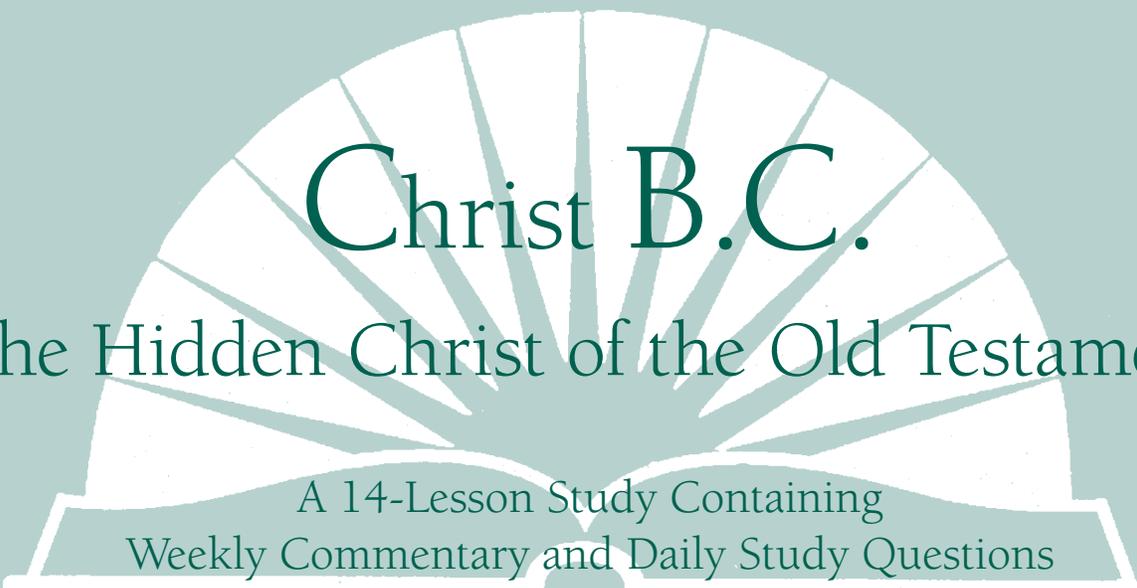


# Joy of Living Bible Studies Of Living

Enriching lives through the study of God's Word



Christ B.C.

The Hidden Christ of the Old Testament

A 14-Lesson Study Containing  
Weekly Commentary and Daily Study Questions

Commentary by

**Bill Myers**

Daily Study Questions by

Nancy J. Collins

# **Christ B.C.**

## **The Hidden Christ of the Old Testament**

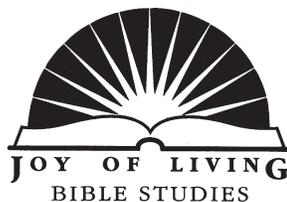
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## About Joy of Living

For over 50 years Joy of Living has been effectively establishing individuals around the world in the sound, basic study of God's Word.

Evangelical and interdenominational, Joy of Living reaches across denominational and cultural barriers, enriching lives through the simple, pure truths of God's inspired Word, the Bible.

Studies are flexible, suited for both formal and informal meetings, as well as for personal study. Each lesson contains historical background, commentary, and a week's worth of personal application questions, leading readers to discover fresh insights into God's Word. Courses covering many books in both the Old and New Testaments are available. Selected courses are also available in several foreign languages. Contact the Joy of Living office for details.

Joy of Living Bible Studies was founded by Doris W. Greig in 1971 and has grown to include classes in nearly every state in the Union and many foreign countries.

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## How to Use Joy of Living Materials

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This unique Bible study series may be used by people who know nothing about the Bible, as well as by more knowledgeable Christians. Each person is nurtured and discipled in God's Word, and many develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as they study.

Joy of Living is based on the idea that each person needs to open the Bible and let God speak to them by His Holy Spirit, applying the Scripture's message to their needs and opportunities, their family, church, job, community, and the world at large.

Only a Bible is needed for this study series. While commentaries may be helpful, it is not recommended that people consult them as they work through the daily study questions. It is most important to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them through the Bible passage and apply it to their hearts and lives. If desired, additional commentaries may be consulted after answering the questions on a particular passage.

The first lesson of a series includes an introduction to the study, plus the first week's daily study questions. Some questions are simple, and some are deeper for those who are more advanced.<sup>1</sup> The individual works through the Bible passages each day, praying and asking God's guidance in applying the truth to their own life. (The next lesson will contain the commentary on the Bible passage being covered in the study questions.)

### To Use in a Group Setting:

After the daily personal study of the passage has been completed, the class gathers in a small group, where they pray together and discuss what they have written in response to the questions about the passage, clarifying problem areas and getting more insight into the passage. The small group/discussion leader helps the group focus on biblical truth, and not just on personal problems. The student is the only person who sees their own answers and shares only what they feel comfortable sharing.

After small groups meet for discussion and prayer, they often gather in a large group meeting where a teacher gives a brief lecture covering the essential teaching of the Bible passage that was studied during the prior week and discussed in the small groups. The teacher may clarify the passage and challenge class members to live a more committed daily life.

At home, the student begins the next lesson, which contains commentary notes on the prior week's passage and questions on a new Scripture passage.

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1. Challenge questions are optional for those who want to dig deeper or write their personal opinion. The Personal questions are between the individual doing the study and God. Those answers may be shared in class only if the individual would like to.

## Do You KNOW You Have Eternal Life?

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### Your condition...

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*

*But your iniquities (sins) have separated you from your God. (Isaiah 59:2)*

*For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)*

### There is help...

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18)*

*The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

### What do I do?...

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. (Acts 3:19)*

*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31)*

### You CAN know...

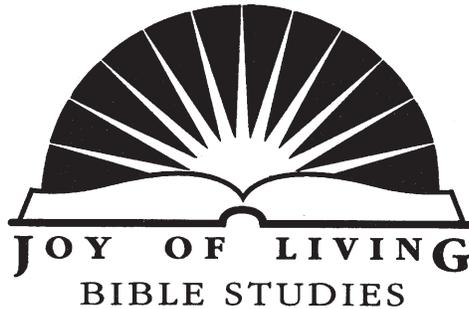
*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:12-13)*

**If you would like to make the decision today to repent and trust Christ as your Savior, either for the first time or as a re-commitment of your life, you may want to pray a prayer similar to this one:**

*Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner. Please forgive my sins. Thank You for dying on the cross for me, and for coming alive again. I accept Your gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. I place my life in Your hands. I want to be Yours forever. Thank you for loving me so much. In Your Name I pray. Amen.*

# Christ B.C.

## Lesson 1



### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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Ours is a busy world of busy people. Our social media, newspapers, magazines, internet, and TVs are filled with the latest stories of what our leaders and trendsetters are doing around the world. We easily forget that the only activity that truly, eternally affects lives, hearts, and human events is the activity of God. His activity, though profound, often goes unseen and unnoticed by the world. Yet that is where we need to focus our thoughts—on what God has done and is doing.

Man's glory will fade. All the accomplishments of our present day will someday be little more than footnotes in some future history, if that much. Only the work of God will endure.

America's greatness will fade, as will the greatness of all the nations of the earth. Only what God is doing endures. If we want our lives to have eternal meaning, then we must give our attention to these great thoughts that God planned before the foundation of the world. Most of all, we must give our attention to the one Person who, in all the span of history, is able to accomplish what no other man could do, Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Many people have never considered that Jesus Christ is eternal and that He is present throughout the Old Testament, from Genesis through Malachi, just as certainly as He is present throughout the New Testament. Often, as people read through the Old Testament, they are not aware of the symbolism that points to Jesus Christ. As the old saying goes, "The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed." This famous statement by Saint Augustine expresses the remarkable way in which the two testaments of the Bible are so closely interrelated with each other.

Christ B.C. is not a comprehensive theological treatise exploring every pre-incarnate reference or allusion to Christ. Instead, each lesson takes a look at some aspect of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and explores how it relates to Him in the New Testament. We will look at how that applies to us today, now, where we live, where we attend school, where we work, where we experience joy and fear, and where we love on a daily basis. It is an exploration into the infinite depths of Jesus Christ, an exploration that will make Him more personal in your

day-to-day living, an exploration that will lead you deeper and deeper into His nature and His great love for you.<sup>3</sup>

### Our Infinite God

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God is beyond our complete understanding because He is infinite, and we are finite, limited beings.

As you work through this study you will find references to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of these names refers to the one true God. This may be confusing to some who have not studied the Bible before. You may wonder if there is just one God or if there are three.

Scripture does describe God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet He is One. The terms we use to describe this are the "Trinity" or the "Godhead." (These words themselves are not used in the Bible.) Matthew 28:19 says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Please note, it says, "name" (singular), not "names" (plural).

In attempting to explain how there can be three, yet one, all we have to do is look at ourselves. We consist of body, soul, and spirit in one person (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Time consists of past, present, and future. There are other examples, but everything falls short when we attempt to explain the infinite God.

### A Daily Appointment with God

---

Make a daily appointment with God. Find a quiet spot. Take your Bible and your Bible study material with you. Remember how very important your appointment with God is, and make time to be with Him daily. Ask yourself the following things:

1. How much time will I spend with the Lord each day? Set a specific amount of time and write it on your calendar to set that time aside.

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1. The Lesson 1 Commentary is written by the Joy of Living editors.  
2. Paragraphs 1-3 of this section are adapted from the Joy of Living study, *Ephesians Part 1*, Lesson 1 commentary, by Ray C. Stedman.

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3. This paragraph is adapted from Bill Myers' Preface to *Christ B.C.* (Regal)

2. What will I put aside in order to spend this time with the Lord? Some examples might be watching television, texting, tweeting, Facebook, or digital games. You will have to decide what your priorities are and what can be changed in your daily schedule to make time to spend with God.
  
3. What is the best time for my appointment with God? Consider whether you are a “morning” person or an “evening” person, and when you are least likely to be interrupted.
  
4. Where is the quietest place for me to pray and study? Look for both physical quiet and visual quiet—a place that won’t constantly remind you of all the other things urgently awaiting your attention.
  
5. Do I really want to spend time with God? If your answer is “yes,” God will bless you as you work out the details of how and when to do it. If your answer is “no,” pray that God will give you a desire, a hunger to spend time with Him. He will do this for you!

## Knowing God

---

As we begin our study let us ask Him to remove the dimness from our vision and the dullness from our understanding, so that we can see the grand and blazing spiritual reality that is all around us in which we live from day to day. Let us ask Him to help us to think deeply and seriously about these incalculable spiritual blessings He has given us, so that our lives will better reflect the awesome reality of who God truly is and what He has done and is doing in our world.<sup>1</sup>

We hope this study will help you grow to know the Almighty God better, and we hope your heart will be filled with ever-increasing joy and peace as you learn how thoroughly He loves you.

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1. This paragraph is adapted from the Joy of Living study, *Ephesians Part 1*, Lesson 1 commentary, by Ray C. Stedman

## Study Questions

### Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the "Challenge" questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the "Personal" questions with the class only if you want to share them.

### First Day: Read the Introductory Commentary.

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1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the introductory commentary or from your teacher's lecture?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

**The central theme of the Bible is salvation through Jesus Christ. He was there in the beginning (see John 1:1-4), and the promise of His coming and what He would accomplish is woven throughout the Old Testament. As we work through this study, we will look at some of these references and what they mean to our lives today.**

### Second Day:

---

**Jesus Himself confirmed that He was spoken about throughout the Old Testament.**

1. At one time or another, we have all felt bewildered and wondered what was going on with the situations we faced in our lives. Luke 24:13-27 takes place on the day of Jesus' resurrection. Two of Jesus' disciples were going to a town called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified. What were they discussing? (Luke 24:14)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. a. As they were walking along and talking, Who joined them and did they recognize Him? (Luke 24:15-16)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What did He ask them? (Luke 24:17a)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. From Luke 24:17b-24, summarize what the two disciples replied to Jesus' question.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. a. In Luke 24:25-26, how did Jesus address their bewilderment?

- b. What did He then do for them? (Luke 24:27)
5. Personal: The central theme of the entire Bible is salvation through Jesus Christ. Do you understand what this means? Do you know for certain that you have been “saved” and have eternal life? If you aren't certain, please turn to page 4, and ask God to give you understanding. You may also want to speak to your leader, pastor, or another Christian.

### **Third Day:**

---

**Yesterday we saw how the understanding of God's Word gave the disciples hope. Understanding what God has said gives us hope, too.**

1. What do the following verses say regarding the origin of the Scriptures?

2 Timothy 3:16a

2 Peter 1:21

2. What do the following passages say about the power of God's Word?

Psalm 33:6,9

Psalm 119:89

3. Hebrews 4:12 also speaks of the power of God's Word. From this passage, describe God's Word and what it does.

4. Challenge: From the following verses, list what God's Word will do for you.

Romans 10:17

Romans 15:4

2 Timothy 3:16-17

1 Peter 2:2

5. As you can see, God through His Word is the most powerful force in all creation. It is important to study God's Word, to search for its literal meaning, but real understanding comes only as the Lord brings it to life in us personally. What does John 16:13a say regarding this?
6. Personal: From today's Scripture passages, we begin to see how important God's Word is. How important is it to you, personally? Are there any changes you need to make regarding your study of God's Word?

## Fourth Day:

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1. So often people think salvation simply means not going to hell, but instead going to heaven and living forever. As wonderful as that is, they are missing what eternal life is all about. What do you learn about eternal life from John 17:3?

2. Just think, you can actually know God and have a relationship with Him, not just know *about* Him! What do you learn about knowing God from the following verses?

Matthew 11:27

John 16:13-15

3. Building a relationship involves two-way communication, that is speaking to someone and also listening to and hearing them. What are some things you learn about communicating with God from the following verses?

John 16:26a (Jesus is speaking of the time after His death, resurrection, and ascension.)

Hebrews 4:16

1 John 5:14-15

4. Personal: This is not a study on prayer. Rather, it is meant to show you that Christians have the privilege of talking to God and being heard by Him. The other side of communicating is listening. The most obvious way of listening to God is through His Word. We have seen how powerful His Word is, how important it is to our lives. We have also seen that it is necessary in order for the Lord to reveal His truth to us. Think about your own life and your relationship with God. How is your prayer life? Do you talk *to* Him or talk *at* Him? Do you allow Him to speak to you through His Word and during the quiet times you have alone with Him?

## Fifth Day:

---

**This relationship with God is a love relationship.**

1. What do you learn about God and His love for us from the following verses?

Romans 5:8

1 John 4:16a

2. From 1 John 4:19, what do you learn about our love for God?

3. a. When we truly love someone, we long to do what pleases that one. It is what we want to do, not what we have to do. It is the action of the one who loves toward the one who is loved. Read John 14:21a. Just as God's love for us caused Him to act on our behalf, what action does our love for Him evoke?

- b. What does Jesus say about this in John 14:15?
  
4. Obedience to God is not making up and following strict religious do's and don'ts. God desires relationship, not religion. The more we love Him, the more we want to please Him, to obey Him. Read Romans 8:5-6 and describe the difference between the person who has their mind set on pleasing their flesh, and the person who loves the Lord and has their mind set on what He desires.
  
5. Personal: This is a good time for a self-check. Where or on what is your mind set? How does your behavior and your life reflect your love for God?

## Sixth Day:

---

**The Lord truly wants us to understand Him, love Him, and have a relationship with Him, but our fears often stifle our relationship with Him.**

1. What does 1 John 4:18a say regarding fear?
  
2. When we look at our own shortcomings, our own sin and failures (I'm talking to you, Christian), we become fearful and discouraged, but when we see and believe what God has said, there is peace. What promises are we given in the following verses?

Romans 8:31-34

1 John 1:8-9

3. What promises does God give you in the following verses, and how do they help alleviate your fears?

Philippians 4:19

Romans 8:28-29a

4. God desires that our love relationship with Him will extend to others. As we learned in 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." What do you learn about His love from Romans 5:5b?
  
5. Personal: Galatians 5:22 tells us that love is a fruit of the Spirit. God placed His love in us, and His Spirit causes that love to grow and mature, just like fruit grows and matures. As we grow to know our Lord better, and as we grow (mature) in Him, God's love for others will naturally flow out of us toward others. Have you begun to see this in your life?



- ☛ encourage us (see Romans 15:4);
- ☛ give us faith (see Romans 10:17);
- ☛ equip us to do good (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17);
- ☛ help us see ourselves as we really are (see James 1:23-25).

When Jesus and Satan were battling it out in the desert (see Matthew 4:1-11), they probably could have used any weapon they wanted. But they decided to pass on the usual tools of warfare. Instead, the Creator of the universe and the most evil being in the universe used the most powerful weapon in the universe. They used one thing and one thing only—the Scriptures. Each time Satan tried to tempt Jesus by perverting God’s Word, Jesus responded with the truth of that Word. In short, Christ defeated Satan by using “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

To me that says *power*—more power than I can even begin to imagine. But how can we plug into that power? How can you and I really absorb and understand the fullest and richest depths of that power?

The bad news is we can’t—not on our own. You see, Scripture is not a series of inert sentences that we can categorize, analyze, and wrap up in a tidy little box (though many a theologian has tried). It is *alive and active*. Once it gets into our souls, it moves about, challenging and encouraging us in different ways at different times. Scripture is a living part of God (His breath), and to fully understand it would be as impossible as for us to fully understand God.

Yes, it’s important to study Scripture, to use commentaries, to search for its literal meaning. But that’s only the beginning. The real key to understanding Scripture is to put it into the hands of the Master Surgeon and ask Him to use it as He intended—to ask Him to use this tool that is *sharper than any double-edged sword* (Hebrews 4:12) to cut away our dying flesh while nurturing and growing our eternal souls.

So, as important as the study of Scripture may be, it means nothing on its own. The only real understanding of Scripture comes as we ask the Lord to bring it to life personally.

There is much talk about the Holy Spirit’s work in the Church today. But in the debates and discussions we frequently forget one of His primary jobs. Perhaps Jesus put it best in His farewell address to His disciples: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). He is our Tutor. He is our Instructor. He is our Guide.

All this to say: No matter how sincere and dedicated we may be in our pursuit to understand Scripture, our intellectual gymnastics will bring minimal results at best. Instead, the key is to go back to the road to Emmaus. We must once again depend upon the Lord. Like the disciples, we may be exhausted, perplexed, even angry at difficulties and confusion. But if we are willing to ask the Author for understanding, He is willing to breathe life into our understanding of His Words—which in turn breathes life into our souls.

## Understanding God

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.* (Revelation 3:20)

If I had run out and asked the first woman I met to marry me, she probably would have died laughing. Why? Because I’m such a strange and absurd character? Maybe. But more likely because she didn’t know me.

How could we have solved that? We’d communicate. I’d talk, she’d listen. She’d talk, I’d listen. Gradually, we’d get to know each other. And, if the chemistry was right, we might fall in love.

That’s what Christ wants. He wants us to know Him so deeply, understand Him so intimately, that we can’t help but fall in love with Him.

Yet somehow, we think we can short-circuit that understanding-and-falling-in-love process. We think that we can just sort of wake up one morning and instantly know Him, or at best show up once a week and listen to someone chatter about Him for 20 to 30 minutes and BINGO: instant love.

But knowing people through secondhand information is not really knowing them. Before I finally married, I got to know my wife-to-be personally. I did not rely on someone else’s description. The same is true with God. There are no instant shortcuts. The only way to really know Him and to really fall in love with Him is through personal, one-on-one *communication* with Him.

And, as obvious as it may sound, we communicate with God in much the same way as we communicate with others: through talking and listening.

### Talking

The most common way of talking to God is through prayer. At the beginning stages we may treat prayer like a Christmas list and God as our private Santa Claus. Or as Bob Dylan sings, we may “think He’s just an errand boy to satisfy [our] wandering desires.”<sup>1</sup> But as we mature, we begin to understand deeper forms of prayer. We begin to experience the depths and mysteries that are unlocked through singing, worshiping, and praising. Eventually we may even begin to experience the intense peace of just sitting quietly before Him in awe.

But expressing ourselves is only half of the communication process. The other half lies in...

### Listening

The most obvious way of listening to God is through His Word. We’ve already discussed the power Scripture has to transform our lives. But the transformation doesn’t stop there. People who are transformed by Scripture are often used by God to help in His transformation of others. I know people who have made tremendous changes in the world who simply point to the few minutes a day they spend with Scripture as a major source of their strength.

1. Dylan, Bob, “When You Gonna Wake Up?” from the album *Slow Train Coming*, Columbia Records/CBS Inc., 1979.

Then there's the type of listening that comes from observing God's work in our lives. Now I don't believe every sneeze and hiccup is a sign from God. But I do believe if we ask for wisdom we can often see His hand and hear His voice in various circumstances.

There's another type of listening—the listening that involves observing God's awesome handiwork in creation. They say you really don't know an artist until you've seen his work. Likewise, there's probably no better way of learning of God's love than by drinking in the splendor of His creation. By creation we're not just talking pretty sunsets in the Bahamas. There's also the day-to-day creation of you—the new person you become as you dwell on the love and faithfulness He's shown to you in the past, or the goodness He's worked in other people's lives.

Finally, there is the type of listening that comes when we have quieted our soul enough to hear what Scripture calls that “gentle whisper”—that gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit as He softly guides and directs (see 1 Kings 19:11-12).

This is how we grow to understand God. By communicating with Him. By taking the time to talk and to listen. There is no other way to truly understand Who He is. And, as we begin to understand Who He is, there is no other choice we have but to fall in love.

### **An Understanding that Leads to Obedience**

*This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. (1 John 5:3-4)*

When my wife and I were first married there were dozens of things I did or didn't do that drove her crazy. But as I got to know her and fell more deeply in love with her I slowly changed. Not because I *had* to, but because I *wanted* to. As we drew closer and closer and I saw the pain and disappointment my shortcomings caused her, I did my best to change. Not for her, but for me—for the satisfaction I experienced from pleasing her. Of course, I'm still light-years from being the perfect husband, but at least I'm heading in that direction. Not because I have to, but because I want to.

The same is true with sin and our relationship with Jesus. As we fall in love with Him, we slowly find that the areas of our disobedience begin to lose their appeal. Oh, we may still enjoy them, but experiencing the disappointment of our Greatest Love, or the momentary separation we feel from committing that sin—well, it's simply not worth the price of admission. We slowly find ourselves starting to change, to conform to Christ's image—not because we have to, but because we want to.

Now it's not always easy. Yes, there are times we have to bear down, using every ounce of self-control, fasting and praying for the strength to obey (or even the desire to obey). But the joy and satisfaction that obedience brings to our Lord, and hence to ourselves, make it all worthwhile. So, as with everything else, we see that the key to understanding obedience lies in Jesus.

Obedience is not making up and following strict religious do's and don'ts. God desires relationships, not religion. He yearns for us; He

woos us to become His Bride. He calls for us to become lovers, not legalists.

With that in mind, there's only one way we can ever really understand and obtain lasting obedience. And it usually calls for very little effort on our part. All we have to do is allow ourselves to fall so deeply and totally in love with Jesus Christ that the obedience in our souls comes naturally—as naturally as falling into His arms.

### **Understanding Ourselves**

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. (1 John 4:18)*

As we continue to look into understanding and Jesus' role in helping us truly understand, let's turn next to ourselves.

I have a pet theory. It probably would never hold water in the scientific community, but I definitely see it in my own life and I'm beginning to see it more and more in others. It's fairly simple and goes like this: My insecurities, my selfishness, my petty jealousies, my fears and worries, my mental stress, my failures with others, my self-hatred, my emotional turmoils, even my very sins come for one reason and one reason only—I simply do not know how loved I am.

How could I possibly worry over the details in my life if I really understood a love that knows the number of hairs on my head and cares for each one of them (see Luke 12:7)?

How could I possibly be selfish if I really understood a love that will supply my every need?

How could I possibly be jealous, insecure, and fearful around others if I really understood I was created for God's pleasure and that He is already delighting in me?

How could I be discouraged in my failures if God knows I'm but dust and still rejoices over me?

How could I possibly sin if I really understood that the do's and don'ts were created out of love for my well-being, and that each intentional failure on my part pierces my Lover's heart?

Once again, the key to true understanding (this time of ourselves) lies with Jesus. As we allow Him to scoop us into His arms and hold us tightly to His breast, our cares and shortcomings begin to fade. We begin to see ourselves as He sees us. Nothing, not even our own self-condemning natures, can touch us when we're held tightly in His arms.

The only way to understand that intense, all-consuming love is to understand the Lover. And, as we understand Christ, our view of ourselves changes. We begin to see ourselves through His eyes.

Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when He promised to give us His peace, a peace Paul described as “peace...which transcends [exceeds] all understanding” (Philippians 4:7; see also John 14:27). Peace with God and, as our perceptions are conformed to His, peace with ourselves.

## Understanding Others

*We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)

Before we leave this lesson's topic of understanding, there's one other aspect we should explore.

Several years ago I was pulling into a parking space at the local supermarket when another car roared in from the wrong direction, cut me off, and took the place. The scene is still vivid in my memory, not because of the driver's rudeness (hey, I live near L.A.—I see rudeness every day), but because of my reaction. Instead of anger and outrage, I felt pity. For a few moments I was actually able to see the offender through Christ's eyes. And this is what I saw:

As far as the driver was concerned, he was an orphan. He had nobody to look out for him. Anything he got he had to take. He did not know the loving Father in heaven Who cared for him. He had to take and scrape and scratch and fight all on his own. I was moved with compassion for him. I wish I could react this way all the time. For a few brief moments I was close enough to Christ's heart to see another human being as He sees him. And, instead of anger, I was moved with pity.

This sensitivity happens far too seldom in my life. But I do remember another time—a time when I was emotionally beat up and scathed by a Christian friend I was trying to help. Instead of anger and resentment I was again able to see him through Christ's eyes. This time I saw my friend as a precious animal hit by a car and left lying on the side of the road. If you've ever tried to help such an animal, you know that your compassionate attempts can be met with vicious bites and attacks. Like an injured animal, my friend was frightened, and he was in pain. He struck out at me—not because of anything I'd done, and not because of anything he was—but because he was petrified, because he was scared to death. At that moment he simply did not have the assurance that he was really loved and cared for. At that moment he simply did not know how loved he was.

As you and I continue on our road to Emmaus and allow Christ to instruct us, we start to enter into true understanding. We start to understand God, Scripture, obedience, even ourselves. And finally, we start to understand others. We begin to see others as people in desperate need of that same relationship with Christ, that same all-encompassing love. We begin to understand that those who have hurt or offended us are not really the *offenders*, but that they are really the *offended*. We begin to see that they are not the enemy—but victims of the enemy.

