

Theme - 2017

2017 "To Be" or "Not To Be" - That is the Question!

Associated Family Scripture:

[Matthew 16:24](#) - NIV

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants **"to be"** my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

(Multi-Book/Materials Used)



Be Made in His Image: Genesis 1-11

So, what *does* it mean to be created in God's image? The Hebrew root of the Latin phrase for image of God—*imago Dei*—means image, shadow or likeness of God. You are a snapshot or facsimile of God. At the very least this means humans occupy a higher place in the created order because we alone are imprinted with godlike characteristics. Your godlikeness is the path to your greatest fulfillment. You will feel the greatest pleasure and wholeness when who God made you to be is fully developed and expressed.



Be Blessed Psalm 67

There are several definitions of blessed:

“Made holy; consecrated”

“Endowed, with divine favor and protection”

“Bringing pleasure or relief as a welcome contrast to what one has previously experienced”

The Greek definition of the word “blessed” comes from *makários*. This describes a believer as being in an enviable position for receiving God’s provisions (favor) – as being an extension of his grace. This happens with receiving the Lord’s inbirthings of faith. These definitions somewhat are surprising. Growing up in western culture, the most commonly heard the phrase “I am blessed” in reference to good fortune, a desired outcome, or comfort. It’s certainly true that the earthly gifts we receive on earth, such as comforts, desired outcomes, success, and the friendships we enjoy, are all unmerited blessings from the Lord. These undeserved blessings, which God pours out on all people through his grace, ought to be received with thanksgiving and praise, leading us to find joy as we glorify God through them. In our flesh, however, we are often prone to attitudes of entitlement, pride, and seeking happiness in worldly circumstances. In the English dictionary, the primary definition of the term blessing is not wealth or comfort, but rather “being made holy.” Since we are made holy through salvation in Jesus Christ, in essence, the truest form of being blessed is to be made aware of our wretched state, led to repentance, sanctified for holiness, and to one day receive the crown of righteousness. All other earthly blessings should greatly pale in comparison to this!

Yes, non-believers receive blessings as well, but not in the same way. They are blessed through the common grace of God that extends to all people. However, because this grace has an expiration date on Judgment Day, the blessed circumstances of their lives are short-term gifts of God’s grace, rather than the life-giving, eternal blessings that are poured out on believers. Sadly, the comfort of these temporary blessings often end up blinding many from their true state of poverty and their need for a Savior .



Be Blessed – Obedient: Genesis 12-25

In a world filled with insecurity and uncertainty, we must learn to walk by faith, or our lives will fall apart. This applies to all of God's children, regardless of how old we are or how long we have walked with the Lord.

Living by faith means obeying God's Word in spite of feelings, circumstances or consequences. It means holding on to God's truth no matter how heavy the burden or how dark the day, knowing that He is working out His perfect plan. *Be Obedient* examines how Abraham and Sarah grew in faith through obedience to God.



Be with God: Genesis 25-50

“The things which are impossible with men are possible WITH GOD.” We like to hear about man’s possibilities with God, but what exactly does the phrase “with God” mean? “With God” can certainly mean being born again (baptized). In the New Birth, He is not only with us but in us. However, there’s more to receiving God’s blessings and experiencing His greater glory.

In the New Birth, we become qualified to be partakers of God’s divine nature and heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus. But how do we actually partake of the blessings and glory of God? How do we receive and experience them for ourselves?

So many people accept Jesus Christ as Savior, and then that’s that. They don’t receive Him as Lord of their lives. They don’t go any deeper in their walk with Him. They go back to living their lives the best they know how and waiting for the Sweet By-and-By when they’ll walk those heavenly streets of gold. But the “with God” that makes man’s impossibilities possible also means that we’re following Him. In other words, our being “with God” is a lifestyle, not just an event.

Did you know that to follow God sometimes means giving up some things or making a sacrifice? It may mean leaving a group of friends you’ve been associating with who don’t want to wholeheartedly follow God. It may mean moving to a certain place in obedience to Him and giving up the comfort of familiar surroundings. It could mean any number of things. But if you will follow God with your whole heart, He will give you more than you ever had before.



Be Delivered: Exodus

“Whether it means freeing a nation from political bondage or delivering an individual from independence or codependence, liberation is a popular theme these days. But many people who want to be free don't really know what freedom is or how to use it if they have it. Fools use freedom as a toy to play with; wise people use freedom as a tool to build with.

The nation of Israel is a case in point. The book of Exodus explains what true freedom is, what freedom costs, and how it must be used. God tells us how to enjoy mature freedom in His will, a quality that is desperately needed in our churches and our world today. Be Delivered searches through Exodus for greater insight on the concepts of freedom, bondage and deliverance.



Be Holy: Leviticus

Whatever else the professing Christian church may be known for today—great crowds, expensive buildings, big budgets, political clout—it is not distinguished for its holiness. Eight times in Scripture, God said to his people, "Be Holy, for I am holy!" The book of Leviticus teaches us how to avoid sin and how to grow in holiness. When this change occurs, the church and its people can become more like Christ and have a greater impact on the present world.

Be Holy first defines the concept of "Holiness" and then moves through the book of Leviticus with commentary. This resource brings new light to the often overlooked lists of Mosaic Law, which are still very applicable to the church today.



Be Bold: Numbers

When you have the revelation of who God is to YOU, you can live a confident life. You belong to God and He is more powerful than anything you face in your life. God is your protector, your shield, your healer, your deliverer, your stronghold, your strength, your redeemer and your savior. He is the solid rock on which you stand (Psalm 62:6).

When you live a life pleasing to God, by that I don't mean you live a perfect life. What I mean is that your heart is right before God and you walk in His ways with the best of your ability, then no matter what comes your way, You can rise up and say, If God is for me, who can be against me? (Romans 8:31) By my God, I can run against a troop, and I can leap over a wall.(Proverbs 18:29, ESV).

When the Israelites approached the borders of Canaan, Moses sent out 12 spies into the Promised Land to spy out the land. Ten of the spies came back with a bad report.

Numbers 13:31 -33. They focused on the giants in the land, men so big and powerful. They feared those giants. They lacked the revelation about how mighty and powerful their God is even though they saw His mighty acts and wonders He did among them. Hence they lacked confidence and believed those giants could not be defeated. However, two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb remained confident. Why? Because they believed God was able and will help them to possess the land. Numbers 13:30 (GWT) – Caleb told the people to be quiet and listen to Moses. Caleb said, "Let's go now and take possession of the land. We should be more than able to conquer it." But The children of Israel didn't listen to Caleb and they rebelled against the Lord. God was angry and was displeased with Israel.

When you encounter difficulties in life, you can choose to respond the way Caleb and Joshua did with a firm assurance of victory. You don't have to be a victim of circumstances. You are a victor not a victim. You are victorious in Christ.



Be Equipped: Deuteronomy

The truths that Moses shared in Deuteronomy are just what we need today as we face the unknown future how to recognize and use the lessons of the past; the importance of God's law; the preeminence of love in the life of liberty; how God deals with failure; what it means to share in God's covenant.

