some Words About the Word

1. We need to see that we—you, me, your nice neighbor—are sinners in God’s eyes, and we are separated from him.

- a. Do you see yourself as a sinner? Explain.
 - b. Why does the presence of sin separate people from God?
 - c. What visible effects come from a person who is separated from God?
2. The cross is both a bridge and a wall. It is a bridge to heaven for those who take it and a wall over heaven for those who reject it. If you are going to become a Christian and be sure that you have eternal life, you must understand that Christ, the only sinless man and Son of God, died for your sins and came back from the dead.
- a. Is the cross a bridge or a wall to you? Explain.
 - b. Why did Jesus have to be sinless to become our Savior?
 - c. Why did Jesus have to rise from the dead to become our Savior?
3. Jesus wants to do more than cancel your sin. He wants to control your life. He also wants to do more than promise you a future. He wants to walk with you in your present.
- a. Would you say that Jesus controls your life? Explain.
 - b. How does Jesus walk with you in your present?
 - c. How does the future Jesus has promised you affect the way you live in the present?

Apply the Word

1. What other metaphors could describe the cross, other than a bridge or a wall? How do these metaphors help you to better understand what Jesus did for you at Calvary?
2. Imagine that someone said to you, "I'm a good person. I don't need a Savior." How would you show this person that he or she is, in fact, a sinner?

You Can Know Everything Will Work Out

Explore the Word

1. Read Romans 8:28-30.
 - a. What do believers “know” (v. 28)? Why is it important to know this?
 - b. What is the certain future of everyone who comes to faith in Jesus (v. 29)? Why is this certain? What does Paul say God had in mind?
 - c. What theological sequence does Paul outline in verse 30? What is significant about this sequence?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.
 - a. What does it mean that Jesus was the “firstfruits” of those who “have fallen asleep” (v. 20)? Why is this important?
 - b. What comparison and contrast does Paul make in verses 21-22? How is this important?
 - c. What sequence does Paul outline in verses 23-26? How is this sequence important to you?
 - d. In verses 27-28, how is God shown to be the center of everything? How should this knowledge about the future affect how we as believers live even today?

Some Words About the Word

1. Behind every promise of God is the providence of God. Things don’t work out coincidentally, things don’t work out accidentally, but things work out providentially.
 - a. How would you define the providence of God? Why is this important?

- b. Describe an event in your own life that you believe pictures the providence of God.
 - c. What are some of your favorite promises from God? How do they demonstrate his providence?
2. God always acts in your best interests. It may be hard to believe in light of the hurt and loss you have experienced, but your bad days are his materials for building good.
 - a. Do you believe that God always acts in your best interests? Explain.
 - b. How have you seen God use your bad days for building something good?
 - c. How important is it for you to believe that God knows how to take the worst things that happen in your life and use them for good? Explain.
3. God uses our life on earth to prepare us for a life in eternity. When we get into a bad situation, we want God to change the circumstances, but God is more concerned about changing our character. He wants to change what happens *in* us more than what happens *to* us.
 - a. How do you think God is using your life on earth to prepare you for eternity?
 - b. In what ways do you believe God is at work changing your character?
 - c. How may God want to change what is happening *in* you?

Apply the Word

1. How would you respond to someone who said, “There is no divine providence; there is only lucky coincidence”?
2. See what happens when you ask three people at your church to name a time when they experienced the providence of God.

The Message that Could Change Your Life

Explore the Word

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.
 - a. What does it mean to take a stand on the gospel (v. 1)?
 - b. What would it mean to believe “in vain” (v. 2)?
 - c. Why does Paul describe his gospel as something of “first importance” (v. 3)?
 - d. What are the key elements of the gospel (vv. 3-8)?
2. Read Romans 1:16-17.
 - a. Why was Paul “not ashamed” of the gospel (v. 16)? Have you ever felt ashamed of the gospel? Explain.
 - b. For whom is the gospel intended (v. 16)?
 - c. What does the gospel reveal to the world (v. 17)?
 - d. Why does Paul include an Old Testament reference in his description of the gospel (v. 17)?

Some Words About the Word

1. Jesus’s death stands out above every other death in history because he died *for* our sins. He did not die as a martyr. He did not die as an example. He died as a Savior.
 - a. Why could no one other than Jesus die for our sins?
 - b. Did Jesus give us an example of how to die? Explain.
 - c. How often do you think of Jesus as your Savior? Describe these thoughts.
2. The crowning point of the gospel is the resurrection of Jesus.

- a. Why is the resurrection of Jesus the crowning point of the gospel?
 - b. Why do you believe that Jesus really rose from the dead?
 - c. How does the apostle Paul connect the power that raised Jesus from the dead to our own experience (see 2 Corinthians 13:4)?
3. When you call upon the name of the Lord, if you do it in sincerity and surrender to Jesus Christ, the Holy God *will* save you.
- a. What does it mean to “call upon the name of the Lord”? Have you done this? Explain.
 - b. What would you say is the proof of someone’s sincerity in calling upon the name of the Lord?
 - c. What happens when God saves someone?

Apply the Word

1. How does the gospel message change your life right now? How do you live your life differently than before you understood and accepted the gospel?
2. Every Christian is supposed to be involved in the sharing of the gospel. How can you best be involved? Name at least three ways you can help to spread the gospel. Who could you partner with in this endeavor?