And, as we begin to see that, we can't help but love them.

## Study Questions

### Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

### First Day: Read the Commentary “The Road to Understanding.”

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1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary “The Road to Understanding ” or from your teacher’s lecture?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

**Because our finite minds can’t comprehend the depth of God’s love, we tend to shorten the gap Jesus had to bridge between the Father and us. We raise our position of “goodness” just a touch and try to lower God’s just a tad. Not only does this mean we short-change God on His glory, but it also means we start to take our access to Him for granted. We may almost flippantly approach His throne, forgetting His awesome purity, His glory, His perfect righteousness.**

### Second Day:

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**Before we begin to look into Christ’s work of righteousness in our lives, let us remind ourselves exactly Who God is, so that we may realize the righteousness we must possess in order to enter His presence.**

1. Many examples in the Old Testament help us understand just how holy God is. Exodus 19:10-13 takes place after the Israelites came out of Egypt, just prior to the law being given. In preparation for God to descend upon Mount Sinai, the people were to consecrate themselves, wash their clothes, and abstain from sexual relations for three days. From verses 12-13, what additional restrictions were given to the people and what would be the result if they failed to obey?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. God had instructed Moses to build the Ark of the Covenant of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was placed in the Most Holy Place within the tabernacle (see Exodus 25:8-22; 26:30-35). God’s presence dwelt above the ark, making the ark extremely holy. God’s holiness was demonstrated in 1 Chronicles 13:7-10, when the Ark of the Covenant was being transported from one place to another. It was not being transported according to the instructions God had given to them (see Exodus 25:12-15; Numbers 4:15). From 1 Chronicles 13:7-10, describe what happened and what the result was.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Read 1 Samuel 6:19a. What happened when a number of people looked into the ark of the Lord?

4. Moses asked God to allow him to see His glory. From Exodus 33:20, what was God's response?
5. What does 1 Timothy 6:15b-16 say about God?
6. Personal: Do today's passages change the way you think of God? ...of your own righteousness? If so, how?

### **Third Day:**

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**Once we begin to understand just how terrifying and intensely pure God is, we can begin to appreciate the distance Christ's sacrifice bridged for us.**

1. Read Romans 3:23. If we compare ourselves to God's glory—His purity and righteousness—what is the result?
2. Describe our righteous acts from Isaiah 64:6a.
3. We are sinful and hopeless, without any chance of ever approaching the perfect, intensely pure God on our own. But, from the beginning, God required only one thing to cleanse us of sin. From Hebrews 9:22, what is the only thing that can bring about the forgiveness of our sin?
4. The sacrifices offered at the tabernacle and later at the temple were not a permanent answer to our problem. What does Hebrews 10:4 say regarding this?
5. What do the following verses say about Jesus Christ and what He has done for us?  
John 1:29  
  
Hebrews 10:10  
  
Hebrews 10:14
6. Personal: How does this change or amplify your understanding of what Jesus Christ has done for us all?

### **Fourth Day:**

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**As we have seen, the cost of bringing us up to God's standard of righteousness was incredibly high. It called for the complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To really appreciate the cost He paid to make us righteous, let us look at the extent of His sacrifice.**

1. The price Jesus Christ paid was enormous. From the following verses, describe what Jesus endured, both physically and emotionally.  
John 13:21  
  
Matthew 26:37-38

Matthew 27:27-31

John 19:1<sup>1</sup>

Matthew 27:39-44

John 19:17-18 (To get a complete idea of what crucifixion entailed, you may want to look it up in an encyclopedia.)

2. The above passages list some of the physical and emotional suffering Jesus went through on our behalf, but this was not the worst of it. From 2 Corinthians 5:21, describe the original condition of Jesus Christ and what happened to Him.
3. Describe what happened in Matthew 27:46.
4. Personal: These truths should never cease to amaze us and make us grateful. Write a song, psalm, or prayer expressing your gratitude to the Lord.

## **Fifth Day:**

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**During this week we have read about how all-encompassing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was.**

1. Read John 3:16-18 and Acts 10:43. Who benefits from this sacrifice, and what must a person do to receive these benefits? What is the state of the person who does not do this?
2. Once we put our faith in Jesus, our sin is forgiven, and we are given the perfect righteousness He purchased for us. Along with all this, the privileges and benefits we receive are quite literally out of this world. Read John 1:12-13. When we believe in His name and receive Him, what do we become?
3. Read Romans 8:17a. If we are God's children, what else does that make us?
4. a. Read Ephesians 1:13b. When you believe, what else happens?

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1. "The scourging of Jesus was the usual accompaniment of crucifixion. The Roman scourge consisted of a wooden handle to which several rawhide thongs were fastened. Into each thong small butterfly shaped pieces of metal or bone were fixed. Wielded by a powerful arm, the scourge was a deadly weapon, which in a few strokes would strip the flesh from a man's back. Frequently death followed immediately so that the victim did not survive for crucifixion." (Frank E. Gaebelin, editor. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), notes on John 19:1)

- b. Read Galatians 5:19-23. Instead of being filled with discord (see verses 19-21), how do our lives begin to change after we believe (verses 22-23)?
  
5. According to Hebrews 4:16, what are we now permitted to do?
  
6. Personal: These are only a few of the benefits that result when we receive Christ. If you have accepted Jesus Christ, briefly write what major differences He has made in your life.

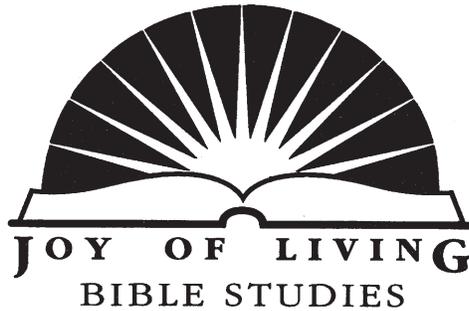
## Sixth Day:

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**Most people recognize that they are not the person they would like to be. We say or do things that we regret. We hurt others with our words. Our attitudes and actions often do not bring peace, but chaos. But there is good news for the Christian.**

1. Read Romans 3:22a and 4:5, and Philippians 3:8-9. What has been credited or given to those of us who have put our faith in the Lord?
  
2. Read Romans 6:22a. What have we been set free from?
  
3. When we put our faith in Christ, God sets us free from the power of sin and credits His righteousness to us. Then, as we learned yesterday, His Spirit begins to work in us. What does Romans 8:28-29 say He is doing (pay particular attention to verse 29)?
  
4. God is working in us to cause us to bear the fruit of His Spirit—that is, to make us like His Son. What does Paul say about this in Philippians 3:12-14?
  
5. What promise have we been given according to Philippians 1:6, and Who is doing the work?
  
6. Personal: Do you desire to be the person God has created you to be? Remember, when you sin, go to God, confessing your sin, and He will forgive you. Then get up and continue to walk with the Lord. Write Philippians 3:13b-14, inserting your own name.

## Christ B.C. Lesson 3



### Real Righteousness

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#### Perfect Righteousness

*Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently.* (Exodus 19:18)

Because our finite minds can't comprehend the depth of God's love, we tend to shorten the gap Jesus had to bridge between us and the Father. We raise our position of "goodness" just a touch and try to lower God's just a tad. Not only does this mean we shortchange God on His glory but it also means we start to take our access to Him for granted. We may almost flippantly approach His throne, forgetting His awesome purity, His glory, His perfect righteousness.

So, before we begin to look into Christ's work of righteousness in our lives, let's remind ourselves exactly Who God is and the righteousness we must possess in order to enter His presence.

For starters, there was His terrifying presence on Mount Sinai—a presence so pure that if the people so much as touched the mountain they were to be executed (see Exodus 19:10-13).

Then there was the Ark of the Covenant, the gold and acacia wood container God instructed Moses to build for the tabernacle. Because God's presence dwelt above the ark, the object was so holy that once when a man reached out to steady it, to prevent it from falling to the ground, the Lord immediately struck that man dead (see 1 Chronicles 13:7-10; also see Exodus 25:12-15).

Or how about the 70 men who were killed when they looked into the ark? (See 1 Samuel 6:19.) The survivors knew exactly what they were talking about when they said, "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" (1 Samuel 6:20).

Then there was the Lord's response when Moses, His faithful friend, pleaded to be able to see His glory: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20).

And finally, a New Testament passage describes God as the One "who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16).

This is the Holy God you and I are allowed to approach through Christ's blood. Awesome, terrifying, and intensely pure. With this in

mind, maybe we can begin to appreciate the vast distance Christ's sacrifice bridged for us.

#### False Righteousness

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

From the beginning of time we humans have tried to reach God (or a condition of godliness) through our own efforts, our own righteousness:

- ☛ from Adam and Eve whipping up some designer fig leaves to hide their nakedness,
- ☛ to Cain who did not bring his sacrifice in faith,
- ☛ to the people of Babel trying to build their way up to the heavens,
- ☛ to Muslims trying to work their way to God,
- ☛ to the Eastern religions who hope with enough tries they'll finally get it right (reincarnation),
- ☛ to the New Age folks who are trying to find it within themselves,
- ☛ to the multitude of Christians who are caught up in religious works for God instead of an intimate relationship with Him.

Why?

I guess it's the age-old problem of pride. After all, if we can reach God through our own righteousness, then we really don't need His help. And if we can reach Him on our own, doesn't that make us just a little bit like Him? Now there's a familiar lie: "For God knows that when you eat from it [the forbidden fruit] you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5).

The truth is, no matter how righteous we are, it's just not righteous enough—not enough to reach a God whose holiness makes mountains smoke and shake, Who lives in "unapproachable light," Who is so pure that scores are slain just by His presence. When comparing our righteousness with His, well, there's not much comparison. It's little wonder then that the prophet cried, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

So basically we're left hopeless, without any chance of ever approaching the all-perfect, intensely pure God.

Well, at least not on our own...

## Temporary Righteousness

*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*  
(Hebrews 9:22)

From the beginning God required only one thing to make us righteous. Only one thing can clean us up and wash us of our sins: blood.

Cain was the first to find this out. Talk about a bad attitude! I mean, this guy tried to shortcut the blood sacrifice by sacrificing “the fruits of the soil,” instead of the firstborn of his family’s flock (see Genesis 4:3). God’s response was basically a “NO Sale.”

But that was only the beginning. Throughout the Old Testament the shedding of blood through animal sacrifice was the primary way to obtain forgiveness.

It was the blood of a sheep or goat put over the doorways of the children of Israel that protected them from the Angel of Death in Egypt (see Exodus 12:1-13).

It was the blood of various animals that the priests used to intercede for the people’s sins. They sprinkled it in front of the curtain of the sanctuary, put it on the horns of the altar, at the bottom of the altar, around the altar, and on top of the altar (see Leviticus 4-5). Moses even sprinkled blood on the people to confirm their covenant with the Lord (see Exodus 24:8). In fact, the very first priests were consecrated with blood on their clothes, their right ear lobes, their thumbs, and big toes (see Exodus 29:19-21).

Why? Why is God so interested in all this blood stuff? I mean it sounds so sick and grotesque.

That’s part of the reason. Sin is sick and grotesque. The shedding of all this blood was to help remind us of the brutal and ugly nature of sin. Sin conquers, it devours, it ravages. In short, it destroys life. And instead of that destruction of life falling upon the people, it was transferred to some innocent, “unblemished” animal. Yes, it was ugly and brutal. But so is sin.

And yes, it probably disturbed God. But better the destruction of an innocent animal than the destruction of His people.

And why the emphasis on the actual blood?

What more accurately depicts the essence of a living life than its blood?

But there’s another reason. And it is far more important than the others. All this brutality and bloodshed is nothing but a foreshadowing of the Great Sacrifice that would take place hundreds of years later. It is but a foreshadowing of the Final Sacrifice for all the world.

*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!* (Hebrews 9:13-14)

*Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the cov-*

*enant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*  
(Matthew 26:27-28)

## The Cost of Our Righteousness

*You were bought at a price.* (1 Corinthians 7:23)

The cost of bringing us up to God’s standard of righteousness was incredibly high. It called for a blood sacrifice, alright—but more than just the blood of an animal or even more than the blood of a human. It called for God’s blood. It called for the complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ—spiritually, emotionally, and physically. To begin to really appreciate the cost He paid to make us righteous, let’s take a brief look at the extent of that sacrifice.

### Spiritual Sacrifice

Picture a perfect man Who has never known sin, suddenly having to bear the sins of the world!

As little as I, being human, know God, the times I’ve been cut off from His presence have been nearly unbearable. Picture what the separation must have been like for Somebody Who had always been present with the Father and Who knew the Father perfectly, somebody Who knew the Father so well that the two were actually one! The separation experienced as God poured out all of His wrath for our sins on Jesus on the cross must have been a living hell! No wonder Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

### Emotional Sacrifice

For a moment, try to feel the emotions Jesus must have suffered on the cross. Imagine being stripped naked and hung up high for all to see. Imagine the pain you feel seeing your friends’ hopelessness—friends who had given up everything to follow you and who now wonder if it was all a sham. Imagine the pain you feel for your mother as she watches you being mocked and tortured. And, most importantly, imagine your heartbreak over a city you loved so much that you actually left your high position in heaven to come down and save, a city that has completely rejected that love, a city that in less than 40 years will be destroyed by its enemies for that rejection (see Luke 19:41-44).

### Physical Sacrifice

And finally, there is the physical anguish. It’s interesting to note that a great part of Christ’s physical sacrifice is connected with blood—the blood the Old Testament emphasized as so necessary for making us righteous.

First, Jesus sweat blood when He prayed in Gethsemane (a medically proven condition known to happen to those undergoing the most excruciating emotional stress). (See Luke 22:44.)

Then there was the crown of thorns (see Matthew 27:29). The crown was most likely constructed from local briars that have needle-sharp thorns that range from one to two inches in length. No doubt it was jammed down on top of His head—hard.

Then there was the flogging—beating with a whip (see John 19:1). The whip was made of several little whips, each with sharp, jagged rocks and shards of metal tied to their ends. These dug deeply into His back, filleting it beyond belief, shredding it beyond recognition.

And let's not forget the spikes driven through His hands and His feet.

And finally, the piercing of His side with the sword so that blood and water spilled out (see John 19:34).

These are realities to dwell upon and to meditate over—not because of their morbid grotesqueness, but because they are proof of Christ's overwhelming love for us. They are proof of the awesome price He was willing to pay to make us righteous.

### The Privileges of Righteousness

*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.* (1 Peter 2:9)

Once we accept the righteousness Christ purchased for us, the privileges and benefits are quite literally out of this world.

#### Forgiveness

Christ's sacrifice was so thorough and complete that believers are seen by God as being 100 percent pure and sinless. It makes no difference what we've done—it makes no difference how many impure thoughts we've had, or how many people we've murdered. If we're truly repentant, our righteousness is absolutely perfect through Christ. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

#### Friendship with God

Because of our perfect righteousness, we now have access to the throne of the Creator of the universe. Any time day or night we may stand in the presence of a God so holy that, if it wasn't for our righteousness through Christ, we would simply keel over and die. But more than access, we have friendship and love—a love so deep that it can only be compared to the relationship of a loving Father and His child. But that's not all. We also have a special relationship with His Son—a relationship full of such compassion and commitment that it can only be described as the love a perfect Bridegroom has for His perfect Bride.

#### Heirship

*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.* (Revelation 3:21)

Not only are you and I allowed access to God's throne, but according to this passage we are actually called to sit on that throne with Him. Because of the price Christ paid for us, you and I are now considered co-heirs with Him, and are actually called to help Him rule!

#### Fruit of the Spirit

But there are more immediate benefits than ruling. Benefits we can enjoy today. Benefits such as having a piece of God, His very Spirit, coming to live inside us.

Contrary to what New Agers teach, the presence of God inside us *does not* exist until our relationship with God is restored through Jesus. Only then does His Spirit breathe into ours, activating it, infusing it with His very presence, bringing it to life. And once we are brought to life, that "born again" spiritual life, we begin to experience living as He originally intended it.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

In short, we are given the privilege of living the types of lives that God designed for us before sin entered our race—lives that, regardless of trials and testings, are overflowing and abundant.

These benefits are almost unfathomable—and they're all a result of the price Christ paid on the cross.

However, there's one other benefit that we sometimes overlook. A benefit we're all called to enjoy...

### All This Plus...

*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.* (1 John 3:9)

There's one other important benefit to accepting Christ's righteousness: *He works in us to perfect it.* That's right. With God's seed planted in our soul, His presence begins to take root and grow inside us. His presence begins choking out sin, loosening its stranglehold on us, and allowing us to actually become righteous. And the best news of all is it's not something we have to work up and labor over on our own. Righteousness starts to come to us naturally, as naturally as a fruit tree bears fruit (see Romans 3:22).

Does that mean once we receive Christ that we'll never have to sin again? That's right. Will we sin again? Most likely.

It's true, sin's hold over us is broken once and for all, make no mistake about it: "Though you used to be slaves to sin...You have been set free" (Romans 6:17-18). But it takes most of us a little while to really believe this, to really incorporate righteousness into our day-to-day lives. Paul probably put it best when he said:

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 3:12-14)

We'll fall from time to time. Count on it. But the important thing is when we fall, we fall into the loving and forgiving arms of Jesus Christ. The important thing is that we allow Him to pick us up and help us continue on our road to right living.

I fully believe that there is no sin we cannot overcome. It won't always be easy. There may be plenty of failures, broken hearts, and tears. Overcoming may take lots of fasting and prayer. But we do not have to go it alone. And eventually, if we *really* want (or even want to want), we will be freed from whatever sin is trapping and tormenting us.

*The one who is in you is greater than the one [Satan] who is in the world.* (1 John 4:4)

*[Be] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 1:6)



d. What will happen to the ungodly? (2 Peter 3:7b)

5. Personal: What truths have you read today that have made the biggest impact on you? Why? Have you ever considered these truths before?

### **Third Day:**

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**As a whole, humanity does not change. As they were before God's judgment came upon them in the days of Noah (and the days of Lot), so will they be before the final judgment (see Luke 17:26-30). But, in contrast to the rest of humanity, Noah found favor with God (see Genesis 6:8).**

1. What do you learn about Noah from Hebrews 11:7? What was Noah's attitude as he did this?

2. God told Noah what was going to happen, but knowledge was only the first step. Noah believed what God said; in other words, he had faith. What do you learn about faith from James 2:17?

3. The action, the obedience to what God has said, springs forth from our belief. What do you learn about this obedience from Romans 1:5?

4. Noah had faith. He believed that what God said was going to happen, would certainly happen. What do you learn about Noah from Genesis 6:22?

5. Challenge: Read Genesis 6:14-21. Along with Noah, his wife, his three sons, and his sons' wives would also be saved. Think about the task that was before them in order to be saved. How difficult do you think this would have been? What do you think was the attitude of all the other people around them toward Noah and what he was building?

6. Personal: Most of us know this story so well that we don't really stop to think about it. But take a moment and consider the magnitude of the disaster that Noah was being warned about, and the action he was told to take. Now consider God's attitude toward sin and His coming judgment. In order to be saved from His coming judgment, we are told to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and what He accomplished by His death and resurrection. Have you done this? If you need more information on this, turn to page 4, then talk to your leader, pastor, or another Christian. If you have put your faith in Him, tell someone.





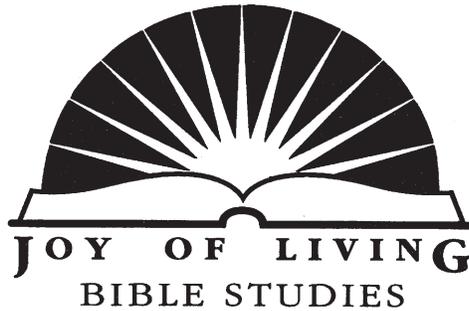
## Sixth Day:

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**Scripture is saturated with God's promises to be our refuge, to protect and watch over the righteous. And even if He allows something bad to happen, He promises to use it for our good (see Romans 8:28-29). Yet it seems as if a part of us is always fearing.**

1. We are saved by faith (see Ephesians 2:8), that is, by believing God, and we continue to live our lives by faith (see Romans 1:17). However, we have an enemy. What do you learn about this enemy from John 8:44?
  - a. Another description of our enemy can be found in 1 Peter 5:8. From this passage, describe what this enemy is like and what he is doing.
  - b. What are we to do? You may want to look these words up in the dictionary to get a more complete understanding.
3. According to 1 Peter 5:9a, how do we deal with this enemy?
4. Challenge: Read Hebrews chapter 11. Does this chapter change your view of faith? Which example stood out to you or was most meaningful to you?
5. Personal: Satan attempts to scare us with all sorts of possible "what if" scenarios. He does everything in his power to make us believe his lies instead of God's truth. What we must do is decide whom we really want to believe, whom we really want to put our faith in—God or the liar. And, once we've decided upon God, we must fill our minds with His Word, so we will know what He has said. Are you faced with some difficulty? What Scriptures might apply to your situation? You might want to ask a friend, your pastor, or your Bible study leader to suggest some passages. Will you choose to believe what God has said?

## Christ B.C. Lesson 4



### Complete Refuge

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#### Noah's Ark

*By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. (Hebrews 11:7)*

The account of Noah and the ark is more than just an interesting historical event. It is also a wondrous picture of how Jesus Christ saves and protects His followers today.

#### God Instructs

For starters, God told Noah what was going to happen and what Noah must do. Noah was not in the dark. He knew precisely what was coming down and precisely (to the very last cubit) what he must do to be saved.

The same is true with us. Scripture couldn't make it more clear about the judgment our groaning world will soon face. And Scripture couldn't make it more clear about what we must do to be saved.

But knowledge is only the first step. Hell will be full of people who had the knowledge of what to do. The next step is a little trickier, we have to...

#### Believe

Noah had to trust God. He had to trust Him enough to do the absurd. He had to trust God enough to build an ocean liner in the middle of a desert, to wait for God to send him a floating zoo, and finally to climb inside and wait. This must have seemed like the weirdest, most foolish thing on earth to do to be saved.

And yet does it appear any more foolish than we Christians who put our hope in a poor, born-in-a-bam, vagabond, miracle worker, Who hung out with bottom-of-the rung riffraff until He underwent the most despised form of capital punishment known to man?

In both cases, the key element is faith—faith in God regardless of outward appearances. But faith is not the end. Next, we have to...

#### Obey

According to Scripture, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). If Noah had only believed God but not obeyed and stepped into that boat—well, he definitely would have gotten a chance to try out all of his swim strokes!

The same is true with us and Jesus. We have to actively put our trust in Him. Believing in Jesus isn't enough.

*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. (James 2:19)*

We have to believe in Jesus enough to actually step on board and trust Him with our whole lives. We have to trust Jesus enough to let Him be both the Savior of our souls *and* the Lord of our lives.

And the result? As with Noah, we are completely saved from God's judgment as well as being saved from all the other storms the world tries to throw our way. Oh sure, the rain may pour, the wind may howl, and the boat may do more than its fair share of rocking. But if we remain obedient, if we stay on board, we'll eventually come out the other end on safe and hallowed ground.

#### Refuge from Day-to-Day Worries

*You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. (Psalm 32:7)*

The little worldly cares are not something to shrug off and ignore. Granted, they're not in the same league as being hit by a Mack truck or being diagnosed with cancer. But they can be just as draining to your spiritual life. Jesus put it best in Luke 8:14, when He described worldly cares as weeds that grow up and slowly choke out the Word of God.

The strangling process may be slower and less obvious than major attacks, but it is just as effective. Nothing more thoroughly chokes off my spiritual life than the thousand and one day-to-day little pin pricks. Sure, I know God promises to be our protection and refuge in the big things. But somehow, I get to thinking He's too big to help in the little things. I know that Jesus said, "Not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:18), but what about the growing number of hairs I see each day in the drain after I shower? What about that MasterCard charge we can't seem to get off our bill? What about that subtle backbiter at school that keeps chomping away at my reputation? The erosion process may be slow, like the steady drip, drip, drip of a leaky faucet, but in the long run it can be devastating.

What can be done? In this war for our spiritual vitality (and it is a war), how can we fight an enemy that is barely noticeable?

We don't fight. We retreat. We seek refuge. We seek God's protective presence as surely as if we were under heavy attack.

How?

For me, I begin to quietly worship and praise. Often the quiet humming of a few favorite choruses does the trick. In heavier times

of attack, slipping away for a slow thoughtful read of an appropriate psalm helps.

In either case, I fully believe that the quickest way into God's protective presence is through praise. I'm sure that's what the psalmist meant when he said, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4). There seems to be something supernatural about praise. Something that supernaturally transports me into His presence.

Now it's true, there are days I absolutely don't feel like worshipping. Days I feel like I'm being a hypocrite and think, *How can I possibly thank God when I don't feel the slightest bit thankful?*

But I found those are the days I need to praise God the most. So, I force myself to thank Him—even through gritted teeth, even if it's only thanking Him for having teeth to grit. Regardless of how I feel, I press on. Praise is an act of my will, not always of my emotions. The Bible specifically talks about "a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15). And sometimes that's exactly what my quiet songs are: a sacrifice.

But eventually, the Lord's peace and presence comes. Sometimes it takes longer than others—one, three, even five minutes. But eventually His truth and reality start to take hold, and the world's attacks begin to appear for what they really are—a silly, dripping faucet. And, a silly, dripping faucet cannot possibly withstand the overwhelming flood of God's love.

## Refuge from Fear

*Anxiety weighs down the heart.* (Proverbs 12:25)

Nothing steals my peace faster than fear. It is so false, such a lie, and yet I fall for it again and again—and again some more.

Fear is false because it contradicts what God says. Scripture is saturated with God's promises to protect and watch over the righteous. And even if He allows something bad to happen, He promises to use it for our good:

*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.* (Romans 8:28)

Yet part of me is always fearing that somehow, some way, God is going to take a nap, that He's going to let something slip past Him. It's such a lie. And yet, I'm so quick to buy into it.

It's little wonder then that Satan, described as "the father of lies" (John 8:44), uses this number one lie as a primary weapon in his arsenal to attack and wear me down.

So, where's my defense?

Another description of Satan can be found in 1 Peter 5:8: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Interestingly enough, lions seldom roar when they're seriously stalking their prey. If they did that they'd always be scaring them off. No, in this case the roar is a blustering, false bravado kind of thing. It's basically just a lot of hot air to try and frighten us.

And that's the key. All Satan can do is try to frighten us. He can get in our faces with his best roar and try to scare us with all sorts of possible "what if" scenarios. He can do everything in his power to make us believe his roaring lies instead of God's quiet truth. He can do all of these things, but he can't touch us.