As Israel's new generation prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses taught them the basic truths they needed to know in order to defeat the enemy and claim their inheritance. These spiritual principles still work today! The future is your friend when Jesus Christ is your Lord and the Bible is your guide! Learn from Moses, one of history's greatest teachers, what it means to be an overcomer, able to fulfill the purpose God has for you.



Be Decisive: Joshua

THE DECISIVE CHRISTIAN LIFE. The main character in today's scripture serves us well as a role model on how to not only live the Christian life, but to evaluate the quality of our Christian life. His name is Moses and he is included in the "Hall of Fame of Faith" chapter in our Bibles. His leadership over the Israelites as well as his confrontations with the unbelieving Pharaoh of Egypt are superb examples of a man who knew and trusted his God in the severest of trials. When life gets tough and it will, look at Moses. The God of Moses, who came through for him, is also our God and will come through for us. Yet, there is something else about Moses leaving us a worthy model to follow. It happened before he became the great leader of Israel. This excellent quality in him is found in today's scripture. It was his decisiveness when it came to living out his walk with God.

This man of God had all the high privileges of royalty. There was nothing under the sun he could not have obtained for his good pleasure. Yet, we find these words of Moses, "choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." What a staggering statement. It is one thing to say "no" to fleshly pleasures. It is another thing to say "no" to pleasures and "yes" to Godly suffering. And the model of Moses is the key for us to live the Christian life both honoring to the Lord and for our joy in the Lord. The key? Being decisive. Make conscious choices that are driven by God and His Word instead of ourselves and this world.

When it comes to the Christian life, it is easy to view it in a "calendar" format. For instance, it is not uncommon to be in the company of Christians and the question arise, "How long have you been a Christian?" Nothing wrong with such dialogue, but really, the Christian life is not measured by longevity. It is measured by Godly qualities and character. And those will only be developed if we are decisive in the Christian life. The Christian life isn't really lived year-by-year; month-by-month; week-by-week; or even day-by-day. It is lived decision-by-decision. We make decisions every day on the use of our time, our money, the attitudes we display, the speech we put forth, and the actions we take. All those decisions will be guided by how we view our lives. *Colossians 3:1-4*. Where are hearts and minds reside – spiritually in heaven or worldly in the earth will determine the decisions we make in life. And our decisions reveal two things; the quality of our walk with Christ and what is most important to us; things of the earth or things in heaven.

Moses modeled not only faith in trying times, but being decisive in his walk with God. He choose the best thing and remained true to his decision. If we are going to leave our mark for Christ in our families, churches, and communities, it will rest on just how decisive we are in saying "no" to the world and "yes" to the Lord. For sure, we live the Christian life by the decisions we daily make. Let's ensure they are rooted in heaven and eternity, not this world and the temporal.



Be Available: Judges

The Old Testament is filled with stories of real people who learned lessons that are still applicable today. The Book of Judges is no exception, we are living in a period that is very similar to that of the Israelite Judges

- People are doing what is right in their own eyes.
- God's People can't seem to work together.
- People are in bondage to various enemies.

Here and there, God is raising up men and women who believe Him, confront the enemy, and win the victory. The challenge of the Book of Judges is to be available to the possibilities of what God can do through you.



Be Loyal: Ruth and Esther

Loyalty is remaining committed to those whom God has brought into our lives and has called us to serve, even in times of difficulty. It is developing allegiance and respect in one another, and not seeking to manipulate the other person. Being loyal exhibits our commitment to Christ by our commitment--with discernment--to people and righteous causes at all times (Proverbs 17:17; Ecclesiastes 8:2-4; John 15:13; Romans 13:1-5; Titus 3:1).



Be Successful: 1 Samuel

"The secret of my success is that at an early age I discovered I was not God." So replied Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. to a young reporter's question on the occasion of the renowned Supreme Court Justice's ninetieth birthday (1931). His quip evokes more theological truth than even he might have intended; for true success in this world is rooted first in the premise that God is in control . . . and I am not. The study of 1 Samuel examines what truly made David a great success - being a follower "after [God's] own heart." (1 Sam. 13:14).

The amazing narrative of 1 Samuel powerfully presents to us the contrast between King Saul's tragic fall and David's life of victory. You will see how true success is defined by character, forged--even in the fires of failure--by a sincere, obedient, and abiding faith in the One True God. And as you follow this story of one man's rise to greatness, you will find yourself grappling with the same tough question: "How do I define greatness?"



Be Thankful: 2 Samuel & 1 Chronicles

Thankfulness and worship are bound up with trusting in the Lord. When you have no human means of escape and you cry out to God as your only hope and He delivers you, your heart overflows in thankfulness and praise to Him. When a slick method works, the method gets the praise. When God works, then He gets the praise.

And it's rather exuberant praise that the psalmist calls for (vv. 1-3): "Sing for joy in the Lord.... Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song [i.e., one that celebrates some new deliverance or victory]; play skillfully with a shout of joy." You don't get the impression that he would be pleased with folks reading their bulletins or sitting stoically through the singing! Calvin (p. 538) describes this as "the vehement and ardent affection which the faithful ought to have in praising God."

You may protest that your personality is too reserved to get excited about worship. But we all get excited about that in which we delight. If you're watching a close football game and your team makes a spectacular catch in the end zone, do you sit there stoically eating potato chips? You'd probably fling the bowl of chips in the air! Why? Because you delight in football.

The secret to heartfelt praise and thanksgiving is to recognize that you were in a desperate situation. You could not save yourself from God's righteous judgment. You cried to the God who spoke the universe into existence, the God who sent His Son, to save you by His grace. Because now you have experienced His great love and grace, you delight in Him and His great salvation and you can't help but sing for joy!



Be Responsible: 1 Kings

"A bad workman always blames his tools." The ancient proverb rings just as true today, and it is with this challenge for personal responsibility that is the installment of a comprehensive study of 1 Kings. Responsibility is not a popular concept for modern sensibilities that prefer to emphasize victimization and blame-seeking. Unfortunately, finding even leaders who will take it can be difficult.

As you follow study 1 Kings, you will see over and over again the importance of moral character in leaders, as well as the tragedy of leaving God out of national affairs. Clearly the call to Be Responsible is as much a need today as it was in the age of Judah's kings.