No Small Comfort

Explore the Word

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.
 - a. How does Paul describe God in verse 3?
 - b. What does God do for us (v. 4)? Why does he do this?
 - c. What two things are said to flow in and out of the lives of believers (v. 5)? What has this looked like in your own life?
 - d. What is divine comfort intended to produce (v. 6)?
 - e. What kind of “hope” did Paul have for the Corinthians (v. 7)? What let him know this hope would be fulfilled?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-13.
 - a. How did Paul describe his life in verse 5?
 - b. How did God comfort Paul (vv. 6-7)?
 - c. What did Paul both regret and not regret about his first letter to the Corinthians (v. 8)?
 - d. What made the apostle happy (v. 9)?
 - e. Describe the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow (v. 10).
 - f. What things does godly sorrow produce (v. 11)?
 - g. What especially encouraged the apostle (v. 13)?

Some Words About the Word

1. When it comes to pain, people who know God, love God, serve God, trust God, believe God, and obey God are just like people who don't. We all have heart attacks, miscarriages, and misunderstandings. We all lose jobs, friends, and money. The difference is every follower of Christ has the comfort of God available to him or her.
 - a. Why do both believers in Jesus and nonbelievers suffer from the same types of pain?
 - b. How have you experienced the comfort of God?
 - c. How can one distinguish the comfort of God from other sources of comfort?
2. You will never know just how much God cares about you and how much he loves you until you go through trials and tribulations and find he is standing right beside you to comfort and strengthen you.
 - a. How have you sensed God "standing right beside you"?
 - b. If God really loved someone, why would he allow that person to go through trials and tribulations?
 - c. How would you describe God's comfort to someone who had never experienced it? How could you help that person to experience it?
3. God does not comfort us to make us comfortable but to make us comforters. God wants to take the heartache in your life and transform it into a balm of comfort in someone else's life.
 - a. What sort of comforter are you?
 - b. Who in your life most needs a comforter right now?
 - c. Think of the worst heartache you've ever experienced. How can God use *that* to bring comfort to someone else?

Apply the Word

1. Who in your sphere of influence most needs God's comfort right now? How can you help to meet that need in a practical, timely way?
2. Think of the times God has comforted you in times of difficulty or sorrow. What did you learn during those times that can help you to become a more effective comforter to others?

Dying to Live

Explore the Word

1. Read Galatians 2:19-21.
 - a. How did Paul die to the law (v. 19)? How did this help him to live for God?
 - b. How was Paul “crucified” with Christ (v. 20)? Why could he say, “It is no longer I who live”? What did he mean?
 - c. If we could be made righteous by keeping the law, would Christ have had to die? Explain (v. 21).
2. Read Romans 8:10.
 - a. What does it mean to have Christ “in” you?
 - b. What does it mean that your body is “dead” because of sin?
 - c. What does it mean that your spirit is alive because of righteousness?

Some Words About the Word

1. Two people must die in order for you to become a Christian. Jesus was first, but you go second.
 - a. Have you “died” to become a Christian? Explain.
 - b. What do you think the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, “I die every day” (1 Corinthians 15:31)?
 - c. What does it mean for you to be “crucified with Christ”? What does that look like in daily life?
2. I cannot live the Christian life; Christ lives it in me. Think of the word *Christian* as a combination of *Christ* plus *in*. The

Christian life is not you living for Jesus; it is Jesus living in you.

- a. Why is it impossible for you to live the Christian life?
 - b. How have others seen Jesus living in you?
 - c. In what life situations is it least likely that others will see Jesus living in you? Explain.
3. A Christian is not the old man trying to live his best for Jesus. The Christian is someone who allows the old man to be crucified so that Jesus can live through the new man.
- a. What is meant by the phrase “the old man”?
 - b. How do you “crucify” this old man? Why is this not a once-for-all event?
 - c. The apostle Paul says that “effort” is required in living for Jesus (Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:3). How is this “effort” not “the old man trying to live his best for Jesus”?

Apply the Word

1. In your own words, what does it mean to live “the crucified life”?
2. How can a grace-filled Christian life still require strenuous effort (see 1 Corinthians 15:10)?

The Shadow

Explore the Word

1. Read Galatians 6:13-16.
 - a. Name at least two problems facing those who wanted the Galatians to get circumcised (v. 13).
 - b. In what did Paul want to “boast” (v. 14)? What did this mean in practical terms? How was Paul “crucified” to the world? How was the world “crucified” to him?
 - c. If circumcision counts for nothing, then what does count (v. 15)? Why does it count?
 - d. What blessing did Paul call upon those who followed the “rule” he laid out (v. 16)? What was this “rule”?
2. Read Philippians 3:7-11.
 - a. What things did Paul consider to be to his profit (v. 7)? Why?
 - b. What comparison does Paul make in verse 8? What great thing did he gain?
 - c. What did it mean to Paul to be “found” in Jesus (v. 9)?
 - d. What things did Paul want to “know” (v. 10)?
 - e. What was the apostle’s great hope (v. 11)?

Some Words About the Word

1. You are going to live your life in the shadow of something. Maybe it is in the shadow of money, work, depression, or guilt. What would it mean for you to live in the shadow of the cross?

- a. Under what shadow are you living your life?
 - b. What changes would help you live more in the shadow of the cross?
2. If you are fighting a spiritual battle that you seem to be losing, take ten seconds and focus on Jesus dying on the cross. The cross both kills the thrill of temptation and gives life to the desire to be holy and righteous.
- a. Are you fighting a spiritual battle that you seem to be losing? Describe it.
 - b. How does meditating on the cross kill the thrill of temptation?
 - c. How do you think *you* can best stoke the desire to live a holy and righteous life?
3. Crucifixion is something that must be done to you. You must surrender to the crucifixion and die to your ego, ambitions, wants, and beliefs. Surrender is the key to the whole Christian life, and we cannot do it without passion.
- a. What does it mean to “surrender to the crucifixion”?
 - b. How do you need to die to your ego, ambitions, wants, and beliefs?
 - c. How does someone surrender “with passion”? What does this look like?