The trick is for us to decide whom we really want to believe, whom we really want to put our faith in: God or the liar. And, once we've decided upon God, we must fill our minds so full of His presence and promises that we drown out the liar's lies. Once again, I do this with quiet worshipping. Others read Scripture. Still others memorize verses. But whatever method we decide upon, the point is to keep our minds so full of God's promises that we can't hear the enemy's lies.

It's like Peter walking on the water (see Matthew 14:25-31). As long as we keep our eyes focused on Jesus and His promises, we'll do just fine. It's only when we start looking around in fear at the storm's wind and waves that we start to sink. But if we refuse to look at them, if we refuse to look at the lies and focus on God's truth, if we refuse to look at the "what ifs" of Satan and only look at the "I AM" of Jesus, we'll walk right over our deepest fears.

I'm not saying we won't get our hair a little messed. But that's about all Satan's hot air can do—mess our hair a bit.

## Refuge from Worry

*The truth will set you free.* (John 8:32)

There's another way to seek refuge from the lies of fear and worry: Seek the truth.

The father of lies wields and manipulates fear beautifully. Somehow through his genius he is able to make fear feed upon itself in our minds until it has grown way out of proportion. Somehow fear feeds upon fear and grows to larger fear that continues to feed and grow, until we find ourselves running from a giant monster that has puffed itself up many times larger than reality.

As a result, we begin to panic and palpitate over the fear of the situation instead of the actual situation—a neat trick, and no doubt what was meant by the famous words of Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."<sup>1</sup>

So how do we fight this inflated monster? We face it down with truth. If there's a big threat hanging over your head, take a good hard look at it. Ask yourself, *What is the worst that could possibly happen? What adjustments would I need to make if it did happen?* and, *Could I live with those adjustments?* Play the whole scenario out in detail in your mind. By exposing the inflated fear to the actual reality, you'll discover that even the worst possibility is far less damaging than the fear of that possibility. As a result, the fear begins to shrink to a manageable size. It begins to lose its icy grip over your heart and turns into something that you can handle.

Fear and worry make wonderful weapons in the arsenal of the father of lies. But the great thing about being a child of the God of Truth is that we can use His truth to unmask those lies. With the truth and

1. Franklin D. Roosevelt, from his First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933.

promises of Jesus Christ, we can approach that roaring lion of unmanageable fear and worry, unmask it, and discover that it is nothing more than a pussy cat with a big mouth.

## Refuge from Self

*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. (Galatians 5:17)*

We've looked at how Jesus Christ provides refuge. Refuge from judgment, refuge from the cares of the world, refuge from the adversary, and refuge from fear. But there's one other thing we need refuge from—ourselves.

As a Christian I often feel like a walking civil war. In my heart there is the constant battle between my old man (that has been genetically steeped in sin for thousands of years) and the brand-new creature I've become through Jesus Christ.

To me the war appears to be fierce, the struggle intense. In fact, when Jesus talks about picking up our cross and following Him, I don't think of it in terms of the trials and persecutions of being a Christian. That's small potatoes (at least for most of us right now in western society). For me, the real cross is my flesh. The real cross is my old man, the part of me that wants to fight instead of forgive, that wants to swell with pride instead of bow in humility, that wants to take instead of give, that wants to doubt instead of believe. That's the heavy load of my old self that I must carry as I stagger and struggle towards Calvary.

It's interesting that one form of punishment in the Roman days involved tying the dead carcass of a human to the back of a living person. The poor person would have to carry this dead, decaying, putrefying carcass wherever he went for days and weeks—until he eventually collapsed from disease, and emotional and physical exhaustion.

That's how I see myself—the good, “Christian” part of me being dragged down by the other part—the lustful, fearful, insensitive, doubting, prideful, self-serving flesh. Those are the times I cry out to heaven with Paul, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:24).

Happily, the answer again lies with Christ, but not in a way I can totally believe yet. You see, according to Scripture there is no war. That war was already won. Someone has already been to Calvary for us. My old nature has already been crucified. Technically, my old self is already dead:

*For we know that our old self was crucified with him [Christ] so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:6-7)*

*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. (Romans 8:9)*

If that's the case, then the real war I'm fighting has nothing to do with the old man versus the new. According to Scripture that war

has already been fought and won. The real war I'm fighting, as usual, comes down to my faith—whether I really want to believe that the old man is dead—whether I really want to believe that Christ has already won.

But, regardless of what battle I'm fighting—my imaginary “old man,” or just my unbelief—I can still rest in the fact that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). I can find peace in the fact that Jesus is at my side forgiving me, comforting me, helping me get back on my feet. I can rest assured that there is nothing I can do or not do, no failure in flesh or faith so great that it separates me from His love.

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)*

## Troubles?

*The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all. (Psalm 34:19)*

In our preaching of the gospel, we're not always as honest as we could be. Sometimes in our zeal we leave out the fine print. I mean, when is the last time you've heard an evangelist promise that if you become a Christian life will definitely be tough? Yet, that's certainly one of the promises Jesus made to us: “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33).

Somehow, we've gotten it into our heads that being a Christian means smooth sailing, that God promises to always take us around the storms. And if He doesn't, we somehow feel betrayed. Or, if a brother or sister in the Lord is suffering, we may even go so far as to question if there's “hidden sin” in his or her life.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is that Jesus promises to protect us *within* the storm, to give us His peace *amidst* the troubles.

For obvious reasons, the persecuted Church in countries antagonistic to Christianity has had a far better perspective of this truth. In fact, for many of these folks there is a disappointment if they *can't* somehow suffer for Christ. In China one of the mottoes of earnest believers has been, “There is no crown without the cross.”

But it doesn't stop in China. I've heard several stories of westerners assuring brothers and sisters in persecuted regions that we are praying for them. But instead of showing thanks, our persecuted brethren simply look down and sadly shake their heads. “No,” they reply. “You've got it wrong. You're the ones in danger. You have no persecution. We are praying for you!”

Our brethren who have suffered know that our refuge in Christ comes from the peace He gives *inside* the storm. It is a supernatural peace that He gives us within our hearts, regardless of the outward circumstances.

With that in mind, maybe the counsel of a good friend of mine isn't so far off. He suggests that whenever we go through the storms of life, we should stop cowering in the hull. Since we're Christian and know God will protect us, we should stroll out onto the deck and enjoy the storm. We should experience the thrill of the wind and rain in our faces, marvel at the thundering and crashing waves. Oh, we might get a little wet from time to time, but we'll be OK.

Maybe my friend's right. Maybe we should get out there and enjoy the drama and excitement of this show called "life." After all, we do have His promises—and we do know how the final act will end.

## Study Questions

### Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

### First Day: Read the Commentary “Complete Refuge.”

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1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary “Complete Refuge” or from your teacher’s lecture?
  
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

### Second Day: Read Hebrews 7:1-3.

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Many scholars believe that the mysterious priest named Melchizedek who appeared to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 14 was a “christophany,” an actual physical appearance of Jesus Christ long before He was born in Bethlehem. Others believe that he was merely a “type,” that is, a foreshadowing of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

1. a. What did Melchizedek’s name mean? (Hebrews 7:2)
   
  
 b. Read Jeremiah 23:5-6. What was the coming Savior to be called? (verse 6b)
  
2. a. What was Melchizedek the king of? What does this mean? (Hebrews 7:1-2)
   
  
 b. Read Isaiah 9:6. What name was the Savior to be called that relates to the meaning of Melchizedek’s kingship given in Hebrews 7:2?
  
3. a. What does Hebrews 7:3 say regarding Melchizedek’s birth and death?
   
  
 b. Read Revelation 22:13. What does Jesus say about Himself?
  
4. a. From Hebrews 7:3, whom does Melchizedek resemble?
   
  
 b. Read Mark 1:1. Who is the Son of God?
  
5. a. For how long does Melchizedek remain a priest? (Hebrews 7:3)
   
  
 b. Read Hebrews 4:14. Who is our high priest?

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1. If you would like to learn more about Melchizedek and/or Christ’s priestly function, you may want to do the Joy of Living Bible Study on Hebrews.

6. Personal: We will learn more about what it really means that Jesus is our high priest, but for now, look back through the answers you have written today and summarize Who Jesus is. Share with the class, if you would like, what these truths mean to you as they apply to your life.

## **Third Day:**

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**When the writer of Hebrews referred to Jesus as our high priest, it is because no position of ministry better describes Who Jesus is or what He has done.**

1. a. In ancient Israel, priests functioned primarily as the bridge between the people and God, because they could offer acceptable sin offerings to God. They taught the Word, they blessed the people, and they offered intercessory prayers. Read Hebrews 8:5 and describe where these earthly priests served.  
  
b. What was Moses warned about? (Hebrews 8:5b)
2. Read Hebrews 8:1-2. Where does Jesus perform His priestly duties?
3. The Israelite priests were sinners (see Romans 3:23). Because of this, it was necessary for them to perform certain rites in order to be ceremonially clean prior to performing their priestly duties (see Exodus 30:17-21). In contrast to these priests, what does Hebrews 4:15 say about Jesus?
4. Read Hebrews 7:23-25, and compare the ministry of the Israelite priests to the ministry of Jesus.
5. Personal: How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is able to save you completely?

## **Fourth Day:**

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**There are few stories that so clearly foreshadow the depth of Christ's redemptive love as our "forever" high priest than the account of Hosea and Gomer.**

1. a. Hosea was a prophet, a holy man of God, who loved and obeyed the Lord. Read Hosea 1:2-3. What did God instruct Hosea to do? Did he obey God?  
  
b. How did God describe His people, Israel (referred to as "this land") in Hosea 1:2?
2. a. Even after Hosea and Gomer were married and had children, Gomer ran off and was with other men. Because of her choices, she was eventually put on an auction block to be sold as a slave. What did God instruct Hosea to do in Hosea 3:1?



5. a. To what lengths did the shepherd go in order to find the lost sheep? (Luke 15:4b)
  - b. What did the shepherd do when he found the lost sheep? (Luke 15:5-6)
  - c. From Luke 15:7, how does this parable relate to God?
6. Personal: Read Luke 15:7 and 10 again. God uses these parables to show us His love for us and how committed He is to redeeming us. How do these truths make you feel?

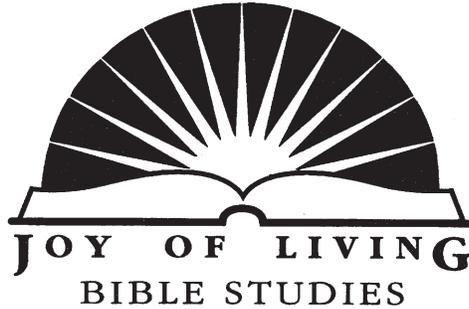
## **Sixth Day: Read Luke 15:11-24.**

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**This is the last of the three parables that Jesus told to help us understand the depth of His love for us.**

1. a. From Luke 15:11-12, describe what the younger son requested of his father and how his father responded.
  - b. Then what did that son do? (Luke 15:13)
2. From Luke 15:14-16, what consequences did he experience?
3. When the son came to his senses, what did he decide to do and why? (Luke 15:17-20a)
4. a. From Luke 15:20b, describe the father's feelings and his immediate action when he saw his son a long way off.
  - b. What did the son say to him, and how did the father respond? (Luke 15:21-23)
  - c. According to Luke 15:24, what was the reason for the celebration?
5. Personal: Did you notice that the father ran out to meet the son? Have you strayed from the Lord? Perhaps you aren't walking with Him the way you know you should be. Won't you come to your senses now and return to Him? He is waiting for you and will rejoice at your return.

## Christ B.C. Lesson 5



### The Depths of Redemption

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#### Melchizedek

*He [Jesus] has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:20)*

Another way of seeing Jesus in the Old Testament is to actually see Him. Many scholars think that we can literally see Christ in the Old Testament in the person of the mysterious high priest named Melchizedek. They believe this “mystery person” who appeared to Abraham back in Genesis was a *christophany*: an actual physical appearance of Jesus Christ long before He was born in Bethlehem.

Here are just a few facts that lead to that conclusion:

- ☛ Melchizedek’s name meant “king of righteousness” (Hebrews 7:2). Jeremiah said that the Messiah would be called “The Lord Our Righteous Savior” (Jeremiah 23:6).
- ☛ Melchizedek was king of Salem (see Hebrews 7:2), which translated means “peace.” So, in essence, he was the “king of peace.” Isaiah called the Messiah the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).
- ☛ Melchizedek appeared out of nowhere, “Without father or mother” (Hebrews 7:3).
- ☛ Melchizedek also was “without beginning of days or end of life” (Hebrews 7:3). Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13).
- ☛ Whoever this guy was, he had more authority than Abraham, because Melchizedek blessed Abraham. (In Old Testament times, a lesser authority never blessed a higher authority.) Also, Abraham tithed 10 percent of his plunder to Melchizedek (see Hebrews 7:4).
- ☛ And finally, to top it off, the writer of Hebrews describes Melchizedek as “resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” (Hebrews 7:3).

It’s this final information that is the most interesting. Not only does the Bible say Melchizedek and Jesus are alike, but it refers to Melchizedek as a high priest *forever*.

Although not all Bible scholars would call Melchizedek a christophany (many consider him just a type or a foreshadowing of Jesus

Christ), there is much to learn about his priesthood and how that office reached its pinnacle in Jesus. During the rest of this lesson we’ll be examining how Jesus Christ still serves as that “forever” high priest.

#### Jesus: The True High Priest

*Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being. (Hebrews 8:1-2)*

When the writer of Hebrews referred to Jesus as our high priest, it wasn’t because he was running out of names to call Him. The truth of the matter is that no position or ministry better describes Who Jesus is or what He did.

#### Ministry Similarities

In ancient Israel, priests functioned primarily as the middlemen between God and His people, much as Jesus is the bridge between us and the Father. Like Jesus, the priests were the ones who could make acceptable sin offerings to God. They were the ones who taught the Word; they were the ones who blessed the people; they were the ones who offered intercessory prayers; and they were the ones, in some instances, who could declare the unclean as purified.

But the similarities go further than that. The tabernacle in the desert and later the temple in Jerusalem were built to the minutest detail according to God’s exacting plans. And for good reason—they were a perfect symbol of the actual sanctuary in heaven (see Hebrews 8:5). So, while the earthly priests served in shadowy symbolisms of heaven, our Heavenly Priest serves in the real thing.

#### Character Similarities

To compare Jesus Christ’s character to the priests’ is a joke. After all, Jesus Christ was perfect and without sin. And yet, by the time the priests finished all of their ceremonial washings, dressings, and blood sprinklings, they too were considered sinless—at least ceremonially.

It’s also interesting to note that, according to Leviticus 21, the priests had to be physically perfect and without blemish, just as Jesus’ character was perfect and without blemish of sin.

But, as interesting as the similarities between the human priests and our Divine Priest are, they are only superficial shadows. Our Priest needs no ceremonial washings. Our Priest doesn’t need to continually offer sacrifice after sacrifice to clean us from our sins. After all, those

priests only used the blood of animals. Our Priest used *His* blood—the blood of the son of God. That blood is so potent and holy, it only needed to be shed one time for all people (see Hebrews 9:11-14, 26).

## The Depth of Christ's Redemptive Love

*The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods." (Hosea 3:1)*

There are few stories that so clearly foreshadow the depth of Christ's redemptive love as our "forever" high priest than the account of Hosea and Gomer.

Hosea was a prophet, a holy man of God who loved and obeyed His Lord. And yet God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. How repulsive that must have been for a man who had spent his whole life striving for purity and holiness. Now this good, pure man must join himself with a prostitute, committing himself to being her faithful husband for the rest of his life. What a difficult task.

Yet how different was Hosea's task from the task Christ has performed for us? Christ's relationship to believers is pictured as a marriage (see Ephesians 5:22-33). He has married us amidst our sins, our failures, and our rebellion. The purest Man and most loving Being in the universe has selected us to become His Bride, to sit with Him on His throne. There was nothing we did to deserve it. There was only our sin, our rebellion—and His love.

But that's only half the story.

Even after Hosea and Gomer were married, even after Hosea had children with Gomer and remained a faithful and supporting husband, his wife ran off and began sleeping around with whomever could give her the finer things of life.

And what did God command Hosea to do? Stone her? Kill and destroy her as the law says he had every right to do? No. He wasn't even allowed to hate and resent her. Instead Hosea was commanded to "love her as the Lord loves" (Hosea 3:1). The prophet, the renowned man of God, went to the marketplace, endured whatever jokes and taunts that were hurled at him, and with a hefty price, bought Gomer off the auction block she had been placed upon (see Hosea 3:2).

What love. What commitment. And what a beautiful symbol of Christ's redemption.

Even though Jesus originally bought us for an incredible price, as Christians we still may stray. We still may be so attracted to the world and its pleasures that we start committing adultery with it—loving it more than Him. We may even allow sin and compromises to slip in until, before we know it, we've sold ourselves back into the slavery of sin.

But Jesus Christ remains faithful even when we are not. Because of the depth of His love, Jesus will search us out. He will make whatever sacrifice necessary to restore us and bring us back out of our slavery. And, once again, He will take us into His loving arms as His precious Bride. He will take us into His heart as His deepest, most treasured love.

## Christ's Commitment to Redemption

*Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:8-10)*

Luke 15 recounts three parables Jesus told about redemption. It's as if Jesus is telling us that the concept of God's redemption is so large and multi-faceted, that it takes several illustrations to help our earthly minds grasp it. For the rest of this lesson we'll be looking into these parables of redemption and viewing other aspects of Christ's ministry as our high priest.

All of the parables end with tremendous rejoicing and celebration when the person or object has been redeemed. That's how intense the Lord's love is for us. That's how important we are in His eyes. If just one of us turns from our sins and allows Christ to redeem us, all of heaven breaks into a celebration.

But the parable of the Lost Coin uncovers another unique aspect of Christ's redemption. Unlike the priests in the Old Testament or any other religious characters in any other religion, Jesus (represented by the woman) doesn't sit around and wait for us to find Him. Instead, He actively searches us out. We don't have to spend our lives staggering blindly about in search of some eternal truth, hoping against hope that somehow, some way, we'll stumble upon God. Jesus is already out there looking for us!

It was no small job this woman had before her—cleaning out the entire house, sweeping it, checking every inch with the light from her lamp. But she did not give up. She did everything in her power, she used every resource she had, until finally she found that one coin. Sure, she had other coins, but that one coin was so important to her, so precious, that she would not give up until she found it.

That is the kind of pursuing love our Lord has for us. He will do everything in His power to search for us, to find us, and to redeem us.

What a relief that is. What peace to know we don't have to run around reading every book we can find, buying every self-help resource on the market, investigating every religion-of-the-month. All we have to do is give up hiding and allow ourselves to be found.

## Christ's Method of Redemption

*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. (Luke 15:4-6)*

Sheep are stupid. They're stubborn. They are fearful. So the next time we read about Christ as the Shepherd and ourselves as the sheep, let's not think God is paying us any poetic compliments. Chances are He's just being honest.

In this parable we again see the commitment of the Great Shepherd as He goes out and searches for us. And we see the joy He experiences when we are found. But there's one unique aspect to this parable that sets it apart from the others. Not only does He seek us out, not only is He joyful when we're found, but He actually carries us. We don't even have to do that on our own. Jesus Christ will actually carry us into His abundant and eternal life!

This is a concept very different from the beliefs of worldly philosophies and religious systems. The following is a little illustration that may help clarify that difference:

Once there was a man so drunk that he stumbled out of a local party and fell into a deep cesspool. It was so steep and slimy that it was impossible to climb out. He was its prisoner. Desperately he cried for help. But no one heard. The nearby party was just too loud.

Eventually a wise teacher by the name of Buddha came upon the man.

"Can you help me?" the man cried.

"Certainly," Buddha replied. "Learn my wisdom, follow my teachings, and you will be able to climb out." With that he turned and left.

The man tried his best to follow Buddha's advice, but the walls were just too steep, their sides too slippery.

Next came Mohammed. "Help me," the man cried.

"Certainly," Mohammed answered. "Simply follow God's rules and my commands and you will be free." With that Mohammed turned and moved on.

Desperately the man tried—again and again. And, again and again, he failed.

Finally, a New Ager arrived.

"Please," the man cried, "you must help me!"

"Certainly," the person answered. "Just look deep within yourself and you'll discover you have the God-given strength to climb out." With that the New Ager also turned and left.

Once again, the man tried his best, but to no avail. His efforts only made him more filthy and more depressed over his hopeless condition.

Finally Jesus appeared. "Do you want out?" He asked.

"Please sir," the man sobbed. "I'm trapped. I've tried everything. There's nothing more I can do."

"That's right," Jesus answered softly. And with that He climbed down into the stinking, slippery hole and carefully carried the man out.

That's the redemptive love of our Lord. Not only does He search for us, not only does He rejoice when He finds us, but He actually wades into the filth of our sins, puts us on His shoulders, and carries us out.

### Christ's Redemptive Process

*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*

*But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:20-24)*

The story of the lost son is one of the purest presentations of the process of Christ's redemption.

#### Free Will

At the beginning of the parable of the lost son, the father gave his son the inheritance and let him run off—much as God has given us free will to follow Him or to run off and sin. The father knew what awaited his son in the world. He could have forbidden him from going out. He could have built a wall to stop him from leaving. But in the young man's eyes, that wall would not have been for protection. It would have been a prison. So, as painful as it was for the father, he knew it was important to let his son go.

#### Enslavement of Sin

After blowing all of his money, the young man wound up working and dining in a pigpen. (Only those who have worked around pigs can appreciate the filth and unique aromas of such a job. Also keep in mind that the kid was Jewish, and pigs rated right at the top of the unclean list.)

The young man soon learned that sin is a baited hook. The same is true for us. A sin may look great on the outside—we may revel in it, satiate our senses with it—but eventually we'll find the hook. And subtly, without our even knowing it, that hook begins to pull us in. The sin has caught us. It is no longer serving us, we are serving it. We have become its slave.

#### Repentance

Eventually the lost son "came to his senses" (Luke 15:17). He had learned what his father had known all along. The son returned to his father in great humility, admitting his sins and asking for forgiveness.

#### The Father's Response

Finally, we see a father so excited and so full of love that he can't contain himself. Before his son even arrives, the man spots him, races down the road, throws his arms around his son, pig slop and all, and hugs and kisses him. This is a picture of the love Christ has for any who return to Him in repentance. It's not hesitant, it's not reserved. It's free-giving abandonment.

#### Summary

So, in looking back we can see that the parable of the lost son underlines the four basic steps of redemption:

- ☛ Christ gives us free will and allows us to rebel.
- ☛ We become enslaved and destroyed by our rebellion.
- ☛ We finally "come to our senses" and repent of our rebellion.
- ☛ And we wind back up in the Father's loving and forgiving arms.



4. The sacrifice of his only son had been required of Abraham, but he didn't have to go through with it. God had provided the sacrifice, a substitute. Centuries later God actually did what He had spared Abraham from doing, and He did it for us, so that our sin could be taken away. What do you learn about this from the following verses?

1 John 4:14

John 1:29

5. Personal: What a loving, providing Father He is. He insists on perfection from us, and then steps in and provides that perfection for us through the death of His own Son (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). And He doesn't stop with forgiving us, cleansing us of sin, and giving us His righteousness. Along with all this He gives us eternal life. He is our provider. Write Romans 8:32 and personalize it by inserting your own name. Write your thoughts on this passage and how it applies to you.

### **Third Day: Read Matthew 6:25-34.**

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**Jesus is speaking in this passage. As we read yesterday, the Lord is our provider, yet the worries of the world constantly scream at us.**

1. a. What command does Jesus give in Matthew 6:25a?  
  
b. What does He say regarding life in Matthew 6:25b?
2. In 1 John 5:20, we learn that life—real life—is really knowing God, Who is life,<sup>1</sup> and living in relationship with Him under His lordship. Read Romans 14:17. What do you learn about the kingdom of God?<sup>2</sup>
3. a. Read Matthew 6:26, 28-31. What examples does Jesus give of God's care?  
  
b. What does Jesus say about you in Matthew 6:26b?

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1. Knowing God is not the same as knowing something about Him. It involves being born again by His Holy Spirit, which makes you His child and part of His kingdom.

2. The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is first mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew 3:2. The *NIV Study Bible* note on this verse says, "The 'kingdom of heaven/God'...is the reign of God that he brings about through Jesus Christ—i.e., the establishment of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people, the overcoming of all the forces of evil, the removal from the world of all the consequences of sin—including death and all that diminishes life—and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace."

4. a. Read Matthew 6:32-33. What does Jesus say should be the difference in what is sought between those who follow Him and those who don't (i.e. pagans)?  
  
b. What will be the result for those who seek His kingdom and His righteousness? (Matthew 6:33b)
  
5. Personal: Jesus is not saying that we shouldn't work and pay our bills. His focus is on what we are seeking, that is, what is most important in our life. If the main focus of our life is knowing God and becoming more like Him (righteous), then we can trust that He will provide for us. Are you seeking God first? Are you focusing upon Him, obeying Him, and seeking His righteousness? If you aren't, will you commit to putting Him first in your life? If you are, will you trust Him to meet your needs?

## **Fourth Day:**

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**God has provided for us forgiveness of sin, righteousness, and eternal life. In addition, He offers a relationship with Himself, the promise to provide for our tangible needs, and so much more.**

1. a. Read John 14:27. What did Jesus give us?  
  
b. Because He doesn't give it in the manner the world gives, what will we be able to avoid as a result of His gift?
  
2. Read Romans 5:1 and describe the peace we have through Jesus Christ.
  
3. Read Philippians 4:7. Describe God's peace and what it will do.
  
4. a. In John 16 Jesus told the disciples about the relationship they could have with the Father and some of the difficult things that were to come. Read John 16:33. Why had Jesus told them those things?  
  
b. What will those who follow Him have in this world?  
  
c. Why can we take heart?

5. Personal: As we see, God's peace is inexplicable. It is supernatural. It flows from Him to us no matter what our outward circumstances are. Take a few moments right now to think about the Lord—all He has done for you and all He has provided for you. Now, thank Him.