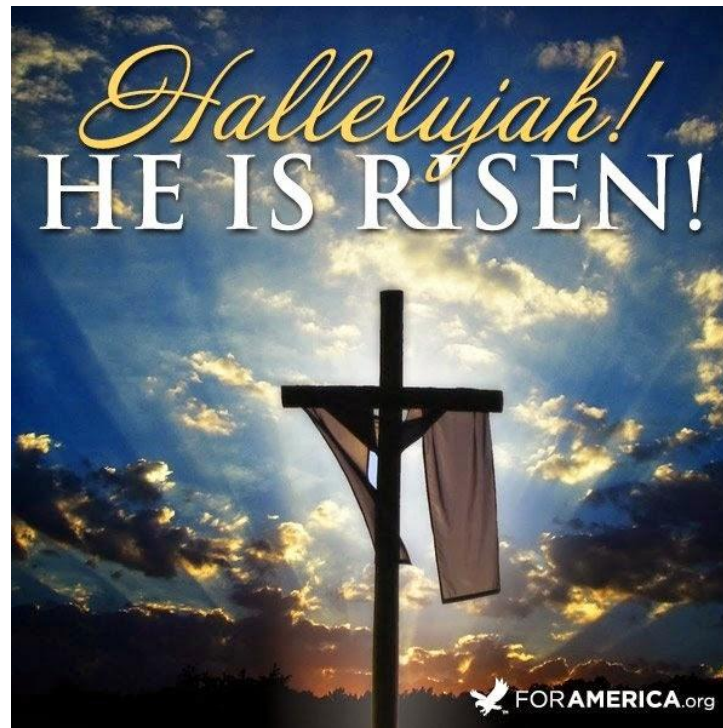


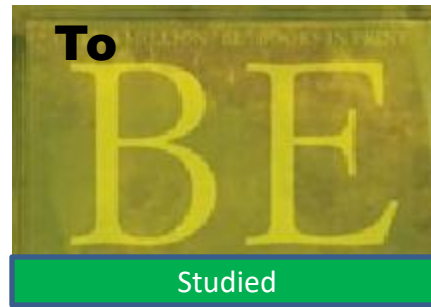
Be Distinct: 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles

This is the tale of two kingdoms that committed spiritual and national suicide by imitating their neighbors and failing to "be distinct." This resource brings light to parallels for today's Church that are both obvious and vital. When society around us is in moral and spiritual darkness, God's people need to be lights and when society is decaying because of sin, we need to be salt. In order to do this we must be distinctive!



Risen – Matthew 28:6





Be Studied: Ezra

Believers are often exhorted to “let go and let God,” to be entirely passive in their sanctification (growth in holiness). The best intentions lie behind this advice. After all, we know that our works contribute nothing to our righteous standing before the Lord (Gal. 2:15–16; Eph. 2:8–9); thus, many people think that giving ourselves a role in sanctification comes perilously close to denying grace.

Certainly it is easy to confuse the process of sanctification with the once-for-all declaration of justification. All Christians believe, implicitly, that our works secure our place in heaven or make God love us more than believers who are “further behind” in their sanctification. To avoid this problem, we simply need to maintain the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification. It is unnecessary to deny our role in sanctification altogether. God’s justification of a person, the starting point of Christian living, relies solely on the work of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Sanctification, Ephesians 4:23–24 explains, requires cooperation between the Lord and individual believers.

God’s “job” is to renew our minds. Note the passive voice in verse 23: we are to “be renewed [by the Lord].” He performs the work of inward transformation, renewing our affection for Him and giving us an ever-deepening understanding of His ways. The Lord works through means to accomplish this — personal Bible study, the preached Word of God, the sacraments, prayer — but He performs the work of transformation. We are grateful for the Lord’s work, for His power guarantees that we will fulfill our role and advance in holiness (Phil. 2:12–13).



Be Strengthened: Nehemiah

Eph. 3:14-19, especially 16:—"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man."

This certainly may be fairly called one of the great passages of the Bible. Note the series of great topics which are adverted to in it: the inward strengthening of the children of God by the Holy Ghost, the continual abiding of Christ in their hearts, their rooting and grounding in love, their enlargement in spiritual apprehension, even to the knowledge of the unknowable, their filling with all the fullness of God. Surely here is a catalogue of great things for God's people! These great topics do not lie on one level, however, set side by side as parallel facts, but are exhibited in special relations the one to the other. Paul is praying here for these high blessings to descend on the Ephesian Christians. But he does not pray for them simply as a bunch of blessings, arbitrarily selected to be on this occasion sought at the great Father's hands—the Father of these Ephesian Christians too, because He is the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, and from Him every fatherdom derives its name. Here are rather a connected body of blessings which go naturally together, one being the ground and another the effect of the one great thing he craves for his readers.

The central thing he prays for is spiritual strengthening. "I bow my knees to the Father that He may give to you to be strengthened by His Spirit in respect to the inner man." Spiritual strengthening, then, that is the main thing that he prays for. By the mere term "spiritual strengthening" two things might be suggested to us. We might think of spiritual as distinguished from physical strengthening. Or we might think of strengthening by the Spirit as distinguished from some earthly agency. The Apostle's prayer includes both ideas. He prays that we may be strengthened in the inner man; that is, for the strengthening of our spirit, in distinction from the body. And he prays that we may be strengthened with respect to the inner man by God's Spirit; that is, for the Divine strengthening of our inward man. And this, I say, is the substance of his prayer—that we may be strengthened with respect to the inner man by the Spirit of God. All else is descriptive of this and tells us what it is, and what it results in; and so enhances our idea of what spiritual strengthening is.



Be Blameless: Job

Blameless The Old Testament. The concept of blamelessness carries with it two different, yet not dissimilar ideas. The first refers to sacrificial animals that were "without defect" (Lev 1:3 ; Leviticus 3:1 Leviticus 3:6 ; Num 6:14). Only animals that were undefiled physically were worthy of being offered to the Lord. Sacrificing blemished animals was a violation of biblical law and a demonstration of brazen disrespect for God (Mal 1:6-14).

From this religious ritual idea comes the notion of moral perfection for individuals. "Blameless" people are those who cannot be accused of wrongdoing before people or God (Psalm 15:2 ; 18:23). David prays, "Keep your servant also from willful sin Then will I be blameless" (Psalm 19:13). David is seeking blamelessness not in a physical but in a moral sense.

The New Testament The concept of moral blamelessness is heightened in the New Testament and employed almost exclusively as a characteristic of Christ and his followers. The sacrificial terminology is applied to the work of Jesus Christ when he is described as "a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pe 1:19), who "through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God" (Heb 9:14). The blameless character of Christ is seen in his continuing work as the believer's high priest who "meets our needs, one who is holy blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7:26).

When applied to Christians, the quality of blamelessness is both a positional benefit of salvation and a moral character to be achieved. Each person is worthy of accusation in the sight of God. The blameless character of Christians, however, is the intention of God, who "chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph 1:4). Christ's love and sacrifice for the church were such that he could present her to himself "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:27).

This positional quality of blamelessness is not earned by personal gain, but imputed by the death and resurrection of Christ (Col 1:22). God's power and protection ensure that the believer maintains a blameless status until the final judgment (1 Cor 1:8 ; Jude 24). In these occurrences, the legal connotation of deliverance from accusation is clearly seen. God alone has the power and right to accuse the believer and pronounce condemnation, but through his grace and power he renders the believer blameless in his sight.

In light of the positional reality, the believer is called to live in such a way as to attain the quality of blamelessness. In these cases, it is evident that blamelessness refers to public respectability as an outgrowth of private moral character. Christians must "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:14). By growing in discernment and avoiding a critical spirit, believers can become "pure and blameless" in an age marked by wickedness (Php 1:10 ; 2:14-15).

The importance of a blameless character for the church is seen in the qualifications for church leaders who must be blameless and above reproach (1 Tim 3:10 ; Titus 1:6). The Scriptures further define the sphere of the Christian's blameless behavior as including godly service (James 1:27) and the marriage bed (Heb 13:4). The characteristic of blamelessness thus should define the believer's private and public life as a reflection of the transforming work of God's grace in salvation.