Apply the Word

1. What sacrifices did Jesus make to die on the cross for you?
2. What effect should Jesus’s willing sacrifice have on you?

The Prize Is Not for Sale

Explore the Word

1. Read Ephesians 2:8-10.
 - a. According to verse 8, how is a person saved? Does this originate with you, or with God? Explain.
 - b. What contrast is explicitly made in verse 9? Why is this contrast made?
 - c. How does Paul describe us in verse 10? For what are we created? Why?
2. Read Acts 8:9-24.
 - a. What do you learn about a man named Simon (vv. 9-11)?
 - b. What happened to put an end to Simon's popularity (v. 12)?
 - c. What did Simon think of the things he saw happening in the ministry of the apostles (v. 13)?
 - d. How did the church in Jerusalem respond when it heard that the people in Samaria had welcomed the gospel (vv. 14-16)?
 - e. What happened when Peter and John placed their hands on the new converts (v. 17)?
 - f. How did Simon react to seeing these incidents (vv. 18-19)?
 - g. How did Peter respond to Simon's proposal (vv. 20-23)?
 - h. How did Simon react to Peter's words (v. 24)?

Some Words About the Word

1. God deals with people in three ways. God can deal with us according to *justice* by giving us what we deserve. God can deal with us according to *mercy* by not giving us the punishment we deserve. Or God can deal with us with *grace* by giving us something good that we do not deserve.
 - a. How do you think God is dealing with you right now? Explain.
 - b. How have you experienced God's mercy in your life?
 - c. How have you experienced God's grace in your life?
2. When the Bible talks about faith, it doesn't mean believing *in* something. It means believing *on* something. Children believe *in* the tooth fairy, but I believe *on* the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe *on* Jesus means to receive Jesus. When you receive Jesus, you receive what Jesus has, which is salvation by grace.
 - a. What is the difference between believing "in" something and believing "on" something?
 - b. What does it mean to "receive" Jesus?
 - c. Have you received Jesus? Explain.
3. Good works are related to salvation, but not the way most people think. Good works are not the price of salvation. They are the proof of salvation.
 - a. How do most people think good works are related to salvation?
 - b. What good works do you think provide evidence of *your* salvation?
 - c. Is it possible to be a genuine Christian and show no outward evidence of having received salvation? Explain.

Apply the Word

1. How would you explain to a nonchurched person the difference between believing *in* something and believing *on* something?
2. What would you say to people who say they have received Jesus as Savior but continue to live exactly as they did before?

One Thing

Explore the Word

1. Read Philippians 3:12-14.
 - a. How did Paul intend to “press on” in his faith (v. 12)? Why did he intend to do this?
 - b. Why was Paul so insistent that he had not yet arrived spiritually (v. 13)? What “one thing” did he intend to do?
 - c. How did Paul describe his life’s goal (v. 14)? Is this your life’s goal as well? Explain.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1.
 - a. What general principle did Paul lay out in verse 31?
 - b. In what way could you cause other believers to stumble (v. 32)? How can you avoid doing this?
 - c. How did Paul try to conduct himself in ministry (v. 33)? Why did he do this?
 - d. What instruction did Paul give the Corinthians (11:1)? Should we be able to say the same thing? Why or why not?

Some Words About the Word

1. When God says, “I will remember your sins no more,” it doesn’t mean that God all of a sudden gets spiritual amnesia. It means he no longer allows your past to affect your relationship to him.
 - a. Do you allow your past to affect your relationship with God? Explain.

- b. What does it mean to you that God says he will remember *your* sins no more?
 - c. How can you stop allowing your past to negatively affect your relationship with God?
 2. You cannot sail your ship into the seas of the future with joy and peace if your anchor is stuck in the mud of the past.
 - a. What anchor(s) do you have stuck in the mud of the past?
 - b. Where would you like to see your ship sail into the future? What, if anything, is holding you back?
 - c. How much joy and peace do you currently enjoy? Explain.
 3. Concentration is the secret of power. A river that flows in one direction and one direction only can become a tremendous source of electric energy. If you can take light and concentrate it and its power, you can make a laser that can cut through steel.
 - a. How can concentration be the secret of power?
 - b. In what areas of your faith do you need to concentrate more?
 - c. How can you increase your concentration in the areas you named above? What can you do practically to help yourself in this area? How could others help you?

Apply the Word

1. Take a few minutes to think about your goal. What's your *one thing* that will make you productive and pleasing to God and the world?
2. Think of someone you know whose anchor is stuck in the mud of the past. How could you help this person to get unstuck?

Rest in Peace

Explore the Word

1. Read John 14:26-28.
 - a. Who is the “Helper” mentioned in verse 26? Who sent him? What does he do?
 - b. Describe the connection between verse 26 and verse 27. How does Jesus give us his “peace”? Why should our hearts not be troubled? How can we avoid feeling afraid?
 - c. What reason did Jesus give his disciples for feeling glad that he was about to leave them (v. 28)? Why should this reason still encourage us today?
2. Read 1 Peter 5:6-11.
 - a. What instruction does Peter give us in verse 6? What is the reason for this instruction?
 - b. What instruction does Peter give us in verse 7? What reason does he give for this instruction?
 - c. How are Christians to prepare themselves for spiritual attacks (vv. 8-9)? How does Peter try to encourage his fellow believers? Why should this encourage his fellow believers?
 - d. What promise does Peter lay out in verse 10? How might this promise relate to you? Explain.