## **Fifth Day:**

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### **All life springs from God.**

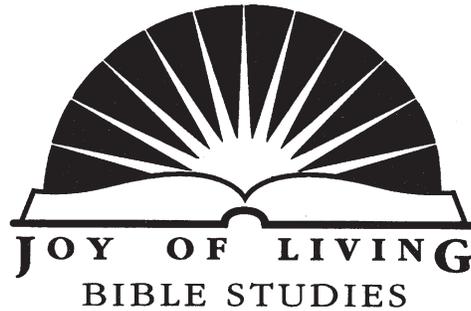
1. a. Read John 10:10. For what reason did Jesus say He came?  
  
b. In contrast, what did the “thief,” that is, the evil one, come to do?
2. This “life...to the full” that Jesus is speaking about is more than just living and breathing and functioning in this world. What does John 17:3 say about this life?
3. As we read in Day 3, and as the above verses state, life—real life—is really knowing God, Who is life,<sup>1</sup> and living in relationship with Him under His lordship. What does the Apostle Paul say regarding knowing the Lord in Philippians 3:8?
4. What does 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 say regarding these spiritual truths?
5. Personal: The life that God has for us here and now, and on into eternity, is more wonderful than words can explain. It is not always easy, but it is full and overflowing. Are you experiencing an abundant life? If you are, share with someone what knowing the Lord means to you. If you aren't, now is the time. See page 4 if you would like to know more about this. You may also want to talk to your teacher, leader, pastor, or other Christian friend.

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1. See footnote on Day 3, Question 2.



## Christ B.C. Lesson 6



### Christ's Provision

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#### Abraham and Isaac

*When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!...Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said... "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."*

*Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." (Genesis 22:9-14)*

No one warned me of the intensity of love I'd feel as a parent. No one told me about the moisture that would silently well up in my eyes when I hold my little daughter, the lump that would catch in my throat when I see her overcoming life's little challenges, the rage when I watch her suffering from a fever, or the heaviness in my chest as I look at her tiny ring finger and realize someday she will no longer be just mine.

The love of a parent for his or her child is indescribable, all-consuming. And yet, because the Lord commanded it, Abraham was willing to destroy the object of that love. The very thing Abraham treasured most God had asked him to sacrifice. What faith Abraham must have had. What commitment. What love.

But although the sacrifice of his only son had been required of Abraham, he didn't have to go through with it. Someone else would provide a sacrifice for him—first, through a ram, then centuries later, through the sacrifice of His own Son.

No human would be required by God to undergo the full agony and heartbreak of willfully destroying his own child. Only one Person in the universe would be required to undergo that type of hell, that tortuous grief.

And yet, how typical that is of our Lord—asking us to do difficult things and then stepping in and actually doing them Himself. What a loving, providing Father He is—insisting upon perfection from us, and then stepping in and being that perfection, Himself.

"The Lord Will Provide." As a loving Father, He will provide anything that His children need, from day-to-day trifles to our salvation. No sacrifice is too great for such a loving Father, no provision too small.

"The Lord Will Provide." What a perfect name for Abraham to give that mountain. What's more perfect still is that many historians and archaeologists believe it was on this very mountain that God's greatest provision took place. Many scholars believe that it was on this exact mountain, centuries later, that God sacrificed His own Son, making the ultimate provision—the provision of eternal life.

#### Material Provision

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

*And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? (Matthew 6:25-30)*

I wish I would never have a doubt that the Lord will always take care of my house payments, my taxes, my medical insurance, and yes, that He'll even clothe my wife and daughter!

I wish I totally relied on the fact that God will provide for my every need. Actually, He promises more than that. He promises to meet all my needs with greater splendor than that of Solomon, one of the wealthiest men who ever lived!

Why do I fight and argue to prove that Scripture is 100 percent accurate, and yet refuse to take these verses as 100 percent truth? Why do I pore over Jesus' every word and accept them as fact, but treat this passage as if He was just taking poetic license? I trust Jesus Christ with my eternal soul; why won't I trust him with a house payment?

Jesus had the answer when He described people like me in the end section as "you of little faith."

That's the key: faith.

God's provision is there. It's simply a question of whether I want to believe Him or not. Do I really want to focus my eyes on Christ and start walking in faith? Do I really want to refuse to look at the roaring wind of inflation, the churning waters of IRS hassles, the crashing waves of oh-no-the-Social-Security-System-is-going-down-the-drain-what-am-I-going-to-do-for-retirement?

That is the ultimate question. Do I really want to lock my sights onto Jesus, trusting His promises and walking above my day-to-day financial worries? Or would I prefer to spend the rest of my life fighting and fretting for what He's already promised to give me?

When I look at the choices, it's not a tough decision. But, as always, it's up to me.

### All Things Given

*So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:31-33)*

The world's worries constantly scream at me. They are a continual roar in my ears, in the heat of my day-to-day battles over making a living, or studying for exams, or office politics, or fighting about who's going to pick up the kids. I mean, let's face it, I'm lucky if I can even hear that "still small voice," let alone obey it!

"Just don't worry," you say? Those are pretty easy words. But what do you do when Reality says otherwise? What do you do when Reality says, "If you don't get out there and fight and scrap and kick with everybody else to get what you got to get, it ain't going to be gotten!"?

One of the things you can do is remember God's faithfulness in the past...

When I was a little guy in Seattle, I lived for Sea Fair Days. It was a time of picnics, boat rides, celebrations, hydroplane races, and the big, *Sea Fair Parade!*

One time we arrived at the parade route early enough to find a perfect place on the curb. The parade unfolded right before us. I watched with saucer-like eyes as the glittering floats passed, the marching bands marched, and the prancing horses pranced.

Then it came—the Sea Fair Float with the Sea Fair Pirates! They tossed candy onto the street and everyone laughed as the kids scrambled out screaming and fighting for as much candy as their greedy little hands could grab. The float came closer and closer.

I thought, *This is going to be great. The next handful should land in the street right in front of me!*

But just before the float arrived, just before it was my turn to race out, my mom leaned over and said, "I don't want you to run out there. I want you to stay here on the curb."

I was heartbroken, devastated. But I quietly obeyed and watched as all the kids around me leaped out into the street to fight and scrap

and kick for a piece of candy. It made no sense to me and it was tough. But I obeyed.

And then, high atop the float, the Captain of the Pirates saw what was happening. Without a word He climbed down, hopped off the float, and headed directly toward me. I was frightened and thrilled at the same time. He hovered over me for just a second. Then he smiled, said something I couldn't understand, and in front of everyone, he dumped the biggest handful of candy I had ever seen right into my lap.

I have never forgotten that experience. I did not have to get out into the street to fight and scrap and kick. All I had to do was obey. Even when it didn't make sense. All I had to do was sit and obey. As a result, I received more than anyone would have dreamed.

In a way, this story illustrates what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6. As I seek God first, as I focus upon Him, obey Him, and seek His righteousness, He will always provide—abundantly.

### Provision of Peace

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. (John 14:27)*

Awhile back when I was first starting this treacherous course called "adulthood," I spent the day working at a famous millionaire's ranch. He had everything and then some. He also had pretty good eyesight, and noticed me ogling and drooling over his empire.

Later that afternoon he strolled over to our pickup and said, "Son, you ain't gonna believe what I'm gonna say but I gotta say it anyways. You see all this stuff?"

"Yes, Sir," I stuttered, doing my best not to salivate all over his thousand-dollar suit and real alligator boots.

"You won't believe this," he repeated, "But I was happier when I was poor like you than I have been since I got all this here money. Now all I worry about is who's gonna try and steal it from me, and how they're gonna try and do it."

He was right. I didn't believe him—at least not for a while. But over the years as I've watched my baby boomer buddies buy their bigger homes, their bigger screen TVs and their bigger BMWs, I've noticed something. I've noticed that the more they've tried to buy peace and contentment, the more it has eluded them.

Sure, they're all smiles and good times on the outside. Who wouldn't be, with their spas, their gorgeous children, and their condos in Colorado? And sure, I'm usually jealous—at least for a while. But when I spend the time to really talk and listen to my "successful" friends, it doesn't take long to discover that these beautiful people with their beautiful lives are riddled with intense fears, depression, and emptiness.

And for good reason. They are desperately trying to buy a peace and fulfillment that they cannot buy. They are desperately seeking a peace from the world that the world cannot give—peace with themselves, peace with their lives, and above all, peace with God.

As Christians, you and I don't have to fall into that vicious cycle of earning more money to buy more things to try to buy peace. If we honestly put our trust in Christ, we can cut out the first two steps of making more bucks to buy more things. Instead, we can go directly to the Source of peace and receive it—no matter what our outward circumstances may be.

I've just returned from a trip to China, visiting members of unofficial home churches. These rural believers are some of the poorest and most persecuted Christians I have ever met. They are also the happiest and most content. Why? Because of their reliance on the Author and Finisher of peace. For it was He who said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

### Provision of Life

*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*  
(John 10:10)

Perhaps all of God's provisions can be summed up into this one promise: LIFE—life as Christ had originally designed it, life that is full, abundant, overflowing. And that's just for beginners! That's just for those who have asked Him to forgive their sins and be their Lord!

Those who are serious about really getting down and serving with Him soon discover a deeper principle. They discover that it's absolutely impossible to out-give God. The more they give of their lives to serve Him, the more He gives of His life back to them. It's a wonderful "non-vicious" cycle. We give, He gives more. We give more from what He has given us, and He gives even more.

That doesn't mean everything's always roses—on the contrary. But, if we are serious about serving Christ, He is serious about blessing and supporting us.

As a teenager I promised the Lord that I would go into full-time service for Him when I turned 20. Little did I know that on my 20th birthday I would be in the middle of the Israeli wilderness with dysentery. *Hmm*, I thought, *so this is what I have to look forward to.*

But from that time on my life has never been the same. Yes, it has been full of sacrifice and occasional lean times, but not once have I given of my life and time that it has not returned, multiplied many times over.

My Yuppie friends with all of their Yuppie toys look at the fullness of my life and shake their heads in amazement. I have never devoted my life to making money, seeking pleasures or worldly adventures. And yet my life, with writing books, directing films, traveling all over the world, beautiful family, home, and above all, with the eternal qualities God is instilling in me—well, it just leaves my friends in awe.

Come to think of it, it does me, too. I haven't been so blessed because I'm such a great person. (My friends and family can attest to that.) And it's not because I have sought any of these things on my own. But because I've devoted my life, with all of its faults and frailties, to serving Christ. And as a result of that service, the past 15 years

of my life have been richer and fuller than I could have ever possibly imagined.

So, if you hear even the slightest inner whisperings about full or part-time service to the Lord, listen carefully. It may be the Holy Spirit asking if you're interested in embarking on the most incredible and adventurous journey imaginable. It may not always be easy, but it will always be full and overflowing. It will always be abundant with LIFE.

### The Key to Receiving Christ's Provisions

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

There are many other areas of provision that Christ supplies in our lives: holiness, good works, love, patience, joy, perseverance. You name it, if it's for our best, He'll supply it.

Why? There are two reasons.

First, Christ loves us so much that He wants us "mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:4). He wants us to experience the joy of functioning as He had originally designed us.

He knows we can't function according to His original design on our own—not anymore. We're too crippled. There's been too much sin in our past. Just as it is with our salvation, so it is with every other good thing in our lives. God must do the work.

You may think, *But we have to do something!*

And you are right, we do. We have to have faith. We have to believe Him and be willing to receive His provisions. We are like men and women dying of thirst in the desert. Suddenly Jesus Christ appears. In His hand is a pitcher of cool, pure water. He gave His life to purchase this precious, life-giving water. And now He will do anything He can to help us drink it. He will even pour it into our mouths. All we have to do is have enough faith to open our mouths. That's it. He will do the rest.

"But," you say, "what if I don't even have that much faith? What if I don't believe He'll supply my financial needs, my emotional needs? What if I don't believe He will give me peace? What if I doubt that He can fix all my 'incompleteness' and make me whole? In short, what if I don't even have the faith to open my mouth to receive that water?"

That's a good question. But here's an even better answer:

*Dwell with Him.* Look into Christ's eyes. Through quiet communing with Him in prayer and reading of His Word, you will discover His reality becoming more real than the reality you're fighting. Gradually as you look to Christ, you will find yourself miraculously receiving His faith to overcome your doubt.

Why? Because He knows we're not even strong enough to have faith on our own. I'm afraid we even have to turn to Jesus for that. This is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said, "Let us...fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2). He is the source of our faith. Not we, He.

Yes, faith is the key. Absolutely. We must have the faith to receive His provisions. But like everything else, we can't even do that on our own.

With this cold, hard fact in mind, one of my favorite Bible passages and one that gives me the most comfort is in the Gospel of Mark:

*Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"*

*"From childhood," he answered. "It [the demon possessing his son] has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."*

*"If you can't?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."*

*Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:21-24)*

With that, Jesus turned and cast out the demon, completely curing the boy.

All things are possible with God—even the faith to make those things possible.

## Study Questions

### Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the "Challenge" questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the "Personal" questions with the class only if you want to share them.

### First Day: Read the Commentary "Christ's Provision."

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary "Christ's Provision" or from your teacher's lecture?
  
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

### Second Day:

**When it comes to Old Testament lives, there are few who typify the obedience of Jesus Christ more closely than Joseph. Early in Joseph's life, God revealed to him in a dream that he would become a ruler. As we will see, although this promise was made to a mortal about an earthly kingdom, it parallels the promise the Father made about His own Son.**

1. a. From the following verses, what happened to Joseph as a young man?

Genesis 37:28

Acts 7:9a (The patriarchs referred to in this passage are Joseph's brothers.)

- b. In spite of this, who was with Joseph through it all? (Acts 7:9b-10a)
2. Read Genesis 39:1-6a. How did God bless Joseph?

3. a. Read Genesis 39:6b-12. Describe the temptation Joseph faced and what he did about it.

b. Read Genesis 39:13-20a. What was the initial result of Joseph's faithfulness and obedience?

4. From the following passages, describe how God was still with Joseph in the midst of his difficulties.

Genesis 39:20b-23

Acts 7:9b-10 (Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams eventually brought him from prison into the service of Pharaoh himself.)

5. Read Genesis 41:46-49, 53-57 and Acts 7:11-14. God sent Pharaoh dreams that only Joseph could interpret, prophesying 7 years of abundance followed by 7 years of famine. How was Joseph used by God?

6. a. Joseph, like Jesus, was not blessed for his own glory. Both used their power and authority to serve and deliver others. From Genesis 45:4-7 and 50:20, how did Joseph summarize the difficulties that took place in his life?

b. Personal: No matter how dark or difficult things seemed for Joseph, he remained faithful and obedient to God. Consider your own life: do you want to remain faithful and obedient to God, at all cost? Will you ask God to help you be obedient to Him in all things?

### **Third Day:**

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**In this age of what is called "cheap grace," people often look upon obedience as an option, something they will do if it doesn't put them out. However, as we have learned, faith—real faith—is life changing.**

1. Read Romans 1:5. What comes from faith?

2. a. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, and are born again by His Spirit, we are changed. What do you learn about this from 2 Corinthians 5:17?
  - b. This “new creation” that we become brings changed attitudes and desires. Read Titus 2:11-14, and describe what God’s grace teaches us.
3. As you see, we are saved by faith in what Jesus Christ did for us by His death and resurrection. Our attitudes and actions—that is, our life-style—are proof of whether we really are a Christian (see 1 John 1:6), but the actions themselves don’t make us a Christian.<sup>1</sup> Just because a person says they have put their faith in Christ doesn’t necessarily mean they have done so. Just because a person says they walk in the light doesn’t mean they necessarily are doing it. Just because a person says they have fellowship with God doesn’t necessarily mean that they do have it. What does James 2:17 say about this?
4. a. We are not talking about sinless perfection, but the desire to walk with, to please, and to be obedient to the Lord. What do you learn about this from John 14:15 and 2 John 1:6a?
  - b. Even though we as believers have the desire and longing to be obedient to God, we sometimes fail. What hope are we given in 1 John 1:8-9?
5. Personal: Write down one truth you have learned today and what difference you believe it will make in your life.

## Fourth Day:

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### We continue to look at the importance of obedience to God.

1. God has so many blessings that He longs to give us, but obedience and blessing go together. Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14, and briefly summarize the blessings that would be given to God’s people, the Israelites, if they fully obeyed the Lord.
  2. a. Deuteronomy 28:15-68 lists the curses that would be upon those who disobeyed God and worshipped and served false gods. Read Deuteronomy 30:19-20. From verse 19, what was set before His people, and what did God want them to choose?
    - b. From Deuteronomy 30:20b, Who is our life?
3. According to James 1:17, from where do all good things, all blessings, come?

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1. If you would like to study more about this, you may want to do the Joy of Living Bible study, *The Letters of John*.

4. In many ways God blesses everyone. What do you learn about this from the following verses?

Matthew 5:45b

John 3:16-17

5. God is love. He created us and knows what is best for us. Second Samuel 22:31 tells us, "As for God, his way is perfect." In contrast to God's ways, which are perfect, what does Isaiah 53:6 say about all people?
6. Personal: Everything good, all life, every blessing originates in and comes from God, Who is life. When we, by our sin, alienate ourselves from God, we alienate ourselves from all the blessings that originate in and come from Him. It is impossible to have these blessings without having Him. When we are born of God's Spirit<sup>1</sup> and endeavor to live in obedience to Him, confessing our sin when we fail, we remain in relationship with Him, which is the place of blessing. We either go our own way, the way apart from God and His blessings, or we go His perfect way, which is the place of blessing. If you would like, share with the class a time you chose to be obedient to God and were blessed, or a time when you were disobedient to God and suffered the consequences.

## Fifth Day:

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**Today we will look at another aspect of obedience to God.**

1. Read John 15:14-17 (Jesus is speaking). What does verse 14 say regarding obedience?
2.
  - a. From John 15:16a, what did Jesus appoint His friends to do?
  - b. What will be the result? (John 15:16b)
  - c. Read Galatians 5:22-23a and describe the fruit of the Spirit.
3.
  - a. Read John 15:5-7. From verse 5, what must we do to bear fruit?
  - b. From John 15:7, what will be the result of remaining in Him and His words remaining in us?
4. Read 1 John 5:14-15. Now try to put it into your own words.
5. Personal: Put simply, when we obey the Lord we remain in relationship with Him, which causes us to bear the fruit of the Spirit, that is, His likeness. As we become more like Him, we begin to pray according to His will. When we pray according to His will, He hears and answers our prayers. Every step of obedience we take is rewarded with a deeper relationship with Him. Is God interested in every aspect of our life, even the seemingly trivial aspects? Yes! (See Psalm 139.) Does He ever give us our wants along with our needs? Just look around you. Our motivation for obedience should be to draw closer to the heart of the Lord. We can't expect our obedience to do anything, let alone manipulate Him into getting our way. What the Lord does after we obey is up to Him. Are you guilty of trying to manipulate the Lord into getting your own way? Do you honestly think you are wiser than God?

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1. If you need to know more about this, see page 4.

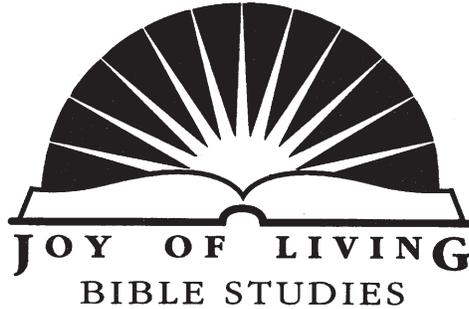
## Sixth Day:

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**It seems that all of the great heroes of the Bible had one thing in common: obedience. Yes, they all had faith, but they were willing to put that faith into action through obedience. They had “the obedience that comes from faith” (Romans 1:5).**

1. a. What command are we given in James 1:22?  
  
b. Read James 1:25. What is the result of both hearing and obeying God's Word—that is, doing what it says?
2. We have already examined Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. Read Genesis 22:16-18. What are some of the blessings God gave to Abraham because of his obedience?
3. a. As we stated before, God blesses every step of obedience we make toward Him. Read Judges 6:1-6. Why were the Israelites being oppressed by Midian? (verse 1)  
  
b. What did the Israelites finally do? (Judges 6:6)  
  
c. Read Judges 6:15-16. When God called Gideon a mighty man of valor and instructed him to save Israel, what did Gideon reply? (verse 15)  
  
d. What was God's response? (Judges 6:16)
4. Gideon took steps of obedience. First, he tore down his father's altar to a false god, replacing it with an altar to the Lord. Then, at God's instruction, he reduced his army from 32,000 men to 300. Finally, he and his men went into battle with trumpets, torches, and empty jars. Because of Gideon's obedience, Israel was delivered. Even when Gideon's faith was weak, God encouraged him to take the next step of obedience (see Judges 6:36-40; 7:9-15). Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. What or whom does God often choose to use? Why?
5. Personal: Think of yourself. Do you believe you fit into any of the categories listed in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31? God asks us to believe Him—to have faith in Him and what He has said. Remember, true faith results in obedience. Do you doubt? Ask God to help you believe (see Mark 9:24) and to obey. You will be surprised at the blessings that follow, especially a closer walk with the Lord, and the ways in which God will use you to touch others with His love.

## Christ B.C. Lesson 7



### The Demand for Obedience

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#### Joseph: A Type of Christ

*Joseph said to his brothers...“God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” (Genesis 45:4,7)*

When it comes to Old Testament lives, there are few who typify<sup>1</sup> the obedience of Jesus Christ more closely than Joseph. I mean, this poor guy went through everything in the book and then some. And yet, no matter how dark things looked, he remained obedient to God. No matter how “unfaithful” God may have appeared on the surface, Joseph hung in there, trusting and obeying Him, foreshadowing the obedience of Jesus many centuries later.

Early on in Joseph’s life, God revealed to him in a dream that he would be a major, big-time ruler. Although this promise was made to a mortal about an earthly kingdom, it parallels the promise the Father made about His own Son.

So, Joseph was going to be a ruler. That was the good news. The bad news was he’d have to wait a few decades for it to happen.

When he was still a teenager, Joseph was betrayed and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers for 20 pieces of silver. In much the same way, Jesus was betrayed by his “brother” for 30 pieces of silver.

But instead of grumbling and turning his back on God, Joseph grew where he was planted, in the household of an Egyptian. Joseph remained faithful to God and God blessed him. Eventually he was put in charge of his master’s entire household. (It’s interesting that once again the Lord didn’t remove one of His children from a difficult situation. Instead, He blessed him in the middle of it.)

But the trials weren’t over yet. It was because of Joseph’s faithfulness and obedience (by refusing to go to bed with the boss’s wife) that he found himself unjustly thrown into prison. I don’t know about you, but by that time I would have started whining a few choruses of “Why me, God?”

But not Joseph. Once again, he remained obedient and faithful. And, amidst the difficulties, God again blessed him. He became head of all the prisoners. Then, to top it off, one of his buddies was getting out on parole. This buddy was so impressed with Joseph’s ability to

interpret dreams that he promised to put in a good word for him to the king. Now at last, things seemed to be turning out as God promised.

Well, not exactly...

As buddies are prone to do, this one let Joseph down. By now I might have been seething with anger and resentment. I mean, what does a righteous saint of God have to do to get a little recognition, anyway?

But not Joseph. He still remained faithful. He still trusted God. And eventually, through no manipulation of his own, but by remaining faithful, Joseph rose to take charge of all of Egypt—the most powerful nation in the world!

Because of Joseph’s obedience, regardless of the cost, God’s promise to him was fulfilled. He became a type of ruler/savior—much as Jesus is Lord and Savior through His persistent obedience.

But Joseph, like Jesus, did not become ruler for his own glory. Both used their power and authority to serve and deliver others. In fact, Joseph used his position to bring about reconciliation with the very brothers who had betrayed him. He also saved their lives by providing them with food during a great famine. In all of this, Joseph saw God’s will at work and probably put it best when he said, “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7).

#### No Option

*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16)*

In this age of “cheap grace” and “convenient Christianity,” it’s far too easy to look upon obedience as an option—as something I’ll do if I get around to it—something I’ll do on my schedule, at my leisure, if it doesn’t put me out.

But to God, obedience is not an option. It is a command: “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15).

Cheap grace may say, “Hey, I’m a Christian, I’m saved. I usually try to follow God’s commands. If I do, great. If I don’t, no biggie. I mean, after all, the Bible says, ‘There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’” (Romans 8:1).

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1. To typify means to symbolize or exemplify.

That verse is true. But I can't help thinking that for those who use and abuse Christ's grace in this way, there is something seriously wrong.

Cheap grace argues, "Come off it, I believe in Christ. That's all that counts."

The answer to that argument is both yes and no.

James said, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:19).

You see, the belief referred to in Scripture is intended to be more than a mental nod. It is meant to be a *life-changing* belief. But even if people only get by with enough belief to save them from the flames of hell, think of the blessings and joys they miss by sidestepping God's fullest will in their lives. I'm a firm believer that every time we take God's hand in obedience, there is a hidden blessing in His palm.

Even if that wasn't the case, what a miserable relationship that must be with Christ. Do they think that they're simply conning Him, that they're using Him like some Kleenex to blow their noses in and then throw away at their convenience?

There's something so cleansing, so freeing, when we stand before Christ knowing we've sincerely tried, even if we sincerely failed. But there's something so dirty and cheap in standing before Him knowing we've used Him. Yes, we may be forgiven. Yes, His blood has covered our sins. But what becomes of our relationship with Christ—that intimacy that's so important for us to have?

All this to say, Scripture implies that we may be called upon to resist "to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4). How sad it is for us when we simply resist to the point of inconvenience.

## Principles of Obedience

*To obey is better than sacrifice.* (1 Samuel 15:22)

There are certain promises God has made in Scripture regarding this present life concerning obedience and disobedience. Here's just one section from Deuteronomy 28:1-19—

*If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:*

*You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.*

*The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.*

*Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.*

*You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.*

*The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.*

*The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.*

*The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath...all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you. The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you.*

*The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.*

*However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you:*

*You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.*

*Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed.*

*The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.*

*You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.*

The curses for disobedience continue for the next 49 verses!

All this to say, it sounds like obedience is fairly important to God.

Lord, may it become more important to me.

## The Power of Obedience

*You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.* (John 15:14-16)

When I seriously wrestle and strive for obedience, my communication lines with the Lord are clearer and my prayers more potent. At first, I thought this was just a coincidence, but it's proven to be a recurring pattern. The first time it really struck me was a few Christmases back. There was this one "tiny" area of blatant disobedience in my life. For years I knew I should take care of it, but I just didn't get around to it. Then for one reason or another I decided it was time. And almost immediately my prayers seemed to take on a deeper potency. It seemed everything I prayed about was answered as soon as I prayed about it! Everything from finding "impossible-to-find" books in stores, to parking

places, to a healed relationship, to one of the most exciting job openings in my career as a filmmaker.

But for me the real topper came when I was at the All School Christmas pageant. My three-year-old was up in the chorus singing something “real spiritual” about reindeer or Santa Claus or something. There was this older kid standing in front of her with giant cutout antlers the size of Cleveland on her head, which managed to block out any sign of my daughter’s existence. Not a good situation for an anxious dad with camera in hand.