Be Worshipful: Psalms 1-89

Do you want to know God more and understand his relationship to his creation, the nations of the world, Israel, and today's believers? Now you can by walking through Psalms 1-89 in Be Worshipful.

Filled with poetry and laments to the Lord, the book's authors were people who knew dire circumstances as well as great joy. Messianic psalms point to the Lord Jesus Christ while others are psalms of praise and thanksgiving, affirmation and trust, not to mention psalms that call down God's wrath.



Be Exultant: Psalms 90-150

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See yourself in those who follow him, their faith and doubts, their victories and failures, and their hopes for the glorious future God has promised. You will meet all kinds of people who are faced with a variety of circumstances, crying out to God, praising him, confessing their sins and seeking to worship him in a deeper, more meaningful way.



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Be Wise: Proverbs

We live in the "Information Age", but we certainly aren't living in the "Age of Wisdom." The Book of Proverbs is about godly wisdom, how to get it and how to use it. The book is about priorities and principles, not get-rich-quick schemes or success formulas. *Be Wise* creatively sums up the Book of Proverbs in the introduction: Don't just make a living—make a life!



Be Patient: Ecclesiastes

Many people would like patience; but not many people *understand* what trials they may have to endure for God to give us patience. They also do not realize that many in the Bible suffered to accomplish patience. God's people today might learn from Job's, Paul's and even Solomon's experiences of how to be patient in suffering and endure to the end.

Being *Patient* helps us in two ways: being patient in your trials helps others in theirs. In order to empathize with others, you must endure hardship yourself. Ecclesiastes will help us understand that the trials you face may be God's way of preparing you to help others.



Be a Goer: Isaiah

The truth is there are “goers” and senders in the call to missions. “Goers” are those who actually go to the local or international destination to share the gospel. Senders are the ones who pray, help raise funds, support, and prepare missionaries to go! Both are necessary and we as followers of Jesus are called to one or the other or both.

Do we disciple, obeying the Great Commission?

As church cultures are changing and family schedules are becoming busier, families are finding less time to meet with a church family. Therefore, we have to use every opportunity that we have to each other the gospel and then foster an urgency for all to share their faith with others. This includes community, city, and unreached people groups in foreign nations.

We need to make the most of our teaching hours on Sunday mornings and any other time during the week, always including stories of those who have taken His word to the lost.

Who are the next goers and senders?

How are we preparing the church family to say yes, “I’m a Goer”?

18 JUN 17



Be Willing: Jeremiah

To become one with Jesus Christ, a person must be willing not only to give up sin, but also to surrender his whole way of looking at things. Being born again by the Spirit of God means that we must first be willing to let go before we can grasp something else. The first thing we must surrender is all of our pretense or deceit. What our Lord wants us to present to Him is not our goodness, honesty, or our efforts to do better, but real solid sin. Actually, that is all He can take from us. And what He gives us in exchange for our sin is real solid righteousness. But we must surrender all pretense that we are anything, and give up all our claims of even being worthy of God's consideration.

Once we have done that, the Spirit of God will show us what we need to surrender next. Along each step of this process, we will have to give up our claims to our rights to ourselves. Are we willing to surrender our grasp on all that we possess, our desires, and everything else in our lives? Are we ready to be identified with the death of Jesus Christ?

We will suffer a sharp painful disillusionment before we fully surrender. When people really see themselves as the Lord sees them, it is not the terribly offensive sins of the flesh that shock them, but the awful nature of the pride of their own hearts opposing Jesus Christ. When they see themselves in the light of the Lord, the shame, horror, and desperate conviction hit home for them.

If you are faced with the question of whether or not to surrender, make a determination to go on through the crisis, surrendering all that you have and all that you are to Him. And God will then equip you to do all that He requires of you.

25 JUN 17



Be Receptive: EZEKIEL, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH

The call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Whether I hear God's call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude. "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). That is, few prove that they are the chosen ones. The chosen ones are those who have come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and have had their spiritual condition changed and their ears opened. Then they hear "the voice of the Lord" continually asking, "...who will go for Us?" However, God doesn't single out someone and say, "Now, *you* go." He did not force His will on Isaiah. Isaiah was in the presence of God, and he overheard the call. His response, performed in complete freedom, could only be to say, "Here am I! Send me."

Remove the thought from your mind of expecting God to come to force you or to plead with you. When our Lord called His disciples, He did it without irresistible pressure from the outside. The quiet, yet passionate, insistence of His "Follow Me" was spoken to men whose every sense was receptive (Matthew 4:19). If we will allow the Holy Spirit to bring us face to face with God, we too will hear what Isaiah heard— "the voice of the Lord." In perfect freedom we too will say, "Here am I! Send me."

02 JUL 17



Be Distinguished: Daniel

Daniel distinguished himself above the administrators and satraps because he had an extraordinary spirit, so the king planned to set him over the whole realm.

Distinguished may also be defined as strength of moral fiber. As the excellence of gold is its purity and the excellence of art is its beauty, so the excellence of man is his character, or being distinguished. Persons of character are noted for their honesty, ethics, and charity. Descriptions such as “man of principle” and “woman of integrity” are assertions of character. A lack of character is moral deficiency, and persons lacking character tend to behave dishonestly, unethically, and uncharitably.

A person’s character is the sum of his or her disposition, thoughts, intentions, desires, and actions. It is good to remember that character is gauged by general tendencies, not on the basis of a few isolated actions. We must look at the whole life. For example, King David was a man of good character (1 Samuel 13:14) although he sinned on occasion (2 Samuel 11). And although King Ahab may have acted nobly once (1 Kings 22:35), he was still a man of overall bad character (1 Kings 16:33). Several people in the Bible are described as having noble character: Ruth (Ruth 3:11), Hanani (Nehemiah 7:2), David (Psalm 78:72), and Job (Job 2:3). These individuals’ lives were distinguished by persistent moral virtue.

Character is influenced and developed by our choices. Daniel “resolved not to defile himself” in Babylon (Daniel 1:8), and that godly choice was an important step in formulating an unassailable integrity in the young man’s life. Character, in turn, influences our choices. “The integrity of the upright guides them” (Proverbs 11:3a). Character will help us weather the storms of life and keep us from sin (Proverbs 10:9a).

It is the Lord’s purpose to develop character within us. “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart” (Proverbs 17:3). Godly character is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification. Character in the believer is a consistent manifestation of Jesus in his life. It is the purity of heart that God gives becoming purity in action. God sometimes uses trials to strengthen character: “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4). The Lord is pleased when His children grow in character. “You test the heart and are pleased with integrity” (1 Chronicles 29:17; see also Psalm 15:1-2).

We can develop character by controlling our thoughts (Philippians 4:8), practicing Christian virtues (2 Peter 1:5-6), guarding our hearts (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18-20), and keeping good company (1 Corinthians 15:33). Men and women of character will set a good example for others to follow, and their godly reputation will be evident to all (Titus 2:7-8).