Some Words About the Word

1. You won't find a lot of joy in big pressures, tough problems, and difficult people, but you can always rejoice *in the Lord*.

You can always rejoice in the greatness, grace, and goodness of God.

- a. What do you find most difficult about rejoicing in the Lord when you face big pressures, tough problems, and difficult people?
 - b. Where have you most clearly seen the greatness of God? Where have you most clearly seen the grace of God? Where have you most clearly seen the goodness of God?
 - c. What does rejoicing look like for you? How do you think you could encourage yourself to do more of it?
2. You ought to learn four words to say to yourself every time the thief of anxiety tries to steal your peace. These four words are, “The Lord is near.”
- a. When do you most tend to feel anxiety?
 - b. The Lord doesn’t always *feel* near, even though he dwells inside every Christian. How can you overcome that feeling of remoteness, especially when anxiety comes calling?
 - c. Name four promises in God’s word that insist we can experience God’s peace even in the midst of turmoil.
3. We aren’t supposed to pretend that we don’t have reasons to worry because we naturally do. But every time something bursts into our life that raises our anxiety level, that is God’s engraved invitation to come to him in prayer and give the cause of our worry to him.
- a. What issues are causing you to worry right now?
 - b. How can you effectively pray about whatever is worrying you?
 - c. What does it mean to give your worries to God? What does this look like? Is this easy or hard for you? Explain.

Apply the Word

1. For what are you most thankful in your life? Make a list, and spend some extended time thanking God for his work in you.
2. The best rejoicing is done with others. How can you help others to truly rejoice in God? What part of your story could you share that maybe you haven't yet shared with others?

More Bang for the Buck

Explore the Word

1. Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
 - a. What are financially wealthy Christians not to do, according to verse 17? What are they supposed to do instead?
 - b. What four commands are given to them in verse 18?
 - c. What promise is given to them in verse 19? How will this promise benefit them?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-12.
 - a. What basic principle is laid out in verse 6?
 - b. What instruction is given in verse 7? How are Christians to give? What reason is given for them to act in this way?
 - c. What promise is made in verse 8?
 - d. Why does Paul quote Psalm 112:9 in verse 9?
 - e. What promise is made in verses 10-11? What benefit is laid out?
 - f. What further benefit is described in verse 12? Why would Paul include this benefit? Why is it important?

Some Words About the Word

1. We have learned how to get rich, but we haven't learned how to be rich.
 - a. What's the difference between *getting* rich and *being* rich?
 - b. Would you call yourself rich? Explain.

- c. Who's the spiritually richest person you know? What makes him or her so spiritually rich?
2. The richest people in the world are those who use what God has given them to bless others.
 - a. What do you have that you can use to bless others?
 - b. Describe a time when you used your resources to bless someone else. Did it make you feel rich? Explain.
 - c. Why does it please God so much when we use what he's given us to bless others?
3. This is the cycle of generosity: God blesses you today, so you can bless others tomorrow, so he can bless you forever.
 - a. How is God blessing you today?
 - b. In what way(s) can you bless others tomorrow? Will you do so? Explain.
 - c. In what ways do you expect to be blessed eternally? How could that expectation spur you to become more of a blessing today?

Apply the Word

1. Name four new ways you could use some of your resources to bless others.
2. How is grace connected to generosity in your own life?

The Final Word

Explore the Word

1. Read Hebrews 4:12-13.
 - a. How does the writer describe the Bible in verse 12? Name the characteristics he lists.
 - b. How does the writer describe God himself in verse 13? What is the primary connection in thought between verses 12 and 13?
2. Read 2 Peter 1:20-21.
 - a. What should Christians understand “first of all,” according to verse 20? Why is this so important to understand?
 - b. How did the Bible come to be, according to verse 21? Why is this important?

Some Words About the Word

1. The Bible is a book that originated in the mind of God, was communicated from the mouth of God, and was then articulated by the messenger of God.
 - a. Could it be said that what the Bible says, God says? Explain.
 - b. Why do you think God used human messengers to articulate the Bible’s message? Why not bypass them and articulate it directly?
 - c. In your day-to-day life, what role does the Bible play in how you work, relate to others, use your resources, etc.?

2. When you read the Bible, God will speak to your heart to reveal any faults or failures. Like a spiritual CAT scan, reading the Bible with an open mind and an open heart will reveal those wrong thoughts, attitudes, and habits.
 - a. How in the past has God used the Bible to speak to your heart?
 - b. When God speaks to your heart through the Bible, how do you generally respond?
 - c. How is God using the Bible to reveal any wrong thoughts, attitudes, or habits you may have?
3. This book is God's final word on how to make sure you spend eternity with him. If you believe in heaven and are interested in going there, this book is God's final word on how to get there.
 - a. How do we know that the Bible is God's final word on how to spend eternity with him?
 - b. Does God still speak today? If so, how does he normally do that?
 - c. What do you think Scripture means when it says God's word "will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:6-8)?

Apply the Word

1. Are you satisfied with the amount of time you spend in the Bible? Why or why not? What could you do, starting today, that would get you closer to where you'd like to be?
2. How can you make your time spent in God's word more productive? Do you need an accountability partner? A reliable commentary? A more focused time of prayer? A study buddy? Decide what could most benefit you, and take steps to put it in place.