I wondered if I should bother God with such a trifling request. Then, I went ahead. I asked the Lord to move that kid in front, so I could get my photo. And no less than 10 seconds later, the little girl with the big antlers moved. I was dumbstruck. Amazed.

Is an experience like that something to build an entire theology on? Absolutely not. Were my motives entirely pure? Wrong again. But time and time again it seems that the more serious I am about honoring the Lord in obedience, the more serious He is about honoring my requests.

You may be thinking, *But aren’t you saying you’re putting your faith in your works instead of in Jesus Christ? After all, it was your works that supposedly got your prayers answered.*

No. My motivation for obedience is to draw closer to the heart of my Lord—that’s where my faith lies. I am not trusting in obedience to do anything, let alone manipulate Christ into getting my way. What Jesus does after I obey is up to Him. What I am saying is that the closer I draw to Christ through obedience, the more sensitive I become to my Friend—and the more sensitively my Friend responds to me.

## Heroes

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says...But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.* (James 1:22,25)

It seems that all of the great heroes of the Bible had one thing in common: obedience. Yes, they all had faith, but the real great ones were willing to put that faith into action through obedience. They had “the obedience that comes from faith” (Romans 1:5b). Let’s take a look at just a couple of these heroes, noting what God required of them, how they obeyed, and how God blessed them for that obedience.

### Abraham

We’ve already examined Abraham and his great obedience in preparing to sacrifice his son. It’s interesting that God didn’t just ask Abraham if he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. The Lord required him to go through with much of it: the long walk to the location, the preparation of the altar, the tying of Isaac to the altar, even the actual raising of the knife. This was no test of theoretical faith Abraham was going through. This was a test of obedience.

And the Lord’s response to Abraham’s obedience?

*I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.* (Genesis 22:16-18)

### Gideon

Gideon was the least member of the weakest family in a nation so weak that its people were hiding out in caves. In short, Gideon was as low on the scale as you can get. Yet, through his obedience to God’s direction—first by tearing down his father’s altar to Baal and his Asherah pole and replacing it with an altar to the Lord, then by reducing a 10,000 man army to 300, and finally by attacking the enemy with shouting, trumpet blowing, and pottery smashing, he became a hero.

Gideon obeyed. Sure, he had his doubts and repeatedly needed God’s encouragement, but this only proves that God will always help us, even in our weaknesses.

And the results of Gideon’s obedience? His nation was delivered from the Midianites, and the people begged him to...

*“Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.”*

*But Gideon told them, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.”* (Judges 8:22-23)

## What If...

*Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.* (John 12:26)

In one sense the life of the great preacher and teacher, D.L. Moody, could be looked upon as a vast experiment. He wanted to find out what would happen if a man simply said yes to God for an entire lifetime. And since there were no volunteers to pick from, Moody chose himself for the experiment.

The result? One of the greatest evangelists and ministries ever to be birthed in America. A ministry that literally changed the world.

What would happen today if each of us were to take obedience as seriously as that—as seriously as God takes it? What would happen if obedience became our number one priority—above our work, our schooling, even above our families? What would happen if we purposed in our hearts to say yes to Jesus regardless of the cost?

We’d definitely be able to change the world. If one wimpy Gideon could change a nation, imagine what a thousand, ten thousand of us wimpy little Gideons could do for a world?

And, to top it off, we’d definitely be experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised. Maybe not abundance as far as things, but abundance as far as a cutting edge, overflowing, exciting life. Who knows, maybe we wouldn’t even have to dump big bucks at an amusement park to get a little thrill or spend our money at a movie theater for

a little make-believe excitement. Instead, we'd actually be living that excitement!

The trick is to look past the short-term comforts and pleasures that disobedience promises. The trick is to look past the common sense, here-and-now solutions disobedience insists upon. It may not always be pleasant. It was no picnic for Jesus, Joseph, Abraham, Gideon, or even Moody. But each of them refused to look at the present circumstances staring them in the face. Instead, they forced themselves to see beyond—beyond to where God's great promises and faithfulness would eventually be fulfilled.

Obedience. What lives could be changed by souls willing to do whatever He asked? What life our sick and dying world could receive if there were more of us willing to obey?

Dear Lord, raise us up, make us willing to become men and women who simply and always say yes.



4. What does 1 Corinthians 5:7b tell you about Jesus Christ?
  
5. Personal: We see that prior to Jesus' birth, the people of Israel had been celebrating the Passover every year for over 1,400 years, to remind them that God had done more than deliver them from enslavement to the Egyptians. Because of the blood of the lamb, God's judgment—that is, the death that struck the Egyptians—had passed over them. Jesus, the Lamb of God—our Passover lamb—asked us to partake of communion to remember that because of His blood we can escape God's judgment and pass from death to life. Instead of allowing communion to be “just something Christians do,” next time you partake of it, will you really stop and consider what He has done for you?

### **Third Day:**

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**Jesus Christ is our Passover lamb. Let us take a look at some of the basic elements of the Passover meal and see how they point to Jesus.**

1. a. Read Exodus 12:5a, and describe what requirements the year-old lamb had to meet in order to be the Passover lamb.  
  
b. What do the following verses say regarding Jesus Christ?  
1 Peter 1:19  
  
1 Peter 2:22
  
2. a. Read Exodus 12:8. After the lamb, what was next on the list of items to be eaten at the Passover meal?  
  
b. Read Exodus 1:14. How had the Egyptians made the Israelites' lives bitter?  
  
c. Personal: Romans chapters 6 and 7 explain that Christians are no longer slaves to sin and the bitterness it brings to our lives—Jesus Christ has set us free.<sup>1</sup> What in particular has the Lord set you free from? If you would like, share with the class.
  
3. a. Review Exodus 12:8. What was the third element of the Passover meal?  
  
b. Read Exodus 12:39. Why was the bread of the Israelites unleavened (i.e. without yeast)?  
  
c. It was necessary for the Israelites to leave Egypt in a hurry, when God opened the way for them to be set free. God has made a way, through Jesus Christ, for people to be set free from the penalty and power of sin. What urgency is expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2?

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1. If you would like to study more about this, you may want to do the Joy of Living Bible study on Romans.

4. Personal: Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ to free you from the penalty and power of sin? If not, "Now is the day of salvation." Tomorrow, or even the next moment, is not promised to you. If you need more information about this, turn to page 4. Perhaps with your head you have acknowledged that Jesus Christ paid the price for our sin, but you have never surrendered your life to Him. Won't you do it right now?

## **Fourth Day:**

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**In the Old Testament the Lord gave the Israelites specific days to celebrate in order to remember Him.**

1. Read Romans 14:5-6a. What do you learn about celebrating "special" days as sacred?
  - a. Celebrating special days can be controversial and divisive. The bottom line is, "Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord" (Romans 14:6). What do you learn about everything we do from 1 Corinthians 10:31-32?
  - b. Personal: Do you celebrate certain days? What are some of the ways you celebrate or remember the Lord on those days?
3. From the following verses, what should help us remember the Lord?  
Romans 1:20a  
  
Psalm 19:1
4. Read Job 12:7-10. What else should remind us of the Lord?
5. Personal: As you behold the wonders of creation, do you marvel at God's handiwork? Do you find your mind turning to the Lord throughout your day? Are you aware of Him as your constant companion? If you aren't, will you ask Him to help you?

## **Fifth Day:**

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**Parenthood is another reminder of the Lord and how He deals with His children.**

1. a. Read 1 John 3:1-2a. What do you learn about one of the ways God has lavished His love on us?
  - b. Read Galatians 3:26. How do we become children of God?
2. Read Matthew 7:9-11. How does Jesus compare human parenthood to the parenthood of God?
3. What do you learn about God from 1 Peter 5:7?

4. What do you learn about God's parenting from the following verses?

Hebrews 12:5b-6

Hebrews 12:9-10

5. How does God express His love for us in Zephaniah 3:17?

6. Personal: We are imperfect, fallen human beings, and yet most of us love our children more than we love ourselves. As we think of parenthood and this type of love, we should remember that God loves us more perfectly than the best human parent there is. He is always doing what is best for us, whether we like it or not. Take a few moments to think about this and what it means in your life. Share with the class if you would like.

## Sixth Day:

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**As Christians, we are to keep our eyes on Jesus, but we are also to pay attention to, that is, remember our brothers and sisters in Christ who have gone before us. They should remind us of God's love and faithfulness to His children.**

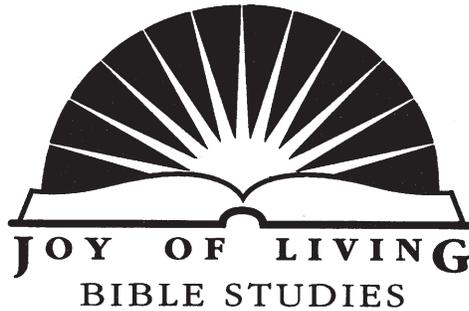
1. What does Hebrews 13:7 say regarding our leaders and those who have spoken the word of God to us?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 11:1. What does Paul urge us to do?
3. As we remember those who have put their faith in the Lord and have gone before us, and remember the outcome of their faith and all that the Lord did in their lives, we are encouraged in our faith. Hebrews 11:4-40 gives a list of men and women of faith from the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Pick two and share how their faith encourages you.
4. Read Hebrews 12:1-3, which refers to the people of faith listed in Hebrews 11. Since they are a witness to us, encouraging us to trust the Lord, what should we do?
5. Personal: Write briefly about a Christian, not listed in the Bible, whose life has encouraged you to remember and walk with the Lord. That person may be someone you have read about or someone you know personally. If you can't think of such a person, you may want to ask another Christian to suggest a Christian biography for you to read.<sup>2</sup>

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1. If you would like to learn more about these people of faith, you might like to do the Joy of Living study, *Hall of Faith: Study on Hebrews Chapter 11*.

2. There are many men and women of God who have gone before us, whose lives are an encouragement, people like William Tyndale, John Bunyan, John Wesley, Susanna Wesley, Hudson Taylor, Mary Slessor, Amy Carmichael, Corrie ten Boom, George Mueller, Dwight Moody, Samuel Morris, and Gladys Aylward, to name a few.

## Christ B.C. Lesson 8



### Time to Remember

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#### Christ in the Passover

*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*  
(1 Corinthians 5:7)

Our Lord seems to put an emphasis on symbols and traditions. It's as if He knows that our memory of His love is often so feeble that we need all the reminders we can get. But in our zeal to keep Christianity fresh and alive, I wonder if we modern day Christians sometimes fail to give the proper importance to these reminders.

Let's explore just a few of the Bible's symbols and traditions, with the hope that they'll make Christ a little more fresh and alive to us.

One of our first and most cherished traditions is communion or the Lord's Supper. Here we personally remember His sacrifice for us by symbolically eating His broken body and drinking His cleansing blood. But the symbolism of this meal began long before Christ's Last Supper with His disciples. It started more than 1,400 years earlier. For 1,400 years the Jews had been eating and celebrating this meal (called Passover) as a reminder of how God had delivered them out of Egypt. Then Jesus came on the scene and gave the meal a new and deeper meaning. He actually insisted that the food really pointed to Himself! To see Jesus' point more clearly, let's take a quick look at some of the basic elements of the Passover meal.

#### Passover Lamb

First of all, there was the lamb. We've briefly discussed how Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. But just in case there are any doubts, here are a few other similarities between the Passover lamb and the Lamb of God:

- ☛ The Passover lamb had to be unblemished, just as Jesus was unblemished (without sin). (See Exodus 12:5; 1 Peter 2:22.)
- ☛ The Passover lamb was to have no broken bones, just as Jesus' bones were not broken on the cross. (See Exodus 12:46; John 19:33-36.)
- ☛ The lamb had to be completely roasted in fire, just as Jesus had to completely undergo the wrath (frequently symbolized by fire) of the Father. (See Exodus 12:9; 1 Peter 2:24.)
- ☛ The lamb had to be totally eaten, just as we have to totally "consume" Jesus. Christ allows no partial salvation or partial Lordship; it's all or nothing. (See Exodus 12:10; John 14:21-24.)

#### Bitter Herbs

Next there was the eating of bitter herbs. The bitter herbs were to remind the Israelites of the bitterness of their bondage to Egypt. Today they could serve as a strong reminder of the bitterness of our bondage to sin.

#### Unleavened Bread

In the Bible, leaven (yeast) often represents sin. In the Passover, eating bread without leaven represents the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt. (They did not even have time to wait for their bread to rise!) So today the bread of communion can represent two things: the pure sinless body of Christ and the extreme urgency for salvation as soon as possible. "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

#### Blood of the Lamb

Then there was the blood of the Passover lamb that the Israelites were required to put on their doorposts and lintels. This actually painted in blood a type of cross over the entrance to their homes. Its purpose? To save the people of Israel when the Angel of Death passed over their homes, just as the blood of the Lamb over our hearts saves us from death (see Exodus 12:12-13; Matthew 26:27-29).

Finally, Jesus spoke of the cup of the Last Supper as representing His "new covenant" with believers (Luke 22:20). He told the disciples to continue to share the communion meal "in remembrance of" Him (1 Corinthians 11:25).

All this to say, what tremendous concepts and memories of Christ are renewed in our minds as we obey and celebrate this meal.

#### Days of Remembrance

*These are the Lord's appointed festivals, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times.* (Leviticus 23:4)

There was a time in my zeal for the Lord that I thought all holidays and celebrations were "indulgences of the flesh"—not something a serious Christian should be a part of. After all I was a young warrior who had just given his life to Christ. I thought there were far too many things to do and battles to fight for me to be involved in such activities.

Today I'm still not a big fan of many aspects of various holidays. But I was really uninformed to think the Lord frowned on celebrations and feast days. In fact, it came as quite a shock for me to learn that He actually commanded the Jewish people to observe various holidays—days when no work was to be done and when the Israelites simply had to rest and remember God's goodness.

How could this be? Didn't God know there's too much work to do to just sit around? Too many souls to save, too many hurt and broken people? How can we eat and play when others are starving, dying, and quite literally going to hell?

It took several years for me to realize that my zeal had to be balanced. In my desire to work hard for the Lord, I was actually committing sin—the sin of not giving God His full glory, the sin of thinking if I wasn't busy, God's work wouldn't get done, the sin of thinking I'm too busy doing His work to enjoy Him and His goodness. To think my work was more important than resting and honoring my Father, was to make the same mistake that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees made in Jesus' day. They were so busy trying to serve that they forgot the One they were supposed to be serving.

That's what the holidays and days of rest spoken of in the Old Testament were for: to “catch our breath” and to honor our Father. And, even though we are under the new covenant and no longer have to remember God's “legal holidays,” they set a good principle for us to follow.

Let's find the time to rest and enjoy the holidays we choose to celebrate. They don't have to be times to overeat or overspend. But they should be times to appreciate, to rest, to remember, and to glory in His goodness to us.

Paul summed it up, “Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord” (Romans 14:6), and, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

## Remembrance Through Creation

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)*

As the Enemy keeps winding our lives up tighter and tighter, as we keep running faster and faster, I'm afraid one of the biggest areas in which we're being ripped off is in our enjoyment of creation. I'm not talking about packing the kids off to a whirlwind tour of the Grand Canyon. I mean simply taking the time to appreciate the day-to-day beauty and craftsmanship that surrounds us. If we're looking for symbols to remind us of Christ's love, creativity, and care, what better place to look than to His handiwork?

And we don't have to live in the middle of Yellowstone either. That appreciation can happen anywhere. Take color, for instance. Look around. Everything about us has or reflects some color. Take a moment. Enjoy it. Savor it. Marvel at the subtle differences and shades. It's interesting that the Lord didn't need to invent color. It serves no purpose. Our eyes could have been made to only see black and white. But in His love and indulgence for us, our Creator invented color.

Or how about sounds? An exercise I often take young actors through is to have them close their eyes and listen deeply for five minutes—listen past the roar of the highway, past the drone of an overhead plane, to the multitude of fragile and overlooked sounds that surround us every second.

What about trees? Have you ever seen such diversity? What an incredible variation on just one, single theme.

And, talk about variation, what about the Lord's crowning creation: human beings? There is such variety—our faces, heights, personalities, and the deep emotions running through each of us. Is there any limit to Christ's creativity and imagination?

One of my favorite books of all time is the Pulitzer Prize winner *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. In it the author, Annie Dillard, writes about the day-to-day activity around her creek. But not just the romping of some playful chipmunk; she also marvels over a drop of swamp water under a microscope or a square inch of soil. The life, the diversity, the complexity, and genius of creation in these tiny microcosms of the universe is astounding—wondrous—breathtaking.

Granted, rejoicing over a leaf ablaze with autumn color doesn't pay the mortgage or deal with the hundred and one migraine makers facing us each day. But enjoying creation from time to time can serve as a reminder of how in charge and detail oriented Christ really is. After all, one of the best ways to truly know an artist's soul is to scrutinize his work. And one of the ways to better understand the depth of Jesus Christ is by marveling over His masterpieces.

## Remembrance Through Parenthood

*Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:9-11)*

For me one of the greatest reminders of God's love is my love for my little daughter. Every day that she is with me, my understanding of the Lord and His feelings towards me deepens.

### The Lord's Love

My little daughter really changed my theology. I used to secretly think God was standing high upon a chair waiting to trounce on me whenever I messed up. Now I'm beginning to understand the pain and frustration the Lord feels when He sees me sinning. He's not fussing and fuming, waiting to clobber me. He's aching. He's as saddened when He sees me sin as when I see my daughter insist on doing the wrong thing and getting hurt by the consequences.

### The Lord's Provision

I now understand that there's nothing Christ won't do for me. If it won't harm me or sacrifice the quality He's perfecting in my life or in others, He will do it for me. If my daughter needs something or even thinks she needs it, and I know it won't harm her or spoil her character, I'll get it. I won't play hard to get, I won't taunt her, I won't make her jump through hoops. Instead, if it's her will and doesn't conflict with my will, she's got it.

### The Lord's Sadness

At the moment, my child is going through a phase where she doesn't want me around. She seems to be constantly nudging my hand aside and insisting on being by herself. Like the Lord, I respect that freewill choice. And, like the Lord, my heart is breaking.

### The Lord's Anger

Three things outrage me:

- ☛ My daughter blatantly disobeying me and insisting upon hurting herself by carrying out her own stubborn will;
- ☛ Someone else hurting her;
- ☛ When her efforts to do the right thing are frustrated.

In each and every one of those situations, I will immediately be at her side doing everything in my power to discipline, to intercede, or to help.

### The Lord's Forgiveness

One thing melts me faster than anything else—when my daughter comes into the room, head bowed, sometimes even in tears, and sincerely says, “Daddy, I’m sorry. Would you forgive me?”

How could I do otherwise?

All this to say, sometimes we don’t have to look any further than our own families to see and remember our Lord.

### Remembrance Through the Sabbath Rest

*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor the foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)*

My brother and I were having an interesting discussion on theology when he asked me this question: “If you look upon the Ten Commandments as good principles to guide your walk as a Christian, why do you only follow nine out of those ten principles? Why aren’t you as committed to the principle of setting aside one day a week to honor the Lord as you are to the principles of not stealing or not coveting?”

He had me. We weren’t arguing about a specific day, just any day—any total day that I would stop what I was doing and rest, honor, and remember the Lord.

My brother does keep this principle as well as the nine others. And during my visits to his home I always enjoy that entire day being set aside for remembering the Lord and for the peace, fellowship, and simple pleasure of friends and family.

My wife and I eventually followed suit. We understand the need to set aside a special time for resting and remembering God’s love and faithfulness.

Perhaps in contemporary Christian zeal to be free of the law and all of its trappings and traditions, many Christians have somehow short-changed themselves and missed out on a major principle of life: the need for rest. God emphasized this need when, after creating the world, “he rested from all His work” (Genesis 2:2).

My family doesn’t adhere to any specific rules or regulations. But by following the basic principle of honoring and resting one day a week, our lives seem fuller and more relaxed. And above all, for at least one day a week we are able to allow our thoughts to dwell on the Lord more thoroughly and remember Him more clearly.

### Our Heritage

*We have heard it with our ears, O God; our ancestors have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. (Psalm 44:1)*

On a recent film project in China I was sharing a hotel room with my translator, a British brother closely associated with the Anglican Church. It was early morning, and as we prepared for the day we were both humming and singing quiet songs of worship to ourselves. But when my friend got into the shower he suddenly cut loose. I mean the walls were practically vibrating. And his song was gorgeous. It was full of such rich melody, texture, and meaning that it made my little sing-songy praise chorus sound like a nursery rhyme.

I stopped. Not because I had to, but because listening to his song was more of a blessing than me singing mine. In fact, that’s how I spent my quiet time before the Lord that morning—just listening to my friend singing in the shower!

Later I learned that the hymn was nearly a century old. And yet, it seemed far more relevant than my hip, upbeat, little ditty.

How many other things have I deprived myself of in the name of what is “modern and happening”?

As Christians we have a tremendous culture and heritage that stretches back hundreds upon hundreds of years. Traditions, old hymns, ancient and magnificently-sung masses that glorify Christ, as well as writings by ancient Church fathers that carry more depth and meaning in one paragraph than a dozen of our contemporary books.

I’m not suggesting that we embrace every creed and thought from the past. What I am suggesting is this:

As we look for new ways to keep our faith alive and vibrant, as we use fresh and innovative ways of worshiping and remembering God, let’s not be so egocentric as to think that our generation has all the answers. Let’s not throw out nineteen centuries of heritage.

We have a rich and beautiful history of brothers and sisters dedicated to Christ. Their works can provide plenty of relevant light to rekindle even the dimmest flames of faith.

A great scientist, when praised for his discoveries, said, “I only stand on the shoulders of past giants.” We too have giant shoulders we can stand upon in our efforts to draw closer to the heart of God.



6. Personal: God made it clear that this was not just another crucifixion. This was God in human form (see John 1:1,14), ransoming the souls of humanity through His sacrifice on the cross (see 1 Timothy 2:5-6a). Take a moment and consider all that transpired on that day, then thank the Lord for what He has done for us.

## Third Day:

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**When people oversimplify God by merely summing Him up as “love,” it’s hard to see any real need for reconciliation with Him. They figure, “God is love. He’ll accept me. What do I have to worry about?”**

1. It is true that God is love (see 1 John 4:8). What else do you learn about God from the following verses?

Psalm 7:11

Deuteronomy 6:14-15

Revelation 6:15-17

2. a. We see that God is love, but He is also holy and righteous (see Acts 3:14). He will deal with those who are against Him and do not repent. What do you learn about yourself from Colossians 1:21?  
  
b. Read Colossians 1:22. What has been done for you through the body of Jesus Christ? According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the term *reconcile* means “to restore to friendship or harmony.”
3. Read Revelation 5:9-10 and describe what Jesus Christ has done for us.
4. Challenge: What does 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 say about reconciliation?

5. Personal: Have you ever considered all this? All of humanity is alienated from God, and each of us is His enemy, awaiting His judgment. However, because He is love, He has made a way through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, that our sin can be forgiven and we can be reconciled to God. Write your thoughts on this.

## **Fourth Day:**

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**God has given us many examples in the Old Testament that remind us of what Jesus Christ has done for us and of what it means for us to be reconciled to Him.**

1. a. Read Deuteronomy 15:1-2. Another benefit of being reconciled to God that is foreshadowed in the Old Testament is called the “Sabbath Year.” How often did the Sabbath Year occur? (verse 1)  
  
b. What were the Israelites instructed to do and not to do at the end of the Sabbath Year, and why? (verse 2)
  
2. a. Read Deuteronomy 15:12-15. What were they instructed to do in the Sabbath Year? (verse 12)  
  
b. What were they to do for those who were set free and in what manner were they to do it? (verses 13-14)  
  
c. Why did God give them this command? (verse 15)
  
3. a. Read Colossians 2:13-14. When we were dead in our sins, what did God do for us? (verse 13)  
  
b. How did He accomplish this? (verse 14)
  
4. Personal: Imagine the joy you would have if you had been someone’s slave and were suddenly set free. What would you do if you suddenly found out that all your bills had been completely paid off and you were completely debt free? How do you think you would react? What Jesus Christ has set us free from is far greater than any financial debt we could owe. Do you have anything you’d like to say to God?

## Fifth Day:

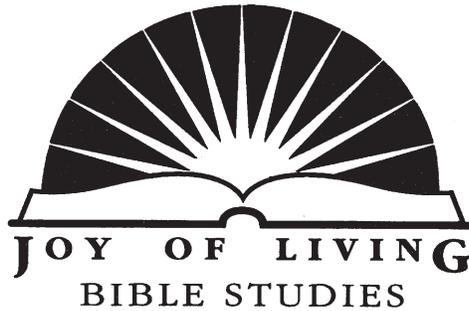
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**We have learned that Jesus Christ nailed all the charges against us to the cross. But you may wonder what happens when you sin and there are new charges against you.**

1. Read Hebrews 7:27 and explain the difference between the sacrifices Israel's high priest made under the law and the sacrifice Jesus made.
  
2.
  - a. We often feel condemned and discouraged when we sin, and we have to be reminded that Jesus already paid the price for our sins in the past, for those we commit in the present, and for any we may commit in the future—once for all! Read 1 John 1:8-9. How might Christians deceive themselves? (verse 8)
  
  - b. What are we instructed to do when we sin? (verse 9a)
  
  - c. What will He then do? (verse 9b)
  
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What do you learn about who we are if we are in Christ?
  
4.
  - a. Because we have been made new, we are not only set free from the *penalty* of sin, we are set free from the *bondage* to sin. Read Romans 6:12-14. What are we instructed not to do? (verses 12-13a)
  
  - b. What are we instructed to do? (verse 13b)
  
  - c. Why are we able to do this? (verse 14)
  
5.
  - a. Read Romans 12:1-2, and list some of the steps we can take in order to live in a way that is pleasing to God.
  
  - b. Personal: Are you doing these things? If not, ask God to help you begin to do them right now.



## Christ B.C. Lesson 9



### Reconciled!

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#### The Temple Curtain

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.* (Hebrews 10:19,20,22)

We've spent some time covering Christ's work on the cross—how on that day He redeemed us, how His blood made us righteous, how He served as the Lamb of God, and how He became our great high priest.

To underscore the significance of His crucifixion, the Lord caused several interesting phenomena to occur. The first and most graphic was the tearing of the temple curtain.

The curtain's purpose was to separate the people in the temple from the presence of God who dwelt in the Most Holy Place or innermost compartment of the temple. Only the high priest was allowed behind the curtain, and only once a year after he had been ceremonially cleansed of his sins (see Leviticus 16:4-6). And he never entered without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance (see Hebrews 9:7).