09 JUL 17



Be Restored: HOSEA, JOEL, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, MALACHI

Restore to me the joy of your salvation. (Ps. 51:12a) This prayer of David's captures the mood of HOSEA, JOEL, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, MALACHI. Repeatedly, David learns the hard way that sin has consequences. It affects his relationship with the people of Israel, with the members of his family, and with God. But the main message of these books is not human failure, but divine faithfulness. As David experienced time and time again, with God there is the possibility of restoration. As you follow David's life in this book, you will discover that what was true for David is true for you, too. No matter what has happened between you and God in the past, restoration is possible. So prayerfully ponder the truths in this book, and *Be Restored*.

16 JUL 17



Be Hearer: AMOS, OBADIAH, MICAH, ZEPHANIAH

In the Gospels, Jesus speaks of those who have “ears to hear” at the end of a difficult saying or parable (e.g., Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9; 23). Who is “he who has ears to hear”? Better yet, who is “he who has ears”? Ears are a feature shared by all of humanity—to not have ears would be an unnatural occurrence. Therefore, when Jesus addresses those who have ears, He refers to all who have been given His words—no matter their age, ethnicity, language, or status.

But there is a difference between having ears and having “ears to hear.” Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seed contrasts types of hearers: those who let the Word of God pass straight through their ears and those who truly listen and seek understanding (Mark 4:13–20). Some hear the Word, yet they do not allow it to take root because the seduction of worldly pleasures and comfort overcomes them. Others end up rejecting the Word because of persecution or trials. Others hear the Word and open themselves to understand and accept it so that it transforms them. Those who have “ears to hear” allow the Word to bear fruit to the glory of God. It is up to the hearer to decide whether to take the Word seriously and pursue understanding; only a few are willing—the rest have ears, but they do not have “ears to hear” (Matthew 7:13–14, 24–27).

Whenever Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” He is calling for people to pay careful heed. It’s another way of saying, “Listen up! Pay close attention!” Speaking in parables was one way in which Jesus sought to gain the attention of the crowds—people love stories, and the parables depicted events and characters with which they could readily relate. But unless they were willing to tune out other distractions and come to Jesus to understand the meaning of His preaching, His words would be only empty stories. They needed more than ears, however keen they were; they needed ears to hear.

When asked by His disciples why He was speaking to the crowds in parables, Jesus refers to Isaiah 6, which speaks of people who have eyes and ears, yet who have hardened their hearts and chosen to ignore the Word of the Lord (Matthew 13:10–15; cf. Isaiah 6:8–10). Part of the judgment on those who refuse to believe is that they will eventually lose their opportunity to believe: “Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (Matthew 13:12; cf. Romans 1:18–32).

A similar phrase is found in Revelation in each of the seven letters to the churches: “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). And in Revelation 13:9, immediately following a description of the Antichrist, we read, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” The readers of Revelation are called upon to pay close attention and seek God’s wisdom concerning what’s written.

Who is “he who has ears”? The simple answer: all people who have been or are being given the words of God. Like the parables’ original audience, we must also “Listen up! Pay close attention!” Jesus’ simple request is that we use our God-given faculties (eyes to see, ears to hear) to tune in to His words (John 10:27–28; Mark 4:24; Revelation 3:20). “For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open” (Mark 4:22). Seeking God’s truth takes energy and focus; it takes a willingness to be challenged and changed. While the way of God’s truth is not the most convenient or fun path to take, we can be assured that it is the best one (John 1:4; 10:9; 14:6). And so He bids us, “Come” (Matthew 11:28–30).

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. (Isaiah 55:1–3)

23 JUL 17



Be a Follower: Matthew

The Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand..." (Isaiah 8:11). There is no escape when our Lord speaks. He always comes using His authority and taking hold of our understanding. Has the voice of God come to you directly? If it has, you cannot mistake the intimate insistence with which it has spoken to you. God speaks in the language you know best— not through your ears, but through your circumstances.

God has to destroy our determined confidence in our own convictions. We say, "I know that this is what I should do" — and suddenly the voice of God speaks in a way that overwhelms us by revealing the depths of our ignorance. We show our ignorance of Him in the very way we decide to serve Him. We serve Jesus in a spirit that is not His, and hurt Him by our defense of Him. We push His claims in the spirit of the devil; our words sound all right, but the spirit is that of an enemy. "He...rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of' " (Luke 9:55). The spirit of our Lord in His followers is described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Have I been persecuting Jesus by an eager determination to serve Him in my own way? If I feel I have done my duty, yet have hurt Him in the process, I can be sure that this was not my duty. My way will not be to foster a meek and quiet spirit, only the spirit of self-satisfaction. We presume that whatever is unpleasant is our duty! Is that anything like the spirit of our Lord— "I delight to do Your will, O my God..." (Psalm 40:8).

30 JUL 17



Be a Sower: Mark

The Parable of the Sower (also known as the Parable of the Four Soils) is found in Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:2-9; and Luke 8:4-8. After presenting this parable to the multitude, Jesus interprets it for His disciples in Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; and Luke 8:11-15.

The Parable of the Sower concerns a sower who scatters seed, which falls on four different types of ground. The hard ground “by the way side” prevents the seed from sprouting at all, and the seed becomes nothing more than bird food. The stony ground provides enough soil for the seeds to germinate and begin to grow, but because there is “no deepness of earth,” the plants do not take root and are soon withered in the sun. The thorny ground allows the seed to grow, but the competing thorns choke the life out of the beneficial plants. The good ground receives the seed and produces much fruit.

Jesus’ explanation of the Parable of the Sower highlights four different responses to the gospel. The seed is “the word of the kingdom.” The hard ground represents someone who is hardened by sin; he hears but does not understand the Word, and Satan plucks the message away, keeping the heart dull and preventing the Word from making an impression. The stony ground pictures a man who professes delight with the Word; however, his heart is not changed, and when trouble arises, his so-called faith quickly disappears. The thorny ground depicts one who seems to receive the Word, but whose heart is full of riches, pleasures, and lusts; the things of this world take his time and attention away from the Word, and he ends up having no time for it. The good ground portrays the one who hears, understands, and receives the Word—and then allows the Word to accomplish its result in his life. The man represented by the “good ground” is the only one of the four who is truly saved, because salvation’s proof is fruit (Matthew 3:7-8; 7:15-20).

To summarize the point of the Parable of the Sower: “A man’s reception of God’s Word is determined by the condition of his heart.” A secondary lesson would be “Salvation is more than a superficial, albeit joyful, hearing of the gospel. Someone who is truly saved will go on to prove it.” May our faith and our lives exemplify the “good soil” in the Parable of the Sower.

06 AUG 17



Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13

The world still needs His love.

The life and ministry of Christ was marked by His overwhelming compassion for people. And His heart is the same today. As believers, we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, and extend His extravagant love to a broken world. Based on the book of Luke, this study examines the very heartbeat of our Savior, and explores how Jesus connected with hurting people in an authentic and powerful way.