Amazing Grace

Explore the Word

1. Read Ephesians 4:2-10.
 - a. What instructions does the apostle give to believers in verses 2-3?
 - b. How does the apostle intend to foster unity in the church through what he writes in verses 4-6? List all the elements he names in this passage.
 - c. How does verse 7 introduce an element of variety within unity?
 - d. Why does the apostle quote the Old Testament in verse 8? What use does he make of this quotation? Why?
2. Read Titus 2:11-14.
 - a. To whom has God's grace appeared (v. 11)?
 - b. What does this grace teach us to do (v. 12)?
 - c. For what should all Christians be waiting (v. 13)? How does Paul describe it?
 - d. How does Paul describe Jesus in verse 14? What should characterize the true followers of Jesus?

Some Words About the Word

1. One of the sweetest words in the entire Bible is *grace*. Apart from grace you cannot know God, understand God, or relate to God. Without grace, churches would close their doors because they would not have a ministry or a message.

- a. How would you define *grace* (without saying “unmerited favor”)?
 - b. What role does grace play in your ongoing relationship with God?
 - c. Why would churches not have a ministry or message without grace?
2. Grace is free but not cheap. Jesus paid for it himself. You can receive grace or you can reject it, but you cannot earn it because it has already been bought and paid for.
- a. In what way is grace free? In what way is it not cheap?
 - b. Why is it impossible to earn grace?
 - c. How has grace been “bought and paid for”?
 - d. Is it possible to illegitimately presume upon grace? Explain.
3. Grace changes us. It changes our heart, our head, and our habits. When grace comes into our life, it gives us not only a love for God but a hatred for sin. It does not give us the license to live like we want to, but it gives us the liberty to live like we ought to.
- a. How has grace changed you? How has it changed your heart, your head, your habits?
 - b. Has grace given you a hatred for sin? Explain.
 - c. How does grace give you power to live like you ought to? Are you taking advantage of this power? Explain.

Apply the Word

1. As you consider the many times God shows grace to his followers throughout the Bible, what examples of his grace stand out to you the most, and why?

2. Who is the most grace-filled Christian you know personally?
Ask this person out for a meal and let him or her know that you'd like to ask some questions about how grace could more thoroughly fill your own life.

Breathing Your Last

Explore the Word

1. Read Hebrews 9:24-28.
 - a. How does the writer describe Jesus's current ministry to us (v. 24)? Why is this ministry important?
 - b. How does the writer contrast Jesus's sacrifice on the cross with the sacrifice made by the Jewish high priest every year (vv. 25-26)? In what ways are they different?
 - c. What general principle is laid out in verse 27?
 - d. Why does the writer insist that Jesus was sacrificed just once (v. 28)? What did Jesus accomplish through his single sacrifice? What will he do when he returns to earth in bodily form?
2. Read Romans 2:6-11.
 - a. Describe God's judgment as outlined in verse 6.
 - b. Who is described in verse 7? What is their destiny?
 - c. Who is described in verse 8? What is their destiny?
 - d. How do verses 9-10 summarize the previous verses?
 - e. Why does Paul include verse 11? What is his point?

Some Words About the Word

1. Three things are linked together in life: sin, death, and judgment. The result of sin is death, but the result of death is judgment.
 - a. How are sin and death connected?
 - b. Why does judgment follow death?

- c. Suppose you were to die at this moment. Do you fear the judgment to come? Explain.
2. If you refuse to accept Jesus into your life, you will stand before God as your judge and give an account for your refusal. If you receive Jesus into your life you don't have to face that judgment, but you will be judged for what you did for Christ after you received him. The difference between the two judgments is that one determines punishment and the other determines rewards.
 - a. Why will those who refuse to accept Jesus stand before God as their judge? How will such a judgment turn out?
 - b. When did you receive Christ as your Savior? Are you pleased with what you've done for him since then? Explain.
 - c. Do you think it's right to think of rewards as an incentive to work for Jesus? Explain.
3. Jesus came to die for your sin problem. When he takes care of your sin problem, he takes care of your death problem. When he takes care of your death problem, he takes care of your judgment problem.
 - a. Do you believe that Jesus took care of your sin problem? Explain.
 - b. In what way does Jesus take care of our death problem? Don't we still die?
 - c. Explain how Jesus takes care of the Christian's judgment problem.

Apply the Word

1. Many people today do not take God seriously, nor do they give much thought to the fact there is a coming time of judgment. What do you think would stir them to take God and judgment more seriously?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-14. What kinds of work would you describe as gold, silver, precious stones? What would you describe as wood, hay, straw? In what ways would living with a conscious awareness of 1 Corinthians 3:12-14 change how you live?

Root Canal

Explore the Word

1. Read Hebrews 12:14-17.
 - a. What kind of striving is urged upon Christians in verse 14? What does this striving look like? What reason is given for putting out this effort?
 - b. How is it possible to “fail to obtain” the grace of God (v. 15)? What happens when someone does this? What are the results?
 - c. What warning is given in verses 16-17? Why would this warning be given to those attending a Christian church?
2. Read Colossians 3:12-14.
 - a. How does Paul describe Christians in verse 12?
 - b. How does Paul urge Christians to live (vv. 12-13)? List all the traits he urges believers to develop.
 - c. How is verse 14 a summary of everything Paul has said in this passage? What does love accomplish in the assembly of believers, according to Paul?