But at the exact moment of Christ's payment on the cross, the temple curtain was completely torn in two—from top to bottom—from heaven to earth (see Matthew 27:51).

This tearing was no coincidence. And it was no minor miracle. Its meaning could not have been more clear. Because of what Jesus had accomplished we could have complete and total access to the presence of God! (See Hebrews 10:19-20.)

The Bible also talks about a darkness that "came over the whole land" (Mark 15:33) for three hours during Jesus' final suffering. We are not told how the darkness came about, nor exactly what it stood for. In Exodus 10:21-23, darkness covered the land of Egypt as part of God's judgment. In Amos 8:9-10, darkness is part of God's judgment. Certainly the darkness during Jesus' final suffering emphasized the somberness of the event. Some think it was sent to symbolize, or possibly to veil, the judgment endured on our behalf by Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Then there was the tremendous earthquake. We're not talking a small-time tremor here. The quake was so intense that it actually split rocks open.

It seems that our Lord was definitely making a point with all of these supernatural events. He was making it clear that this was not just another crucifixion. This was God in human form (see John 1:1,14), ransoming the souls of humanity through His sacrifice on the cross (see 1 Timothy 2:5-6). The supernatural occurrences were merely seals underscoring the validity of that reconciliation.

#### The Need for Reconciliation

*God is a righteous judge, a God who displays his wrath every day.* (Psalm 7:11)

When people oversimplify God by summing Him up as "love," it's hard to see any real need for reconciliation with Him.

As a result, the cross becomes simply a symbol of that love and not a real necessity. *After all, they figure, "God is love." He'll accept me. What do I have to worry about?*

But, without Jesus, the answer is "PLENTY." To help us get a fuller picture of our Father and the need for reconciliation with Him, it might be a good idea to take a look at His feelings about disobedience:

*Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.* (Exodus 22:22-24)

*They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron... The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."* (Numbers 16:3,20-21)

*The Lord's anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone.* (Numbers 32:13)

*Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.* (Deuteronomy 6:14-15)

And for those who think that God somehow changed His outlook on disobedience by the time the New Testament rolled around:

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1. *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, notes on Luke 23:44.

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness. (Romans 1:18)*

*The king [a symbol of God in this parable] was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (Matthew 22:7)*

*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 5:6)*

And God's reaction to sin in the future? Well, since He's unchanging, things will be no different:

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:15-17)*

When the world thinks of God, they may not think of someone who burns with anger, who is intensely jealous, whose wrath brings judgment. As a result, they may not see a need for reconciliation with Him. But regardless of the world's view of God, when it comes to rebellion and sin, this anger, jealousy, and wrath are exactly what our Lord feels.

Fortunately, we never need to experience this wrath—if we accept His solution—if we accept His Son.

## The Great Reconciler

*Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."*

*Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying:*

*"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God per-*

*sons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."* (Revelation 5:1-10)

This is one of my all time favorite passages of Scripture. Picture it. God the Father is holding in His hand a scroll sealed with seven seals. Then a mighty angel asks in a loud voice if anybody is worthy to take it. But no one, absolutely no one in the entire universe, steps forward. John, the one given this vision of the future, breaks into tremendous weeping. There is no one worthy to open the scroll and look inside.

Then suddenly, in His various symbolic forms, including "the Lamb, who was slain," Jesus Christ appears (see Revelation 5:6-12). He boldly strides forward and takes the scroll into His hand. At that moment those around the throne begin to worship Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain for us. He "purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. [He has] made [us] to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and [we] will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10)!

What a glorious, triumphant scene that must have been. Only Jesus Christ is able to step forward. Only Jesus Christ is able to redeem us. Only Jesus Christ is able to reconcile us to God!

## Liberation!

*At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed...If any of your people—Hebrew men or women—sell themselves to you and serve you six years, in the seventh year you must let them go free. And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today. (Deuteronomy 15:1-2,12-15)*

There is another foreshadowing of Christ's reconciliation in the Old Testament. It is sometimes referred to as a Sabbath Year.

The Lord commanded the Jewish people that every seventh year all of their debts to one another were to be totally and completely canceled. Picture it: any debts or bills that anyone had incurred, even if it was from their own negligence, were completely wiped clean!

It would be as if the charges on your Visa card suddenly came up \$00. And while we're at it, kiss those car and school loan payments good-bye. Talk about release—talk about being free to start fresh! But there's more...

All of the slaves were to be set free. What a beautiful symbol of our release from the slavery of sin through Jesus Christ!

The concept of the Sabbath Year was revolutionary. During the Sabbath Year no one was enslaved or bound by anything or anybody. There are few if any practices that more clearly demonstrate God's

understanding of our tendency to get into bondage and His mercy towards setting us free.

It was this freedom that Jesus may have had in mind when He officially announced His ministry in His local synagogue:

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)*

The Sabbath Year liberated the Jewish people from what held them in bondage. Jesus Christ has set us free from bondage to both the penalty and the power of sin (see Romans 6:12-14,23). He is our Sabbath Year. But fortunately, we don't have to wait seven years. His payment was so complete our liberation can take place when we accept Christ as our Savior.<sup>1</sup> And if, or when, we sin, all we need to do is confess our sin (see 1 John 1:9).

### Our Responsibility

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)*

Not more than half an hour ago I experienced such a liberating experience that I have to write it down now while it's still fresh in my memory.

Several months ago I went through an excruciating time in a business situation. I was caught in the middle of some pretty ambitious forces and, as a result, I was financially mauled and beaten up quite badly. It was unjust, unfair, and probably the most painful time of my professional career.

I know bitterness and anger are wrong. I know they can eat into you emotionally, making you a double victim. And I know they can eat into you physically (which explains the burning ache in my stomach). But I just couldn't seem to get rid of the anger. Even though I asked the Lord to remove it, it just kept on coming back.

Once again, this morning I was trying to spend some time in prayer and, sure enough, the situation rose in my mind as it has a dozen times a day for the past several months. Once again, I found myself chewing and mulling over the injustice of it all. I kept trying to push it out of my mind so I could pray, but it kept returning until finally the time I had set aside for prayer was over.

Soon a brother appeared at my door and wanted to pray over a financial problem in his life. But as we were praying for him, it suddenly came to my mind that I wasn't just angry with those involved in my business deal—I actually hated them. That's right—hated. What a shock. I, "Mr. Mature Christian," actually hated someone.

*But Christians don't hate, I thought.*

Maybe they're not supposed to, but I sure did. As the prayer over my friend's finances was closing, I couldn't stand it any longer. I blurted out a confession of my hate. I finally admitted the truth and asked

1. See page 4 for more information about this.

God to forgive me. No religious piety. No soft pedaling. Just honesty: "I hate, and I can't help myself." No sooner had the words come out of my mouth than the cloud surrounding my head these many months started to clear.

What liberation! What freedom!

It was so simple, but so against my human nature (especially since I thought of myself as too mature to be dealing with such basics).

From the time of the Garden of Eden until now, we humans have tried to gloss over our sins, to sanitize them, or worse yet, pass the buck. "It wasn't me," Adam insisted. "It was that woman you gave me." And Eve's great defense? "It wasn't me. It was the serpent." (See Genesis 3.)

If we could just keep in mind that we only have one responsibility in reconciliation: we must honestly, and I stress the word *honestly*, confess our sins before our Father. If we do, not only will He forgive us, but He will also clean and purify us!

Does this mean that I'll magically stop hating those who've hurt me? Probably not. But I can tell you I'm a lot closer to it now than I was an hour ago. And, as I continue to be honest and faithful in confessing my sin, He will be faithful to forgive me and purify me "from all unrighteousness."

### Forgiveness and Forgetfulness

*I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. (Isaiah 43:25)*

A good friend of mine once made a terrific point. "We remember our past sins. But God doesn't."

He definitely caught me off guard. It was true, but I had never really stopped to consider the depth of that truth. Basically, like everyone else I figured the old adage, "I may forgive, but I won't forget," also applied to God.

But nothing could be more wrong. God does not sit on His throne and grudgingly forgive us with the attitude of, "Well, I'll let it go this time, but just you wait." No. The price Jesus paid for our reconciliation with the Father was so expensive, so complete, that God not only forgives our sins, but He forgets<sup>2</sup> them! (See Hebrews 8:12.)

What freedom! What joy to know that the Father's loving arms are always open to us with no strings or past grudges attached.

Keep that in mind the next time "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" (Revelation 12:10) brings up your past in an attempt to paralyze you with guilt. Satan can't get anywhere by bringing your past sins up to the Father, because the Father refuses to remember. So, the only person the devil can torment with your past is you.

Don't fall for it. If God in all of His glory refuses to remember or listen to your past, who are you to think you should?

2. One definition for "forget" in Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary is "to disregard intentionally; overlook." Because of Jesus Christ, God chooses to intentionally disregard our sins—they are no longer an issue to be considered.

When we commit our lives to Christ, you and I are free and completely reconciled to the Father. Nothing can ever come between us again—not even our past failures, no matter how despicable, no matter how recurring, no matter how recent. Because of Christ's blood, the Father now and always will see us as perfect and love us as deeply and as purely as He loves His only begotten Son.

## Study Questions

### Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

### First Day: Read the Commentary “Reconciled!”

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1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary “Reconciled!” or from your teacher’s lecture?
  
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

### Second Day:

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**In the Old Testament, the central place of worship was the tabernacle, and later the temple. At their heart was the ark of the covenant, which was placed within the sanctuary in the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 25:8-22; 26:30-33). The high priest entered that room only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people (see Hebrews 9:7).**

1. Read Exodus 25:10-11 and describe the Ark of the Covenant. (A cubit is 18 inches.)
  
2. The ark was overlaid with pure gold, which symbolized God’s purity and holiness. From Hebrews 9:3-4, what was within the Ark of the Covenant?
  
3. From Exodus 25:17-18, describe the cover of the ark.<sup>1</sup> (The NIV translates the name of the ark’s cover as the “atonement cover.” Other versions translate it as the “mercy seat.” The verb that lies behind the noun “atonement” in the expression “atonement cover” means “to ransom or deliver by means of a substitute.” The Ark of the Covenant was the place of atonement, the place where God extended mercy toward sinners.)
  
4. When the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat/atonement cover (see Leviticus 16:14). According to Exodus 25:22, what would God do there above the mercy seat/atonement cover?
  
5. God’s visible, manifested presence<sup>2</sup> would reside above the mercy seat/atonement cover, and it was there He would meet with Moses. What do you learn about God in Ezekiel 33:11? Does this change the way you view God?
  
6. Personal: Just think, God chose to call the very place that His presence dwelt the “mercy seat” or the “atonement cover.” Does this help you to better understand God’s character? In what way?

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1. A cherub—plural, cherubim—is a type of angel.

2. “At the heart of the idea of a Temple is the abiding presence of God. Although God is omnipresent, He has chosen to manifest His presence in certain locations and at certain times within history. This physical manifestation of God has come to be called the *Shekinah*.” [From “16.2 The Abiding Presence of God,” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/related-topics/the-abiding-presence-of-god.html#104973E>]

## Third Day:

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### Justice and mercy: Can they go together?

1. Read John 8:3-5. What did the teachers of the law and the Pharisees do?
  
2. God's law required death for someone who committed adultery (see Leviticus 20:10). From John 8:6a, why did the Pharisees bring the woman to Jesus? Was it out of concern for God's holiness?
  
3. a. Read John 8:6b-8. How did Jesus respond to the woman's accusers? (verse 7)  
  
b. From John 8:9, how did they react to Jesus' statement?
  
4. a. Read John 8:10-11. What did Jesus ask the woman? (verse 10)  
  
b. What was her response? (verse 11a)  
  
c. What were Jesus' final words to her? (verse 11b)
  
5. Personal: Jesus did not say that the woman was innocent, or that she should not be put to death. He pointed out that only someone without sin should carry out that death sentence. Just like the woman caught in adultery, we are all caught in sin (see Romans 3:23) and the sentence of death is upon us (see Romans 6:23a). However, Jesus—the only one with the right to carry out the sentence upon this woman, and upon us—instead took her sentence, and our sentence, upon Himself (see 1 Corinthians 15:3b). God's justice and mercy are demonstrated by the death of Jesus Christ. Write down Romans 8:34 and personalize it by putting your name in it.

## Fourth Day:

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**It is impossible to understand the depth of God's mercy. He accepts us just as we are, but His mercy is so deep that He doesn't leave us just as we are.**

1. Read James 1:2-4. What should we count as pure joy? Why?
  
2. As we mature in Christ, we begin to bear the fruit of God's Spirit and experience the rich full life He intends for us (see John 10:10). Read Galatians 5:22-23 and list the fruit of the Spirit.
  
3. This list describes the character of Jesus Christ. Read Romans 8:28-29. What does God use to make us into the image of His Son?



4. a. God's way is always the best. When we go our own way, we invariably reap negative consequences. What do you learn about this from Jeremiah 2:19?  
  
b. What does David say about his afflictions in Psalm 119:67?
  
5. Personal: Can you think of times in your life where you have chosen to go your own way rather than to listen to God? What were the consequences? What did it take to bring you back to God? How did God show mercy to you in that situation, and what did you learn from it?

## Sixth Day:

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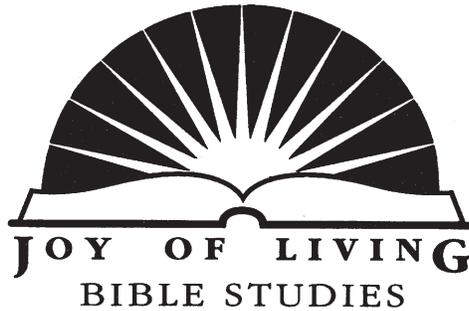
**“Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offenses of others, it proves that we have minimized our own.”<sup>1</sup>**

1. Read Colossians 3:12-14. As God's people, how are we to clothe ourselves? (verse 12)
  
2. What are we to do if we have a grievance against someone, and in what manner should we do this? (verse 13)
  
3. In regard to the virtues listed in verse 12, what part does love play? (verse 14)
  
4. From the following verses, how does love express mercy and forgiveness?  
Proverbs 10:12  
  
1 Corinthians 13:5  
  
1 Peter 4:8
  
5. Personal: Is there someone who has genuinely wronged you that you just can't seem to forgive? Perhaps you are tormented by the hurt, anger, and sense of betrayal that has resulted from that wrong. Would you like to be free? God asks you to do what is impossible for you to do in your own strength—He asks you to forgive. Go to God. Tell Him how you feel about the wrong. Trust Him to deal with the person who has wronged you. Let Him know that you want to be free from the unforgiveness that colors every aspect of your life. Ask Him to do it in you—He will. It may take only a moment, or He may work it in you over time.

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1. From *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, notes on Matthew 6:12, quoting from John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 149-150.

## Christ B.C. Lesson 10



### God's Rich Stream of Mercy

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#### The Ark of the Covenant

*Make an atonement cover of pure gold...And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover...The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Tablets of the covenant law that I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites. (Exodus 25:17-18,20-22)*

In the Old Testament, the central place of worship was the tabernacle, and later the temple. At the heart of these was the Ark of the Covenant, which was placed within the sanctuary in a room called the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 25:8-22; 26:30-33). The high priest entered that room only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people (see Hebrews 9:7). The focus of the tabernacle, and later the temple, was the Ark of the Covenant. It was directly above the ark that God's manifested presence, His Shekinah glory,<sup>1</sup> dwelt.

The ark was about 2 1/4 feet high, 2 1/4 feet wide, and 3 3/4 feet long. It was made of acacia wood: a hard, heavy, close-grain wood impenetrable by insects—a symbol of God's indestructible nature. The ark was overlaid with pure gold, symbolizing God's purity and holiness. Inside were:

- the tablets of the Ten Commandments, symbolizing God's demand for our holiness (see Exodus 20:1-17 and 34:27-29)
- a pot of manna collected in the wilderness, symbolizing God's care and provision (see Exodus 16)
- Aaron's staff, which God had at one point turned into a snake and at another caused to bud, bloom, and produce almonds overnight—symbolizing God's power (see Exodus 7:10 and Numbers 17:8).

The lid was made of solid gold, with a cherub (a type of angel) at each end. They faced the center, with their wings spread out over it.

God referred to this lid as the "atonement cover" or "mercy seat."<sup>2</sup> On this cover was sprinkled the sacrificial blood of animals to atone for sin. Over this cover God's visible, manifested presence dwelt.

It was here, within the Most Holy Place, that the two greatest aspects of God's character are united—His *holiness*, represented by the pure gold of the ark, and His *mercy*, represented by the ark's cover.

It's interesting to note that it was not called the *judgment* cover, the *holy* cover, the *power* cover, or any of the other attributes of God. God chose to call the very place that His presence dwelt the *atonement* cover or the *mercy seat*, the place where God extended mercy toward sinners. And that should reveal to us something about the emphasis He puts upon mercy.

#### Mercy and Justice

*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

*But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."...*

*At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*"No one, sir," she said.*

*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:3-7,9-11)*

Like this woman, I am guilty of adultery. I may not be having a sexual affair, but I am definitely guilty of carrying on relationships with other gods: gods of wealth, gods of self, gods of materialism, and gods

2. The NIV translates the name of the ark's cover as the "atonement cover;" other versions translate it as the "mercy seat." The verb that lies behind the noun "atonement" in the expression "atonement cover" means "to ransom or deliver by means of a substitute." The Ark of the Covenant was the place of atonement, the place where God extended mercy toward sinners, and the lid was the focus of that atonement because it was there, above the cover, where God would speak with Moses.

1. See footnote on Lesson 9, Second Day, Question 5.

of pride. In short, I've been having quite a love affair with the gods of this world.

Like the woman, I am caught red-handed—forced to stand before my Lord with absolutely no defense. There is nothing I can say. I am guilty. I know it. He knows it. And according to the law I must die (see Deuteronomy 6:14-15; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). All that is right and fair and just insists that I must die.

But instead of sentencing me to death, my Lord looks up to me and simply says, "I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more."

How can this be? How can I suddenly be free, totally innocent? How can God maintain His perfect standard of justice and holiness and yet completely let me off the hook?

This was the same question the Pharisees struggled with as they tried to trap Jesus. Which is truth: God's justice of the Old Testament or Christ's "new" concept of mercy?

And what was Jesus' answer? *Both.*

Jesus never said the woman was not guilty. He never said she should not be killed. Instead, He pointed out that only someone totally holy and free from sin should carry out that death sentence. And, once that was clearly understood, Jesus became the judge and executioner. But the execution wasn't carried out at that time, nor was it carried out upon this woman. Instead, our holy and sinless God carried out the sentence, and He carried it out upon Himself.

## The Depth of Christ's Mercy

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produce perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)*

There is no end to the depth of Christ's mercy. I believe that the Lord's mercy can be so deep, so profound, that often, at first glance, it appears to be anything but mercy. Often, at first glance, it may even appear to be the opposite of mercy.

C.S. Lewis probably put this best in a letter to a friend who was going through an extremely difficult time. He explained that his friend was undergoing the Lord's "severe mercy."

There are many cases in Scripture and history that illustrate this severe mercy. The story of young Billy Graham is an obvious one, since we can plainly see the fruit his life and ministry have borne. There are few things as painful to a young man as a broken heart.

It seems young Graham had fallen head over heels in love with a college sweetheart. She was his joy, his love, the woman he wanted to spend his life with. But when he finally popped the question, her answer was no.

"But why?" he persisted, not believing his ears.

"Because you're not spiritual enough," she replied.

Graham was crushed. Devastated. But deep inside he knew she was right. He knew there was still too much of the world in his life. As a result, he began to seriously evaluate his spirituality. And he eventually began to seek and commit himself more deeply to Jesus Christ.

The pain in young Graham's heart must have been immeasurable. But later, as he looked back, Reverend Graham saw that pain as absolutely necessary in refocusing and shaping his life into the ministry it became. And I'm sure that Billy Graham looked upon that past heartache as an example of the depth of Christ's mercy.

The Lord's mercy may not always come as beautifully wrapped gifts. It may come disguised as heartache, unbearable pain, and excruciating pressure. But Christ has not deserted us. His mercy continues in our lives on every level—even the deepest, most severe level.

Yet, if we allow Him, if we fully trust Him, He will take the intense pain and pressure surrounding us and use it to transform the rough, black coal of our hearts into the precious, eternal diamonds of His image.

## Deeper Depth

*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."*

*But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."*

*Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."*

*But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations,*

*with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”*

*When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered, “Listen to them and give them a king.” (1 Samuel 8:4-21)*

There is yet another aspect to the depth of the Lord's mercy that we need to examine. Sometimes, if we want something so badly, if we will not rest until we get it, if we resent the Lord for withholding it, if our attitude becomes rebellious for not receiving it, Christ, in the depth of His mercy, may eventually let us have it. This was the case with the children of Israel in 1 Samuel 8.

The people wanted a king like everyone else. But the Lord in essence told them, “You're not like everyone else. I have something better for you.”

God had Samuel warn the people about the excesses of kings. Yet they kept asking, and whining, and complaining, until He finally gave in and let them have their way. A way which proved far inferior to the blessings He originally had in mind for them.

Then there is the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. Jesus told this to help us understand how much God loves His children and the depths of His mercy toward them. There was a rich man with two sons. The younger didn't want to wait for his father's death to inherit his portion of the father's estate. He wanted it right then. The father gave that son what he asked for. The son soon “set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living” (verse 13). After losing everything, he had to take a job feeding pigs in order to keep from starving, and he finally “came to his senses” (verse 17). He returned home, humbled and repentant. There, instead of being rebuffed by the father, he was welcomed home with much rejoicing. And so, the Father welcomes His wandering children home.<sup>1</sup>

The depth of the Lord's mercy is unfathomable. He will go to any extent, even at times allowing us to have our own, stubborn, self-willed way, if it will eventually draw us closer to His blessings and His ways.

Sometimes our choices will cause us pain. But if it is the only way we can learn to trust Him and fully enter the abundant, full life He promised (see John 10:10), then our Lord will allow us to fall into the awful and terrible hands of our own self will.

In Psalm 119:67 David said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.”

## **Mercy Towards Others**

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)*

When we, by faith, accept God's forgiveness, we are born again by God's Spirit. We become new people with a new nature (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), and God's love is poured into our hearts (see Romans 5:5). Forgiveness and mercy are a by-product, a fruit of God's Spirit. Fruit doesn't appear on a tree all at once, fully formed, but a healthy fruit tree bears fruit—first the bud, then the flower, then the fruit. As we live in relationship with the Lord, He perfects that fruit, and we begin to live a life of love—His love. First Peter 4:8 says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” And 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us, “It [love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”<sup>2</sup>

God commands us to do what may be humanly impossible but is supernaturally possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps there are those who have genuinely done evil to you, and you are amazed that you feel no anger or bitterness toward them—that is God's Spirit working in you. Or, perhaps you want to let go of an offense that was committed against you and allow God to deal with the person, but somehow anger and resentment just keep rising up in your heart. Ask God to help you with this. Keep taking it to Him. Place that person or those people in God's hands, and ask Him to change your heart. This may or may not happen immediately, but as you seek to know God better and to grow in His grace and knowledge, your heart will be changed.<sup>3</sup>

Remember, grace, mercy, and forgiveness are a rich stream that flows from God. Not only should we let it flow into our hearts, but we should allow it pass through us in the form of mercy and forgiveness toward others.

1. This paragraph added by the Joy of Living editors.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.



4. a. Was Moses obedient? (verse 9a)  
  
b. What happened to those who looked at the bronze snake? (verse 9b)
  
5. In John 3, Jesus is explaining to a Pharisee named Nicodemus the simplicity of the Gospel. In this discussion Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son of Man,” and to His upcoming death on the cross as His being “lifted up.” What comparison did Jesus make as He spoke to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15? What hope are we given?
  
6. Personal: It was a simple matter for those Israelites who had been snake-bitten to live. If they believed God, they would look upon the bronze snake, and they would live; if they didn't believe Him, they would not look, and they would die. We may read this and wonder why anyone would not look and live. But think of yourself. Do you believe what God has said? Perhaps you've put your faith in Jesus for forgiveness of sin, but what about other promises God has made to you in Scripture? Do your life and actions show that you believe God?

### **Third Day: Read Romans 5:6-10.**

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#### **God's love and forgiveness are eternal.**

1. a. For whom did Christ die? (verse 6b)  
  
b. When did He do this? What condition were we in? (verse 6a)
  
2. For whom might someone die? Is this a common practice? (verse 7)
  
3. How and when did God demonstrate His love for us? (verse 8)
  
4. We have been forgiven and justified by Christ's blood; we are no longer under God's wrath (see verse 9). From verse 10, when were we reconciled (restored to friendship) with God? How was this accomplished?

5. Since God went to such lengths to bring us back into relationship with Himself while we were His enemies, now that we are His friends we don't have to fear condemnation when we fail. What does Paul say about this in Romans 8:1?
  
6. Personal: The "accuser" (see Revelation 12:10), our enemy, would love to discourage us and paralyze us with a sense of condemnation when we sin, because we still fall short of perfection. Perhaps you are feeling this way. But, think of this: if Christ loved and forgave you when you were His enemy and desired to sin, how much more will He love and forgive you now that you love Him and don't want to sin? This is not a license to sin. It is, however, an encouragement for us to stop listening to the accuser's voice when he tries to make us feel guilty and ashamed. We must remember that Jesus is still on our side when we fail—just as much as He was the moment when we first accepted Him as our Savior. Read 1 John 1:9, and then talk to the Lord about anything you would like to confess or anything that is bothering you.

## **Fourth Day: Read Colossians 1:15-17.**

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### **God's grace and love are amazing.**

1. a. Colossians 1:15-17 is speaking about Jesus Christ, God's Son. Whom is He the image of? (verse 15)  
  
b. What does Hebrews 1:3a say regarding this?
  
2. According to the following verses, who created all things?  
John 1:3 ("him" refers to "the Word," which we see is Jesus Christ in John 1:14)  
  
Colossians 1:16a ("him" is referring back to "the Son...of...God" in verse 15)
  
3. From Colossians 1:16b, list some of what Jesus Christ created. Who were they created for?
  
4. According to Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3b, who holds all of creation together?

5. Personal: When Jesus Christ was on the cross, He could have commanded thousands of angels to swoop down and destroy His tormentors in a second. He didn't. Instead He chose to lay down His life for them (see John 10:17-18). Not only did He refuse to destroy them, not only did He lay down His life for them, but He was also actually keeping them alive! With that in mind, we can rest assured that we're not going to exhaust His grace with whatever weaknesses we're currently struggling to overcome. Really think of this, and then write a prayer telling Him how this knowledge comforts you. Now tell Him, "Thank you."