13 AUG 17



Be Trusted: Luke 16-24

Has God trusted you with a silence - a silence that is big with meaning? God's silences are His answers. Think of those days of absolute silence in the home at Bethany! Is there anything analogous to those days in your life? Can God trust you like that, or are you still asking for a visible answer? God will give you the blessings you ask if you will not go any further without them; but His silence is the sign that He is bringing you into a marvelous understanding of Himself. Are you mourning before God because you have not had an audible response? You will find that God has trusted you in the most intimate way possible, with an absolute silence, not of despair, but of pleasure, because He saw that you could stand a bigger revelation. If God has given you a silence, praise Him, He is bringing you into the great run of His purposes. The manifestation of the answer in time is a matter of God's sovereignty. Time is nothing to God. For a while you said - "I asked God to give me bread, and He gave me a stone." He did not, and to-day you find He gave you the bread of life.

20 AUG 17



Be a Live: John 1-12

BE ALIVE, is the basic teachings of the first 12 chapters of John's Gospel. He urges readers to approach its truths with the hearts and minds of worshipers and to be Alive! John paints a vivid picture of Jesus as the Son of God. Through miracles, parables, and relationships, Jesus shows how He is the fulfillment of God's promises of old.

27 AUG 17



Be a Branch: John 13-21

In John 15 Jesus uses the relationship of branches to the vine to illustrate our relationship to Him: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . . If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (verses 1–2, 6).

Many take the verses about the fruitless branches being taken away and burned as a proof-text that salvation can be lost. The teaching is that a person who was at one time in Christ might later cease to "abide in Christ" and become good for nothing; that person is then cut off and burned up. Now, if the parable of the vine and the branches were the only passage that addressed the issue of eternal security, then we might have good reason to fear that salvation could be lost. However, this is not the only passage in Scripture that addresses security and assurance, nor is it the only passage in John where these issues are addressed.

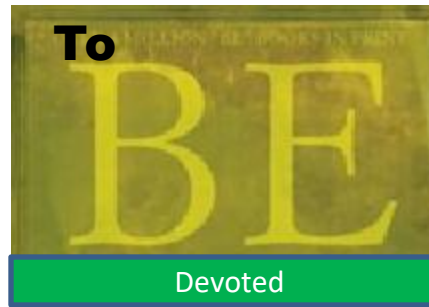
There are several passages in John where the security of the believer is clearly assured (John 3:16–17; 6:35–40; 10:27–29). This is an issue that we find throughout the Bible. There are passages that speak of the security of the believer in very explicit terms and others that would make one wonder if salvation cannot be lost after all. It is always best to interpret more obscure passages in light of clearer passages. Since John 15 is in the form of an allegory, it is best to let the clearer passages inform our understanding.

The background of Jesus' words in John 15 is most likely the Old Testament imagery where Israel is called a vine or vineyard—although one that did not produce the expected fruit (see Isaiah 5:1–7). Jesus replaces Israel with Himself as the "true vine." Unlike Israel, Jesus will not fail to produce fruit in all the branches that are connected to Him. The point of Jesus' metaphor is that He will succeed where Israel failed. The disciples simply need to be connected to Him. According to John 15, it is unthinkable that any branch who is connected to Christ will fail to produce fruit. Yet, according to the illustration, some branches "in Him" will not produce fruit and be taken away. There seems to be a contradiction within the illustration itself that would warn us not to press the details too far.

The apparent problem is the same with all of the other passages in Scripture that warn Christians about falling away. If a true Christian cannot lose salvation, why warn about falling away? The best explanation is that these warnings are directed toward professing Christians who appear, at least outwardly, to be connected to the Vine. They are branches in the vicinity of the Vine, but there is a disconnect. Judas Iscariot is a good example of a false professor. The parable of the seed and the soils (Matthew 13) presents young plants that seem to start out well but then wither away. The book of Hebrews, with its many warning passages, seems to be directed at those who have made an initial positive response to Jesus but are considering turning back. They are like the children of Israel who left in the exodus with Moses but then refused to enter the Promised Land (Hebrews 3:16–19). They started out on the journey but didn't complete it.

Based on outward appearances at any given moment, it may be difficult to tell genuine believers (connected in vital unity with the True Vine) from those who have merely attached themselves to some of the trappings of Christianity. However, time will tell the difference, because the genuine believer attached to the True Vine will bear fruit. A false professor appears to be attached but does not bear fruit, and it's the lack of fruit that shows a branch is not receiving the fruit-bearing energy that comes from attachment to the Vine. Regardless of how attached this branch may appear to be on the surface, it is lacking the one absolute evidence of attachment—fruit! That "branch" should not console himself with false notions that he is attached, because his lack of fruit bears condemning evidence against him. In this case, the branch was never really attached in the first place. The metaphor (or allegory) of the vine and the branches can only be pressed so far.

03 SEP 17



Be Devoted: Acts 1-12

We will never know the joy of self-sacrifice until we surrender in every detail of our lives. Yet self-surrender is the most difficult thing for us to do. We make it conditional by saying, “I’ll surrender if...!” Or we approach it by saying, “I suppose I have to devote my life to God.” We will never find the joy of self-sacrifice in either of these ways.

But as soon as we do totally surrender, abandoning ourselves to Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives us a taste of His joy. The ultimate goal of self-sacrifice is to lay down our lives for our Friend (see John 15:13-14). When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, our greatest desire is to lay down our lives for Jesus. Yet the thought of self-sacrifice never even crosses our minds, because sacrifice is the Holy Spirit’s ultimate expression of love.

Our Lord is our example of a life of self-sacrifice, and He perfectly exemplified Psalm 40:8, “I delight to do Your will, O my God...” He endured tremendous personal sacrifice, yet with overflowing joy. Have I ever yielded myself in absolute submission to Jesus Christ? If He is not the One to whom I am looking for direction and guidance, then there is no benefit in my sacrifice. But when my sacrifice is made with my eyes focused on Him, slowly but surely His molding influence becomes evident in my life (see Hebrews 12:1-2).

Beware of letting your natural desires hinder your walk in love before God. One of the cruelest ways to kill natural love is through the rejection that results from having built the love on natural desires. But the one true desire of a saint is the Lord Jesus. Love for God is not something sentimental or emotional— for a saint to love as God loves is the most practical thing imaginable.

“I have called you friends....” Our friendship with Jesus is based on the new life He created in us, which has no resemblance or attraction to our old life but only to the life of God. It is a life that is completely humble, pure, and devoted to God.

10 SEP 17



Be Bold: Acts 13-28

If you cannot express yourself well on each of your beliefs, work and study until you can. If you don't, other people may miss out on the blessings that come from knowing the truth. Strive to re-express a truth of God to yourself clearly and understandably, and God will use that same explanation when you share it with someone else. But you must be willing to go through God's winepress where the grapes are crushed. You must struggle, experiment, and rehearse your words to express God's truth clearly. Then the time will come when that very expression will become God's wine of strength to someone else. But if you are not diligent and say, "I'm not going to study and struggle to express this truth in my own words; I'll just borrow my words from someone else," then the words will be of no value to you or to others. Try to state to yourself what you believe to be the absolute truth of God, and you will be allowing God the opportunity to pass it on through you to someone else.

Always make it a practice to stir your own mind thoroughly to think through what you have easily believed. Your position is not really yours until you make it yours through suffering and study. The author or speaker from whom you learn the most is not the one who teaches you something you didn't know before, but the one who helps you take a truth with which you have quietly struggled, give it expression, and speak it clearly and boldly.