Some Words About the Word

1. Bitterness is harbored hurt hidden in the heart. Like an emotional suicide bomber, you want to hurt others, and you're not averse to hurting yourself in the process. The deception of bitterness is that it destroys its own container—you.
 - a. Has bitterness ever been a problem for you? Explain.

- b. In what way is bitterness “hidden”? When does it come out in the open?
 - c. How does bitterness destroy the one who harbors it? Describe the situation of someone you know who has allowed bitterness to rule.
 2. You will never forgive someone for what they have done to you until you realize and experience how God has forgiven you for what you have done to him.
 - a. Who might you need to forgive? What has kept you from forgiving this person?
 - b. Why is our offense against God far greater than *any* offense against us?
 - c. What is the difference between *realizing* how God has forgiven you and *experiencing* it? Why do both things need to happen?
 3. You can be full of bitterness and empty of Jesus or you can be full of Jesus and empty of bitterness, but you cannot be both.
 - a. Why is it impossible to be full of both Jesus and bitterness?
 - b. Look carefully at your own heart. Do you see any bitterness within that needs to be ripped out? If so, how do you intend to do that?

Apply the Word

1. Toward whom do you feel bitter? Do any of the following scenarios describe you? You feel bitter toward...
 - God because of a tragedy that you blame him for.
 - A boss who unjustly fired you.
 - A spouse who left you for someone else.
 - A business partner who took financial advantage of you.
 - A relative or a friend who abused you.

- A parent who did not spend enough time with you.
- The church because of a bad experience.

If you harbor bitterness toward someone, what can you do to get rid of the bitterness?

2. What practical steps can we take to prevent bitterness from taking root within us?

The Test of Your Life

Explore the Word

1. Read James 1:2-12.
 - a. How are Christians supposed to react to trials (v. 2)?
 - b. Why are Christians supposed to react to trials in this way (v. 3)? What do trials help to develop in a believer's life?
 - c. What does perseverance produce in a believer's life (v. 4)? Why is this important?
 - d. What instruction is given in verse 5? What promise is given?
 - e. What warning is given in verse 6? Why is this warning given?
 - f. How does James describe Christians who habitually doubt God's intentions for them (vv. 7-8)? How does he warn these believers?
 - g. In what can poor believers take pride (v. 9)? Why?
 - h. In what can rich believers take pride (v. 10)? Why?
 - i. What picture does James give for helping rich Christians to understand their true situation (v. 11)? Why do you think he doesn't give poor believers a corresponding picture?
 - j. Why are Christians who persevere under trial "blessed" (v. 12)? What promise is given to them?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.
 - a. How does Paul describe his situation in the province of

Asia (v. 8)? Why did he want the Corinthians to know he felt this way?

- b. How severe was the trial Paul faced (v. 9)? Why did God allow the situation to grow so difficult?
- c. How did Paul continue to perform his ministry, despite severe challenges (v. 10)?
- d. What help did Paul request from his fellow believers (v. 11)? What did he expect to come from this help? How does this principle continue to hold true today?

Some Words About the Word

1. God knows whether a person's faith is real by looking on the inside, but the only way we can tell is by looking on the outside. What would your faith look like on the outside if it was real on the inside?
 - a. Answer the question above.
 - b. We all sometimes question the reality of our faith. How does "God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20) speak to that unfortunate truth?
 - c. Name one area of your faith that you would like to see strengthened in the coming year. How do you think you could work at strengthening it?
2. If you value your comfort more than you do your character or your feelings more than your faith, then trials, troubles, and tribulations will drive you away from God. If you value your character, your faith, and your walk with God more than anything material or physical, then you will be able to count troubles as joy because you know it grows you and makes you new.
 - a. How much do you value your comfort? When did you last make a decision that valued your character above your comfort?

- b. In your experience, do troubles tend to help you grow spiritually? Explain.
 - c. Think back over the past year. When did you see the biggest growth in your spiritual life? What was happening at the time?
 3. A tremendous and almost indescribable blessing awaits at the end of a life that has remained faithful and steadfast in spite of trouble. No matter how deep and hard and heartbreaking the trouble might be, God says to each one of us that if we refuse to buckle and keep believing, trusting, obeying, and serving him, we will receive the crown of life.
 - a. What would help you to remain faithful and steadfast in spite of trouble?
 - b. Describe a time when you felt tempted to buckle under pressure but didn't. How did you feel afterward? What helped you to avoid buckling?
 - c. What do you imagine the crown of life to be? What sort of reward is it? How can being aware of this crown help you to remain strong despite troubles?

Apply the Word

1. Think of a Christian you know who has gone through a multitude of trials yet has remained strong in his or her faith. Invite the person out for coffee and have a conversation about how he or she managed to remain so strong.
2. Who at your church do you believe could use some encouragement right now? How could you tap some of your own experience with hardship to encourage this person?

Faith Works

Explore the Word

1. Read James 2:14-26.
 - a. What questions does James ask in verse 14? What main point does he want to emphasize?
 - b. Describe the illustration James uses in verses 15-16. How would you answer his question in verse 16?
 - c. What does it mean to say that someone's faith is "dead" (v. 17)? How can you tell if someone's faith is "alive"?
 - d. What contrast is made in verse 18? How does Paul respond to the hypothetical statement he poses?
 - e. What belief do Christians and demons share (v. 19)? How is that belief not enough for salvation?
 - f. What illustration does James use to make his main point (vv. 20-22)?
 - g. Why does James quote the Old Testament in verse 23?
 - h. What conclusion does James make in verse 24? What does this mean for you?
2. Read Titus 2:1-10.
 - a. Most of Titus 2:1-10 has to do with Christian behavior. Why does Paul describe it as "sound doctrine"?
 - b. How are older Christian men to behave (v. 2)? Why?
 - c. How are older Christian women to behave (v. 3)? Why?
 - d. How are younger Christian women to behave (vv. 4-5)? Why?
 - e. How are younger Christian men to behave (v. 6)? Why?