## **Fifth Day: Read Ephesians 2:8-9.**

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### **Do you wonder how one partakes of God's grace?**

1. a. According to Ephesians 2:8a, how is a person saved?  
  
b. From where does this faith come? (Ephesians 2:8b-9)
2. Read Acts 16:29-31. The jailer asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved. What was their answer? (verse 31)
3. According to John 3:16, what did Jesus say a person must do to have eternal life?
4. Read Titus 3:4-5a. What is and what is not the basis of our salvation?
5. Personal: It is important to make certain that we trust in God's grace alone for salvation. When did you first believe and put your faith in Jesus Christ? Share with the class if you would like to. If you have not yet put your faith in Him, would you consider it now? For more information about this, turn to page 4, talk to your teacher or leader, or speak to your pastor.

## **Sixth Day: Read James 2:14-17.**

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### **As you work through this day's questions, remember that "deeds" and "works" refer to the same thing.**

1. According to the following verses, what accompanies faith?

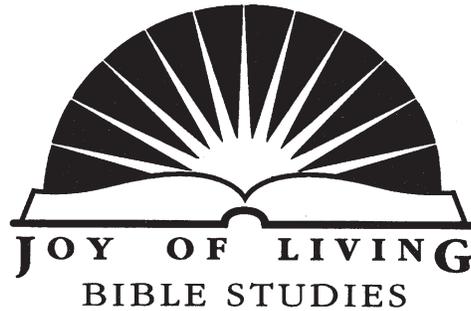
James 2:14

James 2:17

James 2:26

2. James 2:14-17 is not speaking of faith plus deeds for salvation, but rather of deeds done as a result of faith in Christ. This is not a matter of becoming a Christian and then doing “good deeds” because you “should” or because you “have to.” These deeds, these actions, flow from the new life within a Christian. Because an apple tree is an apple tree, it bears apples. Those apples spring forth from the life within the tree. Because we are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, we will naturally bear the fruit of His Spirit, which results in changed behavior. Read Galatians 5:22-23a, and list the fruit of the Spirit.
  
3. a. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3. What is produced by our faith?  
  
b. From the same verse, what is prompted by love?
  
4. What does Ephesians 2:10 say about our good works, that is, our deeds?
  
5. Personal: When we are born of God's Spirit, our works, or good deeds, will come as naturally to our living faith as fruit comes to a living tree. What does your life say about you? Are your “good deeds” done to make you look good to others? To make you feel good about yourself? Or do your good actions flow naturally from God's life and love within you? Do your daily actions and reactions reflect the fruit of God's Spirit in your life and prove that you are born of God's Spirit?

## Christ B.C. Lesson 11



### Amazing Grace

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#### The Bronze Serpent

*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. (John 3:14-15)*

In John 3 we read about Jesus explaining to Nicodemus (a godly Pharisee) the basic principles of God's grace. Nicodemus, like many of us, was trying to be religious, trying to earn God's grace and pleasure. So Jesus went right to the heart of the gospel.

He explained that Nicodemus' only responsibility was to believe and be born again (verse 3). And until this happened, Nicodemus could not even see—that is, perceive—<sup>1</sup> the kingdom of heaven. But Nicodemus couldn't understand that, and said, "How can someone be born when they are old?...Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" (verse 4).

So, Jesus explained the simplicity of God's grace. He reminded Nicodemus of the time the children of Israel were wandering in the desert and began actively complaining and rebelling against God. As judgment, the Lord sent "venomous snakes" into the camp that bit the people and caused many to die (see Numbers 21:4-9).

Realizing their sin, the people repented. To save them from dying, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it high upon a pole, and all who looked upon it could be healed.

The people were helpless. They could do nothing to save themselves. No religious ceremonies, no religious works. All they had to do was believe what God said and look at the bronze serpent on the pole. The rest was up to God. It was His work, His grace. God did the healing. God did the saving.

This was the point Jesus was making to Nicodemus. A person's religious works added nothing to their salvation. It was all God's grace.

And the same is true for us. We can't earn salvation. We can't even earn His love. We don't have to work, we don't have to strive, we don't have to weary ourselves by being religious. All we have to do is repent and look to Him, believe in Him who was lifted up on the cross for us, and God's grace will do the rest.

### No Expiration Date

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:6-10)*

There are areas in my life that I struggle with. Areas that I can't seem to let go of. Or maybe I can let go of them but simply don't. Maybe it's rebellion, maybe it's weakness, maybe it's just plain laziness that causes me to give in. I don't know. All I know is that I get discouraged and feel like the lowest of the low. If being with Christ and shedding this corrupt flesh and its sins were all there is to heaven, well, that would be good enough for me.

But I know one other thing. I know that...

*...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)*

I know that no matter how many times I fail, no matter how many times I sin—I'm still forgiven.

"But how do you know?" the accuser demands. "You wretched hypocrite—preaching righteousness to others but failing in your own life. Maybe God forgave you when you were a baby Christian and didn't know any better, but not now. Now, you should be further along, now you should be more mature. Who're you kidding? There's no forgiveness for you. Not anymore!"

Wrong! Absolutely wrong! Not only is Christ's grace strong enough to break sin's controlling power over me—it is also strong enough to forgive me when I fail to trust that strength.

His grace never fails. I cannot use it up. It makes no difference how long I've lived and walked with Christ. It makes no difference how much I know or how much I have experienced. There is no age or maturity limit to His grace.

That's the point Paul is making in this section of Romans. If Christ loved and forgave me when I was His enemy and wanted to sin, how

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1. See 1 Corinthians 2:11-14.

much more will He love and forgive me now that I love Him and don't want to sin?

Is this a license to disobey, to sin? Absolutely not. It is however, an encouragement for us to stop listening to the accuser's voice when he tries to make us feel lost. It is a reminder that Jesus is still on our side when we fail—just as He was that moment when we were first saved.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

This verse is just as true in our lives today as it was when we first heard it.

## The Greatness of Grace

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)*

Picture it: The Creator of all things personally came to earth. He left all of His glory in heaven to live in the decaying body of a sin-racked race amidst a sin-ravaged world. (The closest thing we can compare this to is if we chose to leave the human family and joined a population of maggots somewhere.)

Then He put up with all of humanity's egotistical pride, verbal abuse, and hatred—a hatred so intense that it caused people to plot His torture and crucifixion.

But (and this is where it really gets interesting) when He was on the cross He still didn't call it quits. Although Jesus could command thousands of angels to swoop down and destroy His tormentors in a second, He didn't. People were standing at the foot of His cross, hurling insults, mocking, taunting, defiling every trace of His holiness. Yet He still refused to destroy them. Instead He chose to lay down His life for them (see John 10:17-18). Talk about self-restraint. Talk about grace.

But there's more. Not only did He refuse to destroy them, not only did He lay down His life for them, but He was actually busy keeping them alive! That's right. According to Colossians 1:15-17, as Jesus Christ was being crucified, somehow, some way, He was supernaturally holding together the very people who were torturing Him!

*And in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17)*

Talk about love! Talk about grace!

I mean it's one thing to resist hurling your wrath down from heaven to wipe out the indignant loudmouths—but quite another to be actively keeping those loudmouths alive! Yet, that's exactly what Christ did.

This is the greatness of Christ's grace. The next time we begin to doubt His love or power to forgive, let's bring to memory the unlimited grace He displayed on the cross—not only forgiving the people that were torturing Him to death, but actually keeping them alive.

With that in mind, we can rest assured that we're not going to exhaust Christ's grace with whatever weaknesses we're currently struggling to overcome.

## Grace Versus Deeds<sup>1</sup>

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Some of us have heard or recited these verses for years. But we've also heard this section from James:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?... Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14,18-19,26)*

So what gives? Which saves us, faith or deeds? This is no light question. In fact, the supposed contradiction haunted Martin Luther so badly that he wanted to throw the entire book of James out of the Bible!

But there really is no contradiction. Like so many aspects of the Christian walk, the answer is not "either/or." It is "both." The Christian walk is a series of balances, not extremes.

Yes, we are saved only by God's grace. But if our salvation does not bring about deeds, if it does not bear fruit, then it is dead. If I plant a fruit tree and it does not bear leaves, buds, and fruit, then I no longer have a fruit tree—I have firewood.

Does that mean that once I'm saved I have to dig in and start working, that is, doing good deeds, to keep my salvation?

No. The deeds will come as naturally to your living faith as fruit comes to a living tree. You don't have to strain, you don't have to sweat. All you have to do is abide and stay connected to Christ. The grace of God will do the rest, as effortlessly as a fruit tree bears fruit.

*By their fruit you will recognize them... Every good tree bears good fruit. (Matthew 7:16-17)*

Or, as the verse immediately after this section's passage in Ephesians puts it:

*We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)*

All this to say...

You and I are not saved *by* deeds. We are saved *for* deeds.

1. Remember that "deeds" and "works" refer to the same thing.

## Active Grace

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)*

The following is a true story. It has burned inside my heart for years and I hope someday to co-write it with the participants—two people I now count as good friends.

Judy was thoroughly committed to her son. He was her firstborn and she loved him deeply. Needless to say, she was devastated when she learned of his brutal murder in a drug deal that went bad. At first, she wanted to kill the murderer. Better yet, she wanted to kill his family, so he'd suffer like she was suffering. She's a feisty, strong-willed woman and probably would have done it—if it wasn't for her love and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Immediately after the murder the Lord began to work with Judy, insisting that she forgive the killer. At first, she refused. Gradually she gave in—but with one condition: She could not forgive him on her own. If the Lord wanted her to forgive then He must help her see the killer through His eyes, through His eyes of love.

It was a clever move on Judy's part. Basically, she had put the ball back into the Lord's court. It was out of her hands. She didn't have to deal with it. The episode was finished. Or so she thought...

Five months later she was visiting a friend in prison when she heard the clear and unmistakable voice of the Lord: "Judy," He said, "the young man who killed your son is in this room."

At first Judy thought she was crazy. She looked around but no one else heard the voice—not even the guards who were stationed on either side of her.

The Voice repeated Himself, "Judy, the young man who killed your son is in this room—and I want you to love him for Me."

Suddenly, unexplained tears were rolling down her cheeks. "Lord," she protested, "I can forgive him, but I can't love."

"Judy," the Voice interrupted, "do you love Me?"

"Lord, you know I love You. But..."

"Then love Richard for Me."

"But..."

"Judy, do you love Me?"

"Lord," she sobbed, barely able to get the words out, "You know I love You. But..."

"Then love Richard for Me."

Three times the Lord asked if she loved Him. And each time that she professed her love, He insisted that she love her son's killer.

Finally, she was broken. Uncontrollable tears of love and repentance continued to wash over her face. She slowly rose to her feet and began to walk around the room. Although she had been at the trial she could not remember the killer's face. Finally, she heard, "Stop. He's right here."

She looked down and there was Richard seated beside her, a hardened killer of not one, but two human beings. But she didn't see that. By the grace of God, she saw a young man (not unlike her own son) who was bound and shackled by hate and fear. And once again the tears began to pour. But this time they were not tears of repentance. They were tears of love. The Lord was indeed allowing her to see the murderer of her son through His eyes.

She knelt beside the man, introduced herself and began to share the supernatural love she felt washing over her. She told of her love and forgiveness and she told of the Lord's love. She also explained how Jesus wanted to forgive him.

Finally, she was able to look up through her tears long enough to see something that took her breath away. This hardened criminal was also beginning to weep, sobbing uncontrollably.

Judy had obeyed. As a result, God's grace was flowing. But that was only the beginning...

After she returned home she began to write letters to Richard, sharing Scriptures, explaining the great love Jesus had for him. To make a long story short, finally, when Richard was in solitary confinement, he dropped to his knees and received Christ's forgiveness.

Judy demonstrated the depth and power of Christ's grace. It is the grace that loves and saves a world. A grace we don't have to generate on our own. A grace that we only need to let flow into our hearts—and out to others.

*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. (Jeremiah 31:3)*

## Study Questions

### Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

### First Day: Read the Commentary “Amazing Grace.”

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1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the commentary “Amazing Grace” or from your teacher’s lecture?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

**The Bible is like no other book. It was written by over 40 authors from various backgrounds, over a period of about 1,600 years—in complete harmony. For this number of people, from different walks of life, in different periods of time, to write in complete harmony is a miracle.**

### Second Day:

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**As we mentioned in Lesson 2 commentary, there were over 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Christ alone.**

1. Compare Isaiah 7:14 to Matthew 1:18-23. Isaiah was written about 700 years before Matthew was written.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Compare Micah 5:2 to Luke 2:4-7a. Micah was written about 700 years before Luke was written.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Compare Isaiah 9:1-2 to Matthew 4:13-17. As previously stated, Isaiah was written about 700 years prior to Matthew.

4. Compare Zechariah 9:9 to Matthew 21:1-9. Zechariah was written about 500 years before Jesus was born.

5. Compare the following passages from the Old and New Testaments. Remember, Psalms and Isaiah were written hundreds of years prior to Jesus' birth.

Psalm 22:16-18

Isaiah 53:5-6

Matthew 27:26

Luke 23:33-36a

Romans 4:25

1 Peter 2:22-24

6. Personal: After reading just these few prophecies that were fulfilled, do you doubt that the Bible is true? When or how did you first come to know that the Bible is God's Word?

### **Third Day:**

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**Let's look at what the Bible says about itself.**

1. What do you learn about Scripture (the Bible) from 2 Timothy 3:16a?

2. All Scripture—every word in the Bible—is God-breathed, which means inspired by God. This is not the inspiration that an artist or musician may have when creating. Somehow, every word of Scripture contains the breath of God—a portion of His actual life. What does Hebrews 4:12a say regarding this?

3. God uses Scripture in powerful ways in the lives of both believers and nonbelievers. From the following verses, what will God's Word do for the nonbeliever?

Romans 10:17

James 1:21b

4. From the following Scripture passages, list what God's Word will do for the believer.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Romans 15:4

5. Personal: Share with the class, if you would like, some of the times God has used His Word in your life.

## **Fourth Day:**

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**Jesus was well aware of the truth and the power of Scripture.**

1. From Matthew 4:1-11, how did Jesus battle the devil in the wilderness?

2. How did Jesus use Scripture and validate its truth in each of the following passages?

Matthew 21:12-13

Matthew 21:16

Mark 7:5-7

Luke 22:36-37

John 12:14-15

3. Personal: Share with the class a time you chose to believe what the Bible says despite what popular culture, or perhaps family or friends, said to the contrary.

### **Fifth Day:**

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1. From Psalm 119:89, how enduring is God's Word?
2. What does Jesus say about God's law in Matthew 5:18?
3. What does Jesus say in Matthew 24:35 say regarding the permanence of God's Word?
4. From 1 Peter 1:24-25a, contrast people with the Word of God.
5. Personal: When you consider the permanence of God's Word, are you encouraged to base all of your life and eternity on what God has said? Are you facing a difficulty right now? Will you trust God in the midst of it, even if you don't understand? What Scripture passage will you hold on to in order to help you through this difficult time? If you aren't certain, look in your Bible, or ask a Christian friend, pastor, or leader to suggest some of God's promises.

## Sixth Day:

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**We have seen how powerful and eternal God's Word is.**

1. What direction did God give to the Israelites in the following verses?

Deuteronomy 4:2

Deuteronomy 12:32

2. a. What warning is given in Revelation 22:18, and what will be the result if it is not obeyed?

- b. What warning is given in Revelation 22:19, and what will be the result if it is not obeyed?

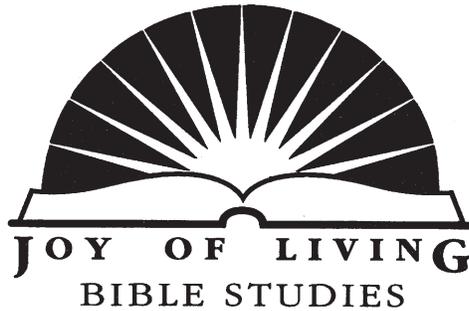
3. What caution is given in James 3:1 to those who teach the Word of God?

4. What did Paul say in 2 Corinthians 2:17 regarding his teaching of God's Word?

5. In Mark 4:24, what did Jesus command those who hear God's Word?

6. Personal: As we have read, God takes His Word seriously and so should we. Think through your attitude toward God and His Word. Look back through today's Scripture passages. What has been most meaningful to you?

## Christ B.C. Lesson 12



### The Truth Stands

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#### Inerrant Scriptures

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)*

I recently asked one of the best writers I know why he became a Christian. His answer was simple (although perhaps a bit egotistical). "The Bible," he said, "is the only piece of writing I'd ever read that I cannot improve upon." As far as this man is concerned, the Bible is artistic perfection.

But there's more perfection to the Bible than its art. It is inerrant. It is without error. It is without error historically, archaeologically, and prophetically.

Let's take a fleeting glance at prophecy. As I mentioned before, there were over 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Christ alone. The odds of one man fulfilling even a few dozen of these prophecies would be phenomenal, but to fulfill all 300 would be impossible! But, as usual, God has done the impossible. I won't be able to squeeze all 300 prophecies into these few paragraphs, but here are just a few. As you read them, keep in mind that the passages were written hundreds of years before Christ was born.

#### His Birth

*Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [which means "God with us."] (Isaiah 7:14)*

#### His Ministry While on Earth

*In the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—*

*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9:1-2)*

*Then will the eyes of the blind be opened  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
Then will the lame leap like a deer,  
and the mute tongue shout for joy. (Isaiah 35:5-6)*

#### His Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)*

#### His Crucifixion

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6)*

*A pack of villains encircles me;  
they pierce my hands and my feet.  
All my bones are on display;  
people stare and gloat over me.  
They divide my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment. (Psalm 22:16-18)*

The existence of such prophecies and their fulfillment would be impossible unless the prophetic Scriptures themselves were 100 percent accurate.

But fulfilled prophecy is only one proof of Scripture's infallibility.

#### Jesus' Perspective

*All Scripture is God-breathed. (2 Timothy 3:16)*

Before we get into defending the inerrancy of Scripture, let's briefly review exactly what the Scriptures say about Scripture.

For starters, they say that all Scripture—every word in the Bible—is God-breathed, which means inspired by God. And by *inspired* we're not talking about someone getting so excited and worked up about the Lord that they invented a bunch of tall tales to give Him glory. Somehow, some way, every word of Scripture contains the breath of God—a portion of His actual living, breathing life.

This "living" aspect of the Word leads to another quality we've already touched upon:

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* (Hebrews 4:12)

Because of this living aspect, the Scriptures are used by God to save us (see James 1:21), cleanse us (see Ephesians 5:26), encourage us (see Romans 15:4), give us faith (see Romans 10:17), equip us to do good (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17), and help us see ourselves as we really are (see James 1:23-25).

These are the claims the Bible makes about Scripture. But any book can make exaggerated claims about itself. What we need is proof. But not only proof, we also need endorsements by people we can trust.

Time doesn't permit us to go down the complete list of great scientists, humanitarians, philosophers, and statesmen who have embraced and endorsed the Bible. So let's just pick the most trustworthy person...

### Jesus Christ Believed

As we've seen before, Jesus was well aware of the power of Scripture—particularly when He chose to use it as His only weapon to fight Satan out there in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1-11). In fact, despite all of what was available to them, both Jesus and Satan chose to use only God's holy Word in the great showdown (although Satan perverted God's Word and used it out of context).

But this was not the only time Christ used the Word. He often made reference to it. He used it again and again to teach, to correct, to clarify. And, most importantly, He used it as the ultimate proof of who He is and why He came.

Never once did Christ cast doubt on the Scriptures regarding their trustworthiness. In fact, He did just the opposite—He always treated the Word as it is—perfect and God-spoken.

And perhaps this is the best of all inerrant arguments. If Jesus Christ, Himself, looked upon the Scriptures as perfect and without error, then I'd say that's a good reason for you and I to do the same.

### Historical Truth

*The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.* (Isaiah 40:8)

Countless books have been written about the historical accuracy of Scripture. In fact, it does the subject an injustice to touch upon it in this little space. But here's a little food for thought...

### Oldest and Most Accurate History

The Bible is one of the oldest historical documents in existence. It is likely the most accurate record that has ever been kept. By comparing our current copies of Scripture with those that have been buried for thousands of years, it has been discovered that there's virtually no difference between the ancient and the "modern" documents.<sup>1</sup> This means that the historical records of the Bible have remained exact

and unaltered since they were first written. Even the tricky and detailed spelling of all those Old Testament rulers has remained virtually unchanged.

### Quality Reporting

The best journalists know an accurate news story is a story confirmed by two or three sources. But the confirmation in the Bible goes further. In the Gospels there are four confirmations of Christ's ministry: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four men, from four distinct backgrounds, wrote the Gospels at four distinct times, and from four distinct locations. Not only did all four men agree and come to the same conclusions (a miracle in itself), but their accounts of the principal actions are practically identical!

### Additional Sources

But the Bible wasn't the only historical record kept. Oral traditions such as a great flood that swept over the world are common in the history of many cultures.<sup>2</sup>

Then there are other written records—such as this one recorded by Josephus, a Jewish historian (most likely a Pharisee) who lived during or shortly after the time of Christ:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again on the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.<sup>3</sup>

All this to say...

When it comes to judging the Bible on a historical basis, we have nearly an airtight case in favor of its accuracy.

### Archaeological Truth

*Your word, Lord, is eternal.* (Psalm 119:89)

When archaeology was in its infancy, some tried to use it as a tool to disprove Scripture. But as this science grew and was refined, others started to realize that archaeological findings actually confirmed Scripture. And by confirming Scripture, I'm not just talking about the discovery of cities or civilizations where the Bible said they'd be, though that in itself is tremendous evidence of the accuracy of the Bible. Interest-

2. "The flood myth motif is found among many cultures as seen in the Mesopotamian flood stories, Deucalion and Pyrrha in Greek mythology, the Genesis flood narrative, Manu in Hinduism, the Gun-Yu in Chinese mythology, Bergelmir in Norse mythology, in the lore of the K'iche' and Maya peoples in Mesoamerica, the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa tribe of Native Americans in North America, the Muisca, and Canari Confederation, in South America, and the Aboriginal tribes in southern Australia." <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood\\_myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood_myth)>

3. McDowell, Josh, as quoted in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1972) p.82.

1. Dr. Patrick Zukeran, "The Dead Sea Scrolls Shed Light on the Accuracy of our Bible," <<https://probe.org/the-dead-sea-scrolls/>>

ingly, archaeology goes many steps further. It even offers possible proof of miracles.

One of my favorite bits of archaeological trivia concerns Jericho—the city Joshua marched around and whose walls fell when the people shouted and blew trumpets. Now, usually, the walls of cities that were under siege always fell in, towards the city. But in the ruins of Jericho they've found that for some strange reason the walls had actually fallen outwards, away from the city. To this day no one has a suitable explanation. It's almost as if the walls had fallen by themselves. Hmm... Now you can't go to court with this type of evidence, but it does make interesting food for thought.<sup>1</sup>

What does hold up in court is that there are thousands of archaeological findings that support the Bible's accuracy. Or as Nelson Glueck, whom Josh McDowell considers to be one of the three greatest archaeologists, is quoted as saying: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted [opposed] a biblical reference."<sup>2</sup>

In fact, not only is the credibility of the Bible strengthened through archaeology, but so is the faith of some of the archaeologists. Millar Burrows, a Yale archaeologist, put it best:

Archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

## The Care to Preserve Scripture

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll. (Revelation 22:18-19)*

Since the Bible is so old, it only stands to reason that some will question its accuracy. They think, *Surely over the centuries of copying and recopying, changes and errors have slipped in.*

You might think so. But God, in His wisdom, had other plans...

The ancient Jews actually created a special group of men whose duty was to preserve the accuracy of the writings to the finest detail. They believed they were handling God's holy Word, and they took every conceivable precaution to make sure that every word, every symbol, even every letter, was exactly the same as in the original manuscripts.

Here are just a few of their painstaking rules and regulations:

- ☞ The ink was prepared with a special recipe.
- ☞ The persons copying the writings had to bathe.
- ☞ They had to sit in full Jewish dress.

1. Scott Ashley and Jerold Aust, <<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/01/Jericho-Does-the-Evidence-Disprove-or-Prove-the-Bible.aspx>>

2. McDowell, Josh, *Evidence*, p. 65.

3. *Ibid*, p. 66.

- ☞ Each line had to contain exactly 30 letters.
- ☞ Each consonant had to be separated by the width of a hair.
- ☞ Not a single word or letter could be written from memory.
- ☞ If they were writing the name of God and even the king came in and addressed them, they had to ignore the person speaking.
- ☞ And, if these rules (and plenty more) were not followed, the copy had to be destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

With such precautions, it's safe to say that no creative "doctoring" was allowed to creep in.

In short, it seems there has been no historical document in the world whose accuracy has been so carefully preserved as the Bible.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls

*"My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever," says the Lord. (Isaiah 59:21)*

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls gives us another reason to believe that the Bible we have today is the same as the one God originally inspired. In 1947, a shepherd boy stumbled on a cave with several hidden jars that contained scrolls of Scriptures (including the entire book of Isaiah). When scientists investigated those scrolls, they found some to date as far back as the second century B.C.!

At last it was time for the great showdown. If our Bible was the same as those Scriptures that were over 2,000 years old, it would prove that God's Word had remained unchanged from the time God first inspired it. But if those Scriptures were different from our Bible, it would prove that people had tampered with God's Word over the centuries, and that it could no longer be trusted. Carefully the experts went over the text—back and forth, checking every phrase, every word, every letter. They knew the gravity of their findings.

And the result?

According to Gleason Archer in his *Survey of the Old Testament*, the Isaiah scrolls proved to be identical to the modern Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent variation consisted of obvious slips of the pen and variations of spelling.

The test had been passed. In over 2,000 years, the Word of God had remained virtually unchanged!<sup>5</sup>

Not only is Scripture the actual God-breathed Word of our Lord, but many, many scholars agree that it is the most accurate and perfect book ever written.

Even the harshest critic (if he or she is educated) will admit that there is absolutely no historical book of such honesty and integrity. But as weighty as their opinions may be, they mean nothing in comparison to what Jesus Christ believed—or to what the Scriptures themselves teach when they say, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

4. According to *Hebrew Text of the Old Testament* by Samuel Davidson, as quoted in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 56-57.

5. Myers, Bill, *Hot Topics, Tough Questions*, (Wheaton: SP Publications, Inc., 1987) p. 77.



Luke 2:52a

John 4:6a

John 19:28b

3. From firsthand experience the Lord understands all of our struggles. What do you learn about Jesus from Hebrews 4:15?
4. Personal: The Lord cares about you as an individual. He understands your struggles. He is there to help—to forgive, to comfort, and to guide. How does this encourage you?