17 SEP 17



Be Subject: Romans

I have to account to God for the way in which I rule my body under His domination. Paul said he did not “frustrate the grace of God” — make it of no effect. The grace of God is absolute, the salvation of Jesus is perfect, it is done for ever. I am not being saved, I am saved; salvation is as eternal as God’s throne; the thing for me to do is to work out what God works in. “Work out your own salvation”; I am responsible for doing it. It means that I have to manifest in this body the life of the Lord Jesus, not mystically, but really and emphatically. “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.” Every saint can have his body under absolute control for God. God has made us to have government over all the temple of the Holy Spirit, over imaginations and affections. We are responsible for these, and we must never give way to inordinate affections. Most of us are much sterner with others than we are in regard to ourselves; we make excuses for things in ourselves whilst we condemn in others things to which we are not naturally inclined.

“I beseech you,” says Paul, “present your bodies a living sacrifice.” The point to decide is this — “Do I agree with my Lord and Master that my body shall be His temple?” If so, then for me the whole of the law for the body is summed up in this revelation, that my body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

24 SEP 17



Be Strong: 1 Corinthians

Whether we like it or not, God's people are expected to be strong. First Corinthians is a letter to the church at Corinth explaining to them how to be Christians and how to claim our rich spiritual inheritance in Jesus Christ. It tells us how to be strong and courageous as we face our enemies and march forward to live this life that we have been called to.

The church needs the message of First Corinthians more than ever. Christians today often look more like prisoners of war rather than the mighty and triumphant army God intends us to be. This book is Paul's insight on how we should live.

01 OCT 17



Be Encouraged: 2 Corinthians

The road of spiritual growth can get bumpy. From the new believer to the seasoned disciple, we all experience frustrations and setbacks in our pursuit of God. And perhaps no one understands spiritual struggles better than the apostle Paul. In the book of 2 Corinthians, Paul shares a revealing look at his own challenges, and offers a profound message of encouragement for every believer and Paul shares words of hope for your own journey of faith.

08 OCT 17



Be Free: Galatians

Be Free is embracing our freedom in Christ. Paul's epistle, explaining Paul's approach to the Galatians and putting ancient traditions in perspective for Christians today. Most importantly, Paul's writing show how the Gospel can only remain the Gospel of Christ if it is solely for God's glory alone. Just as the Galatian church was slipping back into the dangerous rituals of the Jewish religious system, Christians today add parameters around Scripture that hinder them and that Christ never intended.

15 OCT 17



Be Rich: Ephesians

In a society where wealth is often the measurement of success, Ephesians reveals the countercultural nature of the Gospel. Through helpful illustrations and analysis, our eyes are opened to the riches that we already have in Christ—though we rarely take advantage of them.

We are saved through faith, and with this gift come many other blessings. We have the Holy Spirit to empower us for the work of the Kingdom. We have the necessary spiritual armor to fight off enemy attacks. We have the promise of eternity with a loving Father and perfect God.

But not only has God given us the promise of an eternity in heaven—He has given us the reality of a relationship with Him on right here on earth. Be encouraged in this good news and stop seeking the things of this world, for we already have the priceless gift of eternal life in Christ!

22 OCT 17



Be Like Minded: Philippians

We cannot expect all the Lord's people to think exactly alike, or feel exactly alike, nor act exactly alike. Our degrees of knowledge differ; our views influence our feelings, and our feelings affect our practice. Yet it is desirable, that in reference to God's truth, and our duty towards each other — that we should be as much like-minded as possible. On this — our peace, our harmony, and our union depends. The Apostle felt this, and therefore he uttered his ardent desire for his brethren at Rome thus, "May the God of patience and consolation, give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 15:5-6. What a beautiful representation is here given of our Covenant God and Father, how encouraging to us in approaching the throne of grace.

29 OCT 17



Be Full: Colossians

We live in an age when everyone is trying to live richer, fuller lives. We're told to buy this, try that, eat those, and say no to the rest, as if that's all we need to do to make our lives complete/full.

Two thousand years ago, the church at Colossae faced similar challenges. The Apostle Paul wrote a letter outlining the only way we can live complete lives: Christ. What can we learn today from this ancient church?

Called by many scholars the "most profound letter Paul ever wrote," Colossians warrants a careful, faithful study. In this short, but exciting letter, Paul makes the case for the supremacy of Christ in all things. Paul calls your attention to essential thoughts on living a complete/full life—Christ alone.

05 NOV 17



Be Workers: 1&2 THESSALONIANS

It is only the loyal soul who believes that God engineers circumstances. We take such liberty with our circumstances, we do not believe God engineers them, although we say we do; we treat the things that happen as if they were engineered by men. To be faithful in every circumstance means that we have only one loyalty, and that is to our Lord. Suddenly God breaks up a particular set of circumstances, and the realization comes that we have been disloyal to Him by not recognizing that He had organized them. We never saw what He was after, and that particular thing will never be repeated all the days of our life. The test of loyalty always comes just there. If we learn to worship God in the trying circumstances, He will alter them in two seconds when He chooses.

Loyalty to Jesus Christ is the thing that we “stick at” to-day. We will be loyal to work, to service, to anything, but do not ask us to be loyal to Jesus Christ. Many Christians are intensely impatient of talking about loyalty to Jesus. Our Lord is dethroned more emphatically by Christian workers than by the world. God is made a machine for blessing men, and Jesus Christ is made a Worker among workers.

The idea is not that we do work for God, but that we are so loyal to Him that He can do His work through us — “I reckon on you for extreme service, with no complaining on your part and no explanation on Mine.” God wants to use us as He used His own Son.

12 NOV 17



Be Protected: John

There are many promises and examples of physical protection in the Word of God, both the Old Testament and New Testament. God promised protection to the Israelites against the nations who would come against them as they entered the Promised Land. "I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you" (Exodus 23:27). Here we see God protecting those whose actions were in accordance to His foreordained plans and purpose.

The Psalms of David are filled with praise for God as He protected His chosen one against his enemies (Psalm 18:3, 54:7, 138:7). No matter the amount of power or wrath that David's enemies brought against him, they were no match for the protection of God. God's protection in Job's life was evident as well. Even though Job suffered through many trials as a result of the attacks of Satan, it was God who drew the line in the sand, over which Satan could not cross. Satan was limited to doing exactly what God allowed him to do, and nothing more (Job 1–3). Even through all the misery and afflictions Job endured, God was protecting him from greater harm. God also protected Job's faith, allowing Job to be tested only so far before He stepped in and spoke to Job (Job 38–42). Even though Job could not see God working behind the scenes, he came to understand that God's protection is sure and faithful because He promises to His people: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5; 1 Chronicles 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).

Understand, however, that although God has the ability to deliver us out of every physical calamity or trouble, it may not be His will to do so. Sometimes He uses these trials to purify us. At these times, we should "count it pure joy" because by allowing such trials, God tests our faith to develop more faith so that we persevere and grow to maturity and Christ-likeness (James 1:2-3). Protecting us from such trials would not be beneficial to us.