- f. What general rule does Paul give for church leaders (vv. 7-8)? Why?
- g. How are Christian slaves instructed to behave (vv. 9-10)? Why?
- h. How do all of these instructions relate to grace?

Some Words About the Word

1. If you say you have faith in Jesus, yet there has been no life change that results in your obeying God and doing good, then your faith is not real. Declaration without demonstration equals deception.
 - a. Since you came to faith in Jesus, in what ways has your life changed to demonstrate that your faith is genuine?
 - b. Are there any areas of life in which you still struggle to obey God and do good? If so, how can you improve in these areas? What outside help might you need?
 - c. What does it mean to say, “Declaration without demonstration equals deception”?
2. If someone were to look at your life, would they see indisputable evidence that you believe in God?
 - a. Answer the question above.
 - b. What sort of “indisputable evidence” do you think outsiders would need to see to prove that you believe in God?
 - c. If you believe in God, what sort of belief is it? How does your faith differ from the kind of faith described in James 2:19?
3. Faith justifies the believer, but works justify the faith. God sees our faith on the inside, but we demonstrate our faith on the outside. Faith is the root of salvation, but works are the fruit of it.
 - a. How does faith “justify” the believer?

- b. How do works “justify” the believer’s faith?
- c. What does it mean that faith is the root of salvation?
How are works the fruit of salvation? How are the two related?

Apply the Word

1. Think of a way you can tangibly demonstrate your faith—something that you have never done before. How could you do this in the coming week?
2. If you were to draw or paint a picture of the fruit your life is bearing, what would that picture look like?

Off-Ramp

Explore the Word

1. Read 1 John 1:1-10.
 - a. Who is John describing in verses 1-2? How does he describe this person?
 - b. Why does John “proclaim” this person (vv. 3-4)?
 - c. Describe the message John proclaims (v. 5). What does he mean by “light”?
 - d. What does it mean to “walk in darkness” (v. 6)? What is true of those who walk in this way?
 - e. What does it mean to “walk in the light” (v. 7)? What is true of those who walk in this way?
 - f. How do some believers deceive themselves (v. 8)?
 - g. What is the antidote to this deception (v. 9)?
 - h. What is true of those who claim never to have sinned (v. 10)? Why is this important to state so early in John’s letter?
2. Read 1 John 3:4-6.
 - a. How does John describe sin (v. 4)?
 - b. Of whom is John speaking in verse 5? How does John describe him? Why did this person appear?
 - c. What two statements does John make in verse 6? Why are these statements so important?

Some Words About the Word

1. A sin is more than a mistake. If I am a mistaker and not a sinner, I don't need a Savior. I just need to do better and learn from my mistakes. Mistakes need to be corrected. Sins need to be forgiven.
 - a. How would you describe the difference between a sin and a mistake? Which is worse? Why?
 - b. What's the difference between correcting someone and forgiving someone?
 - c. When do you know that you have committed a sin rather than just made a mistake? Explain.
2. To confess sin, we call sin what God calls it and we admit to God that our sin is our fault.
 - a. In your own words, define confession of sin.
 - b. Why does God insist that we name our sins and call them for what they really are?
 - c. Why does it displease God when we try to blame someone else for our sins?
3. God's goal isn't to crush us under the weight of our sins but to deliver us from them. Jesus specializes in replacing guilt with grace, sin with salvation, and failure with forgiveness. Once we see the enormity of our sin, we can get off the highway of guilt via the off-ramp of forgiveness.
 - a. Why doesn't it crush us when we freely admit our sins to God?
 - b. Is there ever a time when we need to confess our sins to others besides God? Explain (see James 5:16).
 - c. How does the feeling of conviction differ from the feeling of condemnation? How can distinguishing between the two help you to discern whether God or the devil is trying to influence you?

Apply the Word

1. Other than to God, to whom may you need to confess some sin? What's kept you from doing this so far?
2. Think of someone you know who may be languishing under a powerful feeling of condemnation. How could you help the person distinguish between conviction and condemnation?

Sure Thing

Explore the Word

1. Read 1 John 5:10-15.
 - a. What is true of those who believe in the Son of God (v. 10)? What is true of those who do not believe in the Son of God?
 - b. Where does eternal life come from (v. 11)?
 - c. What is true of those who “have” the Son (v. 12)? What is true of those who do not “have” the Son? What does it mean to have the Son of God?
 - d. Why did John write his letter (v. 13)?
 - e. What confidence can Christians have in approaching God (v. 14)? What conditions, if any, are attached to this confidence?
 - f. How does verse 15 build on verse 14?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-9.
 - a. In what way are Christians to “examine” themselves (v. 5)? What is the “test” Paul mentions here?
 - b. How does Paul pray for the Corinthians (v. 7)?
 - c. What does it mean to live “for” the truth (v. 8)?
 - d. How did Paul further pray for the Corinthians (v. 9)? How is this a good prayer for all of us?