### **Third Day:**

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#### **We humans are unique and special to God.**

1. From Genesis 1:27, what is unique about all people?

2. From the following verses, what does sin do?

Romans 6:23a

Isaiah 59:2

3. Challenge: Everything that truly satisfies a person is wrapped up in God. He is life, love, light, peace, joy, and so much more. Sin separates us from God, and it brings about eternal death (see Romans 6:23). It can also cause the death of relationships, health, hopes, and dreams. Have you experienced loss because of your sin, or do you know of someone who has experienced loss because of sin in their life? Share with the class, if you would like.
4. From the following verses, what lengths has God gone to in order to rescue us from the eternal penalty of sin?

Romans 5:8

1 Peter 3:18a

5. Personal: Have you taken advantage of what Jesus Christ has done for you? If you would like more information, turn to page 4 or talk to your leader, pastor, or other Christian friend.

## Fourth Day:

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### Love has many different faces.

1. Read 1 John 3:16a. How did Jesus Christ show that He loves us?

2. From the following verses, describe how Jesus felt about the people.

Matthew 9:36

Matthew 11:28-29

3. Read Mark 11:15-17.<sup>1</sup> Describe Jesus' actions. What did He tell these people?

4. Challenge: The buying and selling was taking place in the outer court, which was the Court of the Gentiles. How difficult do you think it would have been for godly Gentiles to pray and worship in this place? Do you think the cheating that was taking place would hinder those, both Jew and Gentile, who had come to worship?

5. Personal: The Lord's compassion comes in many forms. For those who are dedicated to Him, it appears as soft encouragement and gentleness. For those who are abusing and doing wrong to those He loves, it comes with anger and judgment. Is this new to you? Do you understand this? Do you think love should allow someone to harm another?

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1. "Pilgrims coming to the Passover Festival needed animals that met the ritual requirements for sacrifice, and the vendors set up their animal pens and money tables in the court of the Gentiles. The pilgrims also needed their money changed into the local currency because the annual temple tax had to be paid in that currency. The doves that were sold were required for the purification of women (Lev 12:6; Lk 2:22-24), the cleansing of those with certain skin diseases (Lev 14:22-23), and other purposes (Lev 15:13-14, 28-29). They were also the usual offering of the poor (Lev 5:7). Isa 56:7 assured godly Gentiles that they would be allowed to worship God in the temple. By allowing the court of the Gentiles to become a noisy, smelly marketplace, the Jewish religious leaders were interfering with God's provision" (*NIV Study Bible Notes* on Mark 11:15-17).

## **Fifth Day:**

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**There are works of art from all over the world depicting what people think Jesus might have looked like. Today we will see what the Bible says.**

1. With all that is written about Jesus in the Bible, there are very few descriptions of what He looked like here on earth. These describe Him at the height of His compassion, when, in His intense love for us, He was pouring out His life. Read Isaiah 52:14 and describe Jesus from this passage.
  
2. How is He described in Isaiah 53:2-3?
  
3. What do you learn from Psalm 22:14-17 about His appearance when He was on the cross?
  
4. Challenge: Read Mark 15:15-20 and describe how these events might have altered Jesus' appearance.
  
5. Personal: Think of this composite description of Jesus and how it expresses the love He has for us, for you. Write a prayer, poem, or song expressing your gratitude and love for Him.

## **Sixth Day:**

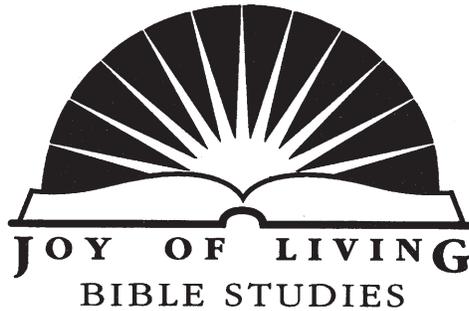
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**We toss the word "love" around like it's some kind of Frisbee. Unfortunately, because of that, it carries about as much weight as a Frisbee. However, the clear and distinct command from Christ is to love.**

1. a. According to John 15:12, how are we to love?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. From Romans 5:8, describe how He demonstrated His love.



## Christ B.C. Lesson 13



### The Many Faces of Compassion

#### The Man of Sorrows

*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.* (Isaiah 53:4)

There's another aspect of Christ's love and sacrifice we haven't really looked into yet. It has to do with carrying our sorrows. Not only did Jesus suffer for and carry the sorrow of our sins when He was on the cross, but for 33 years He also carried and endured all the difficult aspects of being human here on earth. For 33 years He endured all of its pain, all of its sorrow, and all of its temptations.

This is what's so vitally important for us to remember: the Lord is not some circus ringmaster with a snapping whip who demands we jump through His rings of righteousness. He's been here. He knows the hell we've created for ourselves here on earth. From firsthand experience He understands all of our struggles. This is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he wrote:

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Jesus Christ has borne our sorrows—on the cross, yes, but also in our day-to-day troubles. He has been tempted and has struggled in every area we will ever face. He knows what we are going through. And, from personal experience, He knows how to help us win.

Even when we fail and lose, He is not a demanding Lord with arms crossed and a foot tapping impatiently at our shortcomings. He is not a Warden. He is a caring and feeling Coach, someone who partners alongside us, urging us to try, strengthening us to succeed, and tenderly picking us up and holding us if we fail.

We are not in this alone. We have Someone fully acquainted with our sorrows. And Someone whose love and compassion is so intense that He'll come alongside us and help us bear those sorrows every minute of every day.

#### Passionate Compassion

*But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine...everyone*

*who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."* (Isaiah 43:1,7)

The greatest works of art are those that have been created with the greatest passion. When an artist truly pours himself into his work, rejoicing over its strength, agonizing over its weakness, infusing his very personality into the work, that work will capture a piece of his soul. That is the art that lasts—the masterpiece that has a part of the artist's life living and breathing on the canvas, in the marble, on the written page.

I believe this is the type of compassion the Lord has for us. He has poured His very life into us, and He is absolutely passionate when it comes to defending and protecting us. I believe this is, in part, why He hates sin so intensely, and this is why He is so angry when He sees us destroying ourselves and others with that sin.

When I was a boy my family moved from the city into the country. It seemed all my new friends thought it was their mission in life to try to educate and impress the city slicker. One fellow in particular did just that. But not necessarily the way he had planned.

He was showing me around his dairy farm. No doubt he saw my cityfied eyes widen as we approached the bull pen. So, to impress me, the kid climbed on the bull's fence and began shouting and teasing. But that wasn't good enough. Soon he climbed to the top and straddled the fence as he carried on his taunt against death. Luckily it was short-lived.

Out of nowhere, the hired hand appeared. He reached over, grabbed my friend, pulled him off the fence, and dragged him to the ground. Then, with a quick kick to the pants and swearing a blue streak, he made it painfully clear that he never wanted to catch my friend on that fence again.

Why such harsh treatment? Because he loved that kid. He loved him and was passionately committed to his welfare. He was outraged; he was absolutely livid to see the boy treat so cheaply the life the man loved so dearly.

I think of that incident from time to time, and can't help but wonder if that is the type of passion my Father has for my well-being. Because He loves me, He will do whatever is necessary to make sure I don't destroy myself with sin.

Now granted, to compare God with an outraged farmhand may not be all that accurate. But in some ways, I wonder if their love and compassion are all that dissimilar.

And, interestingly enough, the farmhand, like the Lord, had definitely made his point. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, my friend never so much as touched that bull pen again.

### Compassionate Outrage

*On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (Mark 11:15-17)*

This is not the meek and mild Jesus that's so often painted for us. No soft-spoken, dewy-eyed doormat here. Jesus is furious. He was passionately outraged at what had been done in His Father's house.

But why? If God is a God of love, how could He turn so angry—throwing the coins to the floor, flipping over tables, even driving out the animals and those who were buying and selling? I mean, come on, this doesn't sound like love to me.

But it was.

First, this was taking place in the Court of the Gentiles, the only place in the temple where Gentiles were permitted to enter. This "market" was a hindrance to worship by godly Gentiles. Also, hundreds, perhaps thousands of people a day were being ripped off by the temple merchants. These people were sincere, dedicated, pilgrims who had traveled hundreds of miles to worship God. But instead of shepherding this dedicated flock, the leaders were fleecing it!

For one thing, the sacrificial animals the people brought with them were seldom judged "perfect enough" to sacrifice by the temple officials. (The fact that these officials had a side business selling "unblemished" replacement sacrifices might have clouded their judgment slightly.)

Then there was the problem of the people's "dirty money." Before they could do business in God's holy temple and buy the officials' animals for sacrifice, that awful, worldly money had to be exchanged for "clean money."

In short, if he played his cards right, a greedy temple official could turn a huge profit per customer!

No wonder Christ was outraged! People who came to His Father out of love were being robbed blind and/or being kept from worship. I believe His feelings then are no different from His feelings today. I believe Christ feels that same burning passion inside His heart every time He sees His beloved ones being kept from worship, or being hurt, abused, or fleeced. And that is love.

Christ's compassion comes in many forms. For those who are dedicated to Him, it appears as soft encouragements and embraces. For those who are abusing and destroying those He loves, it comes with anger and judgment.

### The Look of Compassion

*There were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness. (Isaiah 52:14)*

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (Isaiah 53:2-3)*

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth...They pierce my hands and my feet...All my bones are on display. (Psalm 22:14-17)*

It has always fascinated me that with all that is written about Jesus in the Bible, there are very few descriptions of what He looked like here on earth. And these describe Him at the height of His compassion, when, in His intense love for us, He was pouring out His life.

There is nothing about His height, His weight, His hair, or His facial features. Nothing.

It's as if the Holy Spirit, in His great wisdom as a writer, wanted us only to focus on one thing. It's as if He only wanted us to picture our Lord and Savior when He was at the height of His compassion.

All we see are a suffering face, a body whose blood is being poured out like water, whose bones are pulled out of joint, and whose hands and feet are pierced. This is the only picture painted for us. No handsome face, no piercing eyes, no towering strength—simply a man in the agonizing throes of death. A man in the midst of total and consuming compassion for us.

### The Sacrifice of Compassion

*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:12-13)*

We toss the word "love" around like it's some kind of Frisbee. Unfortunately, because of that, it carries about as much weight.

Yet the clear and distinct command from Christ is to love. It's important to keep in mind that He wasn't making some sort of suggestion or stating a great ideal. It is a boldfaced, in capital letters, front page command: **LOVE**.

But how much? I mean there are varying degrees of love, right?

Right, and Jesus gives us the exact degree when He said, "Love each other as I have loved you."

But that concept means little to me. How can I love someone like Jesus loves me? How many opportunities am I going to have to be crucified to save a friend's life?

None. But there are other sacrifices we can make, sacrifices the Lord expects us to make.

What about giving up watching Sunday afternoon television in order to help a neighbor in need?

You might think, *But all he cares about is himself!*

And exactly who did the disciples care for when they deserted Jesus after His arrest? Yet He still died for them.

What about sacrificing a night out in order to help a sister study for tomorrow's exam?

You might think, *But she's been too busy playing. She deserves a bad grade!*

Right, and we were busy sinning although Jesus died for us. We deserve death.

Or what about sacrificing your pride in order to make a phone call, or send a text, an email, or a letter seeking reconciliation with one of your enemies?

*No way! If you had seen what he did to me—if you had known how he hurt me—you wouldn't even be asking. Besides, I was entirely right.*

Probably. But if there's anybody who was "entirely right," it was Jesus. Yet He still loved His disciples, even as they betrayed Him, denied Him, and deserted Him. It seemed everyone was doing all they could to destroy and deny Christ. But He still died for them.

What Jesus is requesting of us are the continual day-to-day sacrifices that He expects us to make for our brothers and sisters.

Love isn't always a cozy, gooey feeling. I'm sure Jesus wasn't feeling warm fuzzies when He allowed Himself to be tortured to death for us. Sometimes love is just plain, old-fashioned, and excruciatingly difficult. But that is what He calls for:

*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*  
(John 15:12)

## Compassion for Self?

*Love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matthew 19:19)

For years I've heard that this verse is proof that we should love ourselves. For years I've heard that our number one problem in life is that we don't love ourselves enough. For years I've heard that if we just relaxed and loved ourselves, all of our emotional issues would be over.

And for years I almost fell for that line. But not quite. I just couldn't equate it with what Scripture had to say about loving self:

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful,*

*proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.*  
(2 Timothy 3:1-2)

And the list goes on. But notice what is at the top of the list: "lovers of themselves." Here's another catchy little verse, a direct quote from Jesus:

*Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* (John 12:25)

Does this mean I'm supposed to go around with my head hanging down, always hating myself and never loving me?

Yes and no. You see, we Christians are regenerated, reborn, and full of the Spirit of Christ. But there is also a part of us that is putrid and self-centered, the old self, the flesh that hasn't yet given up to Jesus and won't give up to Jesus (see Romans 8:7-8).

This second part is the part I hate. This second part is the part that makes me angry and that I loathe so intensely. This "old self" is the one that's constantly fighting, trying to hold me back. He'll do anything to try to stay in control—even disguise himself as being religious. But every day, as I abide in Christ and grow to know Him better through His Word, the new self takes a little more ground.

It is this new self that I love. He's the one I rejoice over when he does right—when he loves, when he worships, when he obeys, when he gives part of his life to others.

Even at that it's not really me that I'm loving. It's Christ in me. Still, I'm not going to get a headache trying to divide the difference. No matter how you word it, the point is, as Christ takes over more and more of my life, I am filled with more and more of His peace, His joy, and most importantly, His love.



Revelation 20:10

4. a. Romans 8:20 in the *New Living Translation* says, "Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse." From Genesis 3:17-18, what caused this?  
  
b. From Revelation 22:3a, what will eventually happen to the curse?
  
5. Personal: Are you anticipating the Lord's return? What specifically are you looking forward to?

### **Third Day:**

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**In His earthly life, Jesus was full of mercy and compassion. When He returns, He will be full of awesome power, glory, and majesty.**

1. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus frequently referred to Himself as "the Son of Man." How does Revelation 1:13-16 describe Jesus Christ? In verse 17, what was John's reaction when he saw Jesus?  
  
2. a. When Jesus first presented Himself as king in Jerusalem, He came riding on a donkey, the symbol of a peaceful king (see Matthew 21:5). Read Revelation 19:11-16. Describe Jesus Christ from verses 11-13.  
  
b. From verse 14, who is with Him?  
  
c. From verses 15-16, what is He coming to do and in what manner?

- d. From verses 11 and 16, what is He called?
- 
3. What does Philippians 2:9-11 say about Jesus Christ?
- 
4. Personal: Everyone will bow their knee to Jesus Christ and acknowledge that He is Lord, either now or in the future. Have you? If not, when will you? If you have, when did you accept Him as Lord?

### **Fourth Day:**

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**Jesus came about 2000 years ago to die on the cross in order pay the price for our sin and reconcile us to the Father. Although He didn't make elaborate displays of His power, it was not hidden.**

1. Read Matthew 8:23-26. What did Jesus have power over?
- 
2. Read Luke 9:42. What did Jesus have power over?
- 
3. Read Matthew 15:35-38. What did Jesus do?
- 
4. Read Matthew 4:23-24. What did Jesus have power to do?
- 
5. From today's verses we see that Jesus has power over the elements, power over demons, power to provide, and power over sickness. Read Matthew 6:31-33. What is the most important thing we should be seeking? If we do this, what will also happen?



2. God is life. Everything that a person needs and desires is in Him: life, light, love, peace, joy, etc. (see Acts 17:25, 1 John 4:8, Galatians 5:22-23). But we humans have a problem. From the following verses, what is our problem? (Note: *iniquities* are sin.)

Isaiah 59:2

Romans 3:23

3. Because we have all sinned, because we are all less than perfect, we are separated from God, Who is life. From the following verses, what do you learn about the remedy for our problem?

1 John 4:14

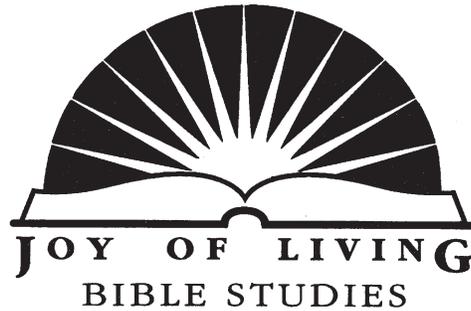
Isaiah 53:6

John 3:16-18

2 Corinthians 5:18-19a

4. Personal: As Jesus said in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, we can have a relationship with the living God. We can experience life—the full, abundant life that comes only from Him. If you have come into that wonderful relationship with Him, write a prayer to Him thanking Him for all He has done for you. If you have not yet come into this relationship with Him, please, turn to page 4 for more information, talk to your leader, pastor, or other Christian friend.

## Christ B.C. Lesson 14



### A Victorious Future

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#### The King Returns

*The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (Zechariah 14:9)*

Picture it.

One day Jesus Christ will return—not as the suffering Savior on a cross, but as the ruling King on the throne. The world Satan has dominated and oppressed<sup>1</sup> will be returned back to its original Owner. And the original Owner will realign and adjust everything He created to function as it was originally designed.<sup>2</sup>

No longer will there be twisted contortions of what were once beautiful creations. No longer will love be contorted into lust, holiness twisted into self-righteousness, or a relationship with God distorted into religion.

And our contributions to His creation—the sickness, disease, and death that we've managed to introduce through our own sin? They will be totally eliminated.

In short, the “groaning” creation (see Romans 8:22) will finally be set free. It will once again function as it was designed to function and be the blessing it was intended to be.

#### An Illustration

Once we were like a magnificent and precisely tuned orchestra. There was no end to the beauty and wonder our music could create under the expert hands of our Conductor.

But, being persuaded to believe our Conductor was a tyrant, we threw Him off the podium. Now we had freedom. Now we could play whatever we wanted to play, whenever we wanted to play it.

But our music became discordant, off tempo, and out of tune. We had no leader. No one could agree on anything. We broke into factions, each group trying to overpower the other. In our refusal to work together, we even forgot the range and unique abilities of each of our instruments. Drums were trying to play flute lines. Violins were trying to be tubas. Soon screechings, squawks, and unbearable thunderings replaced what was once breathtaking beauty. And soon the very orchestra that was created to bring beauty and joy brought nothing but ugliness and pain.

But not forever. Eventually some in the orchestra realized what we had done and asked the Conductor to again lead. And for those of us who asked, He has done just that—at least in part.

But soon He will return and take complete charge. When He does, we will be able to play the full range of our instruments in perfect harmony with all of our fellow orchestra members. We will be part of the beauty and majesty He originally created us to be.

#### Another Description

*Among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. (Revelation 1:13-16)*

I mentioned before that there are only a couple descriptions of what Jesus looked like on earth. But there are other descriptions—descriptions of what He looks like in heaven and later on when He returns to earth. Now that He is in heaven, He is no longer the tormented, suffering Savior. And when He returns, we will see Him as He really is—a powerful and conquering King. The Revelation passage above conveys some of that awesome and terrifying power. In fact, John ends this passage with his reaction to what he saw:

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. (Revelation 1:17)*

---

1. Jesus referred to Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31), and Paul called him “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2) and “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). John makes a further distinction when he says: “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). The Bible frequently uses “the world” or “this world” (translated from the Greek word *kosmos*) to refer to the present evil system of opposition to God. So, the Bible never teaches that Satan actually rules over the entire world, but that he is ruler over the current system of sinful opposition to God. In other words, he’s leading the rebellion against God. [Adapted from Tim Augustyn. See footnote on Lesson 13, Second Day, Question 2.]

2. The time frame for these future events is not known for certain and there are a variety of beliefs about how these events will play out. We do know that they *will* happen, and in this we can rejoice.

Just as the Holy Spirit wants us to understand that Jesus, as seen on earth, was full of mercy and compassion, it seems He's making it equally clear that when Jesus returns, He will be full of awesome power, glory, and majesty.

We no longer have a suffering, broken, and bleeding Christ for our King. Today Jesus Christ sits on His throne (see Revelation 3:21), full of awesome power and unutterable glory!

## The Conquering Warrior

*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19:11-16)*

The first time Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He came riding on a donkey, the symbol of a peaceful king.

The next time He makes His entrance things will be a little different. The next time He will be coming as a conquering warrior!

I saw a bumper sticker a while back that made me smile and shudder at the same time. It simply read:

Jesus is coming back—and boy, is He mad.

I don't know about others, but I'd much rather bow my knee and submit to Him now than when He returns, blazing with the wrath and fury of God Almighty!

## A People-Pleasing Cure

*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)*

I am a first class, triple A people pleaser. I wish I wasn't, but I am.

You see, my problem is—I live in fear. Fear of what people think. I particularly live in fear of the rich and powerful because they're the ones who seem to have the most control over my life.

But I've found a cure.

As I keep growing in Christ, I've found the best freedom from my bondage comes when I look squarely at my Lord. That freedom comes when I begin to dwell on exactly who He is. And as I begin to see His power, His glory, His awesome holiness, suddenly the hold other people have on my life begins to weaken. And by comparing how their power will stand up to Jesus Christ's power, well, I quickly realize there's no contest about who I really want to please.

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:15-17)*

## You Can't Keep a Good God Hidden

*Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"*

*He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.*

*The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matthew 8:23-27)*

Even when Jesus was in human form here on earth there were still times His divinity couldn't help but shine through.

As we close our studies together, let's take a look at some of those times—not so we can be awed by the miracles, but so we can be reminded that today, at this very moment, Christ is the Conquering King. Today, Jesus Christ can invade our hopeless situations with His supernatural power and strength. We don't have to wait until He returns to solve our problems. He operated mightily when He was here on earth, and He still operates mightily today.

### Power for Provision

*He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. (Matthew 15:35-38)*

Like most people in our society, I'm running in front of a giant rolling boulder—bigger and faster than Indiana Jones ever had to worry about. In fact, I'm sure it's going to crush me if I just stop and rest for even the briefest second. Its name? "Finances."

And yet, time and time again I read that if I seek God (as the people in today's reading were doing) and obey Him, He can take my meager little provisions and supernaturally turn them into all that I need and more.

I don't remember this all of the time. But the times I do remember are the times that I experience His peace, His joy and, most importantly, His rest.

### Power over Evil

*Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit,*

*healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. (Luke 9:42-43)*

Jesus Christ can cast demons out and destroy all of the strongholds of Satan, so I know He can protect me from evil.

What an encouragement it is to know that Jesus has complete power over evil. And, as I walk with Him, He protects me from the evil one (see 2 Thessalonians 3:3).

## More Kingly Power

### Power over Sickness

*Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. (Matthew 4:23-24)*

Not once in all of His ministry did Jesus refuse to heal someone. There were times He left regions because there was so little faith, but we do not have a single account of Jesus saying, “You’re suffering? Too bad, I’m not in the mood.”

*Does this mean Jesus always heals today?*

No.

*Why not?*

I don’t know. But I do know this: for those who are earnestly seeking Him, Jesus will do one of two things. He will either heal them, or He will give them strength and peace and will use their illness for good and for His glory. Those illnesses will in one way or another be changed from destruction to construction—either through healing or by eventually using it to minister to others and to glorify God.

### Power over Death

*As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”*

*Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. (Luke 7:12-15)*

There are several accounts of Jesus raising someone from the dead: this widow’s son, a ruler’s little girl, and His own friend Lazarus. That’s some track record.

Today each of us has suffered death—death of dreams, relationships, or loved ones. Yet we can rest assured that Jesus has the power to resurrect. He may not do it on our terms or by our timetable. But Jesus Christ has the power to change death into life—no matter what that death may be.

## Power to Forgive

*Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”*

*At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”*

*Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” Then the man got up and went home. (Matthew 9:2-7)*

For me there are few stories in Scripture that capture the full ministry of Jesus Christ as this one. First, He emphasized His power to forgive.

He has the power to forgive whatever we have done and whatever we may do. If we sincerely confess and repent, He will forgive us of anything.

Then there was His grace. From the passage, we know of nothing the man did to earn forgiveness and healing. He simply came to the source of grace. And that was enough.

Christ’s forgiveness and grace are not just for the future (i.e. fire insurance shielding us from hell and giving us eternal life in heaven). His grace and forgiveness are active now, in the very midst of our day-to-day lives.

It’s true, as the conquering King, Jesus offers us a terrific eternity. But He also offers us a terrific now—our lives can be rich and full, filled with His peace, joy, and love. You and I can have a life worth living right here on earth. Not only do we have a terrific eternity in heaven in store for our future, but we can also have a terrific now. Or as Jesus, Himself, said...

*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)*

## One Book—One Story

As you have worked through this study we hope you have come to see that the Bible is one book, from Genesis to Revelation. It is the book that tells His story. Truly...

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)*

**This is the end of the study on *Christ B.C.* There are no questions for Lesson 14.**

## Notes:

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# CHRIST B.C. — THE HIDDEN CHRIST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Commentary by Bill Myers

Daily Study Questions by Nancy J. Collins

Jesus Christ is eternal. He is present throughout the Old Testament, from Genesis through Malachi, just as certainly as He is present throughout the New Testament. Often, as people read through the Old Testament, they are not aware of the symbolism that points to Jesus Christ.

Christ B.C. does not explore every pre-incarnate reference or allusion to Christ. Instead, each lesson takes a look at some aspect of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, examines how it relates to Him in the New Testament, and explores how it applies to us today. It is an exploration that will make Him more personal in your day-to-day living, and lead you deeper into His great love for you.

**Joy of Living** courses are suitable for both **formal and informal meetings**, as well as for **personal study**. Each lesson contains a commentary and a week's worth of **personal application and study questions**, leading readers to discover fresh insights into God's Word.

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**Bill Meyers** is a best-selling author and award-winning filmmaker who uses his talents to further the gospel around the world. During his first year at college, Bill told God He could have his life, that he would do whatever God wanted. To date, Bill Myers' books and videos have sold over 8 million copies. As author/screenwriter/director his work has won over 60 national and international awards, including the C.S. Lewis Honor Award. Bill holds a degree in Theater Arts from the University of Washington and an honorary doctorate from the Theological Institute of Nimes, France, where he taught.

**Nancy J. Collins** is the director of **Joy of Living Bible Studies**. She has been a speaker and Bible teacher for over 40 years, ministering to both children and adults. Nancy holds a B. A. in Biblical Studies, and is the author of 3 complete Joy of Living courses, the commentary portion of 5 Joy of Living courses, the study questions for over 10 Joy of Living courses, and 3 Joy of Living pre-school studies. She and her husband, Chuck, live in Southern California. They have 7 children and numerous grandchildren.

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