We may think that if God really wanted to protect us, He would provide wealth and ease in this life. But God does not always protect us from the consequences of bad financial decisions or our lack of diligence in working. "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you" (1 Thessalonians 4:11). God made Solomon extremely wealthy because his attitude toward wealth was much less than his desire for God's wisdom and knowledge. As Solomon walked in sin and adultery, his wealth was destroyed. Ultimately, God uses wealth to lift up some and bring down others, all of which is part of His protection of His own.

"Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever" (Psalm 112:1, 3). "The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts" (1 Samuel 2:7)

The true essence of God's protection is the eternal indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22). The believer is sealed for the day of final glorification (Ephesians 1:13-14). We are protected in all things. We have the ability, though, by allowing our sin nature to rule us, to depart from the will of God. A shield can only protect if it is picked up and used. We cannot sit back and say, "God will protect me!" if we have not done the things we ought to be doing. It is only through prayer and the study of God's Word that we are assured of God's protection in our lives.



Be Diligent: 1&2 TIMOTHY – PHILEMON

Newton's first law of motion states that an object in motion tends to remain in motion, and an object at rest tends to remain at rest. This law applies to people. While some are naturally driven to complete projects, others are apathetic, requiring motivation to overcome inertia. Laziness, a lifestyle for some, is a temptation for all. But the Bible is clear that, because the Lord ordained work for man, laziness is sin. "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise" (Proverbs 6:6).

The Bible has a great deal to say about laziness. Proverbs is especially filled with wisdom concerning laziness and warnings to the lazy person. Proverbs tells us that a lazy person hates work: "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work" (21:25); he loves sleep: "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed" (26:14); he gives excuses: "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets'" (26:13); he wastes time and energy: "He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great waster" (18:9 KJV); he believes he is wise, but is a fool: "The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly" (26:16).

Proverbs also tells us the end in store for the lazy: A lazy person becomes a servant (or debtor): "Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor" (12:24); his future is bleak: "A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing" (20:4); he may come to poverty: "The soul of the lazy man desires and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich" (13:4 KJV).

There is no room for laziness in the life of a Christian. A new believer is truthfully taught that "...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). But a believer can become idle if he erroneously believes God expects no fruit from a transformed life. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Christians are not saved by works, but they do show their faith by their works (James 2:18, 26). Slothfulness violates God's purpose—good works. The Lord, however, empowers Christians to overcome the flesh's propensity to laziness by giving us a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In our new nature, we are motivated to diligence and productiveness out of a love for our Savior who redeemed us. Our old propensity toward laziness—and all other sin—has been replaced by a desire to live godly lives: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). We are convicted of our need to provide for our families through our labors: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8); and for others in the family of God: "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:34-35).

As Christians, we know that our labors will be rewarded by our Lord if we persevere in diligence: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:9-10); "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24); "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them" (Hebrews 6:10).

Christians should labor in God's strength to evangelize and disciple. The apostle Paul is our example: "We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29). Even in heaven, Christians' service to God will continue, although no longer encumbered by the curse (Revelation 22:3). Free from sickness, sorrow, and sin—even laziness—the saints will glorify the Lord forever. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).



Be Faithful: Hebrews

In a fast-paced, technology-based era when drive-thrus, cell phones, laptops, and Internet banking are the norm, it's sometimes hard to fathom that God doesn't appreciate our frail attempts at spiritual shortcuts.

Throughout Hebrews, it illustrates that working for God's Kingdom requires tenacity, never-ceasing prayer, and protective battle gear that only God can provide.

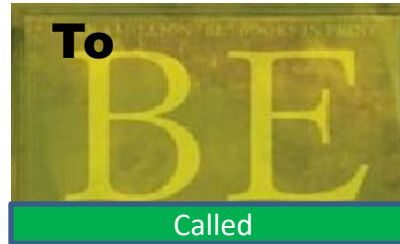
This study, you'll grasp the imminent danger of false teachers and, thus, the overwhelming need for godly ministers—people who preach, practice, and progress in the Word. By explaining how a healthy body of believers should operate, God's words in chapter 11 are used to encourage yesterday's and today's churches to stay the course and be faithful!



Be Mature: James

Perhaps of all the books in the New Testament, James most squarely focuses on results. His pull-no-punches approach to spiritual maturity, his preference for action over words, makes his text the perfect backdrop for a study of how to grow in our faith.

This is a practical book with advice on how to overcome temptation, controlling the tongue, effective prayer, and how to practice what the Bible teaches. If you're going to make progress in these areas, you will need a growing faith and dependence on Christ because as James claims, "Every good and perfect gift is from above."



Be Called: 2 PETER & 2&3 JOHN, JUDE

The Bible plainly speaks of those who have been called by God. Let's read several passages. Here is what was written to the Thessalonians: "Faithful is He [God] that calls you" (I Thes. 5:24). As a warning to the Galatian congregation, who were losing sight of the true gospel, Paul wrote: "I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Gal. 1:6), and he later added, "This persuasion comes not of Him that calls you" (5:8). To the Corinthians it says, "For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (I Cor. 1:26).

Jesus Himself spoke on many occasions about the Christian calling. You may be familiar with this, "For many are called, but few are chosen," found in both Matthew 22:14 and 20:16. Later, adding meaning to the second part of this phrase, He explained this to His disciples: "You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you" (John 15:16), and then, "But I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (vs. 19).

When placed together, these passages explain that God is calling out to the of the world for His Supreme Purpose. Those who respond to His calling are then "chosen," having gone on to repentance, baptism and conversion.



Be Alert: 1 PETER

The study guide for life's true or false questions

The world is filled with counterfeits. And the church is not immune, as false ideas and doctrines can infect believers and congregations. So when it comes to spiritual teachers, messages, and movements, how can we tell fact from fiction? The answers are found in Peter, where the apostles provide practical insights for discerning truth.

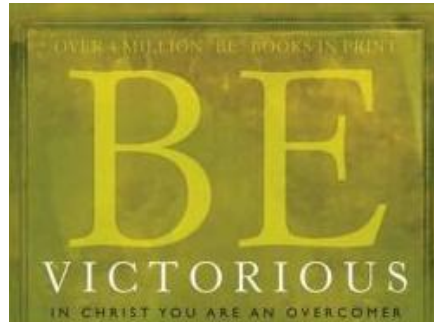
Discover foundational principles from God's word that will help you determine the true from the false.



Be Hopeful: 1 John

"Hope is not a sedative; it is a shot of adrenaline, a blood transfusion." Through clever word pictures like this, John writes. Believers gain increasing confidence in true Hope, a God in whom they don't just wish for eternal life (In Scripture, hope means the promise of salvation for those who have accepted Him and His Son's death and resurrection).

Christians who possess this hope and live as though they possess it will learn godly submission, holy living, and harmony with other believers. These qualities will prepare them for what is inevitable-suffering and persecution; some level of suffering will always be a part of the believers' journey. A time is soon coming when living the "comfortable" Christian life will be far more costly than the life willing to give up all.



Be Victorious: Revelation

The book of Revelation stands out as one of the most intriguing, yet least understood books of the Bible. From the sobering letters to the seven churches to the amazing visions and epic battles, millions of Christians have toiled to understand the meaning of this mysterious book.

The main message of Revelation: Christ is the Victor, and in Christ, we are also victorious.