Some Words About the Word

1. The presence of doubt doesn’t necessarily mean the absence of faith. Doubt can be a helpful signal to our spirit in the

same way that pain is to our body. Pain indicates that something is missing or wrong. Pain and uncertainty will drive us to find a remedy. The remedy for our spiritual doubt is in God's word.

- a. What's the difference between doubt and disbelief?
 - b. How can God's word help you to deal with your doubts?
 - c. What doubts are you struggling with right now? God doesn't want you to ignore them; he wants you to confront them and find some answers. How can you best do that?
2. The Bible never says that we are right with God because of something we remember in the past, such as getting christened, catechized, or baptized. What matters is not what happened in the past as much as what is happening right now.
- a. Do you know the exact date that you asked Jesus to become your Savior? If so, how can that help you when doubts come? In what way might you depend on that date too much?
 - b. How would you describe the health of your relationship with Jesus right now?
 - c. Think ahead five years. In what ways would you like your relationship with Jesus to have grown in comparison to what it is now?
3. If you have been born into God's family, you have a love for and a desire to be with God's family because his family is now your family.
- a. Do you love to be with God's family? Explain.
 - b. How do you handle conflicts when they arise within God's family?
 - c. What are you doing to encourage and equip other members of God's family?

Apply the Word

1. If you love being a part of a local church, let some people in your church know it. Write some uplifting notes, give a helpful testimony, thank someone for his or her encouragement to you.
2. Do you know a believer in Jesus who is suffering from some serious doubts right now? If so, what can you do to help the person? How could you encourage or strengthen her or him?

The Warrior Returns

Explore the Word

1. Read Revelation 19:11-21.
 - a. Who is being described in verse 11? What do his various titles mean?
 - b. How does John describe this person in verses 12-16? What do each of the descriptions signify?
 - c. What announcement does the angel make in verses 17-18? Why does he make this announcement?
 - d. Who are the main combatants listed in verse 19?
 - e. What happens in this great battle? How is this meant to give Christians throughout history confidence?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.
 - a. What promise is given in verse 6? Why is this promise significant?
 - b. When will the promise be fully kept (v. 7)? Why is this important to keep in mind?
 - c. What will Jesus do when he returns in power and glory (v. 8)?
 - d. What will be the destiny of all those who have rejected Jesus as Savior (v. 9)?
 - e. What will true followers of Christ do on the day he returns (v. 10)?

Some Words About the Word

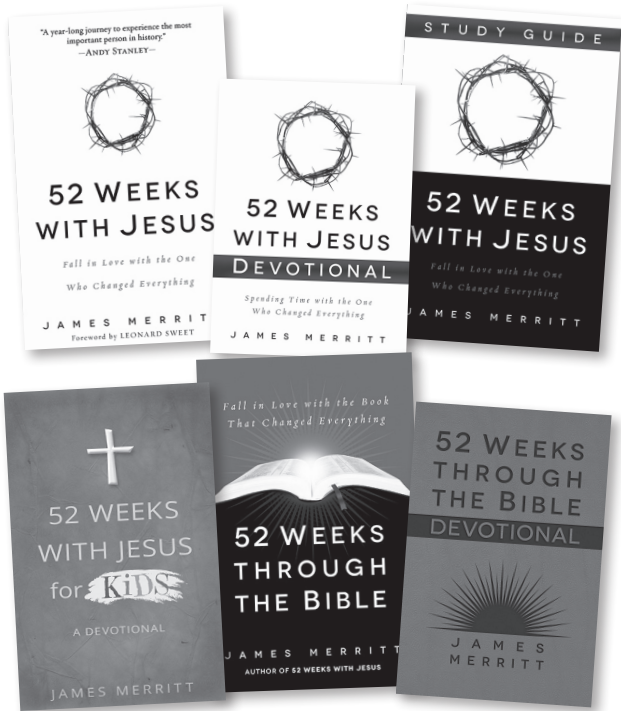
1. Satan started this war, but the warrior is going to end it. He will return to defeat sin and death once and for all in the greatest battle in history.
 - a. How did Satan start this war?
 - b. What do you know about “the greatest battle in history”?
 - c. How will Jesus defeat sin and death once and for all?
2. This warrior came the first time as the meek Lamb of God to make peace between the Creator and the creature, but when he returns, “With justice he judges and wages war.”
 - a. Which picture of Jesus do you most gravitate toward, the Lamb or the warrior? Why?
 - b. How can someone “full of grace” (see John 1:14) also “wage war”?
 - c. Read Romans 11:22. How does this description of God the Father also describe Jesus the Lamb/warrior?
3. We should live now knowing that the warrior is coming. He is coming to bring peace, so we should be peacemakers *now*. He is coming to rule, so we should surrender to him *now*. He is coming to end evil and sin, so we should fight evil *now*. He is coming to eradicate suffering and death, so we should tend to the physical and spiritual needs of others *now*.
 - a. How does knowing that the warrior is coming change the way you live now?
 - b. What kind of a peacemaker are you?
 - c. How are you tending to the physical and spiritual needs of others?

Apply the Word

1. What is your favorite song about the second coming of Jesus? Sing it.
2. What are your favorite Bible passages about the second coming of Jesus? Read them and meditate on them over the next week. Then thank him for his promise to return and make all things right.

OTHER HARVEST HOUSE BOOKS

BY JAMES MERRITT



52 Weeks with Jesus

52 Weeks with Jesus Devotional

52 Weeks with Jesus Study Guide

52 Weeks with Jesus for Kids

52 Weeks Through the Bible

52 Weeks Through the Bible Devotional