



LOVE

—THIS—

BOOK

PART 4

SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL

Jesus' earthly ministry has concluded. His final words to "go and make disciples" still ring in the disciples' ears. Our study in the book of Acts illustrated how the disciples experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the gospel message. No voice declares the gospel with more vision and clarity than the Apostle Paul. Our study this year focuses on how we are *Shaped by the Gospel* as we look at the letters written by Paul.

As the message of Christ spread throughout the Roman world, Paul was a key emissary of proclaiming the gospel. His work included planting churches and corresponding with churches and church leaders. Through his letters, we see the challenges and questions that confronted the first generation of Christians. Now that they had become followers of Christ, how were they to live out this new relationship? How would it affect their relationships and responsibilities? Paul's letters address these types of questions and reveal how he sought to equip others to be part of the ongoing story of the gospel.

Several key ideas will be explored throughout the study:

1. We will observe how Paul's life and ministry is shaped by the "gospel of the kingdom," and how the kingdom of God has invaded our world of brokenness and rebellion.
2. We will examine how Paul writes his letters to accomplish his goal of equipping people to live in light of the gospel.
3. We will consider how, in his letters, Paul applies the message of the gospel to different issues, questions, and challenges that early Christians were facing.
4. We will discover in surveying these letters, how we can apply the gospel to the issues, questions, and challenges that we face.

The framework for this year's study is:

- Information: How the content in Paul's letters help us understand the message of the gospel.
- Formation: How Paul's writings provide insight into the work of the Spirit in helping us take on a new identity rooted in the character of Christ.
- Motivation: How our lives model the goodness and love of Christ as we live out the message of the gospel.

Love This Book, *Shaped by the Gospel*, is an opportunity to study the writings of Paul with a renewed understanding of what it means to be "in Christ" and how that knowledge changes everything about us. May you see this study as an opportunity to be "shaped by the gospel" and experience the transforming work of the Spirit.

ENGAGING THE STUDY

Use the following framework when engaging the study: The pattern for the study is:

1. Begin each study with expectant prayer.
(See the Prayer Rhythms section to read about different practices of prayer you can use as you go through the Love This Book guide this year.)
Ask the Spirit to guide your thoughts as you read the passage and engage the questions. Then, conclude your time with a prayer that seeks how you can apply what you learned.
 - **Pray before beginning your devotional time.**
 - **Read the passage.**
 - **Respond by applying the passage.**
 - **Reflect on the passage for a deeper awareness of the Spirit's guidance.**
 - **Pray for direction on how to live out the gospel message from the passage.**
2. For this study, we will modify the order from **Read, Reflect, and Respond** to the pattern of **Read, Respond, and Reflect**. Read the passages several times during the week and then take three days to engage the questions. The **Read** portion of the study will help you gain information about the story; the **Respond** portion will give you opportunities to apply what the Spirit is prompting you to do. The **Reflect** portion will help you focus on the formational element of your faith journey. In the **Reflect** section you will be given the opportunity to practice more reflective rhythms that help you hear how the Spirit is using the Word of God to deepen your walk of faith.

Using this pattern will enable you to engage the study with a more open heart and mind in how the Spirit is guiding and teaching you through the Word.
3. Use the journal pages to write out your thoughts. Give the Spirit time to speak into your mind and heart about what you are learning and processing, and then take time to write how he is leading and guiding you.
4. Use the links on hfcinfo.com to connect you to additional resources that will expand your understanding of the passages.

PRAYER RHYTHMS

Prayer is the central point of life with God. It should be woven into the fabric of our daily lives. We need to make time for prayer every single day and at various times throughout the day. Prayer is not a duty or obligation; it is an invitation to the Father's presence. Prayer is our opportunity to be with and interact with the Creator. Below are various ways you can pray throughout the next weeks and months as we study *Love This Book, Shaped by the Gospel*. Use this time to explore some of these prayer rhythms to engage in prayer and enter into a deeper relationship with God.

PRAYER OF RELEASE AND RECEIVE:

Before beginning the study, stop, take a deep breath, and prepare your heart and mind to receive what the Spirit wants to say to you. To practice the prayer of release and receive, it's important to use your hands to help engage your heart, mind, and body in the action of praying. Turn your hands, palms down, to **RELEASE** whatever is on your mind that could distract. Next, turn your hands around, palms up, to **RECEIVE** whatever God has for you as you engage him through

scripture. This prayer can also be practiced anytime throughout the day to lessen stress and anxiety and help you refocus on God's goodness and faithfulness. It is also a way to practice discernment as you take time to receive the Spirit's wisdom.

PRAYING SCRIPTURE:

As you study the various passages, choose to pray the passage or selected verses. There are several ways to do this. Begin by meditating on the verses, giving you the opportunity to reflect on them more deeply. Then write out the verses in your own words using the journal section of the book, or you can pray the passage silently or aloud. Use this time to personalize the passage or verses selected and pray them to a listening heavenly Father who desires that you embed his Word in your life and pray it for the lives of others.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION:

Intercession is a word that can easily be misinterpreted. It is more than praying about our desires or wishes. Intercessory prayer is rooted in our desire, even desperation, to see God radically move in the lives of people and circumstances around us. In a phrase, it is where we join with Jesus in praying God's will to be done in the lives of those we care about, "*on earth as it is in heaven.*" In this practice, you are bringing yourself, others, and circumstances before God and waiting. Waiting as we pray is challenging. To practice intercessory prayer, we must learn to wait on God and trust in his faithfulness. In this space, we boldly and expectantly persevere in praying, "*your will be done.*" As you practice this rhythm, write your request in a prayer journal or in your Love This Book prayer pages so that you can persist in praying for the requests you wrote down.

PRAYER OF EXAMEN:

The prayer of Examen is a way of intentionally and consciously reviewing your day through God's lens. Ask the Spirit to guide you as you review your day. This practice has four simple steps.

1. At the end of the day, but before you are too tired, replay your day or the past several days in your mind. Ask yourself where you saw God's grace today. When did you give and receive love? When could you have received or given love? When were you aware of God's presence?
2. Name the strongest feelings you experienced, both positively and negatively. What precipitated those emotions? How did these emotions/experiences help you know yourself or God better?
3. Be honest with yourself and with Jesus about what you experienced. Confess any sinful thoughts, attitudes, or actions and allow the Spirit to remind you that you are loved and valued by the Father. Take this opportunity to grow and experience the transforming work of the Spirit into the character of Christ.
4. Conclude your time by thanking God for his presence with you during this practice, and ask him to be with you as you start the day tomorrow. You can also pray a verse or passage that comes to mind or use the Lord's Prayer as a way to conclude your time.

One simple way to remember these four steps is to use the following pattern:

- **Replay** - What happened today?
- **Rejoice** - Where did I feel grace today? Where was God particularly present?
- **Repent** - Where did I feel emotional pain today? Where did I sin?
- **Resolve** - To live differently tomorrow, if need be. And sleep with gratitude. (Ganz)

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S BIRTH, EDUCATION, AND MINISTRY

(Indication of the time Paul's letters were written is in bold)

c. A.D. 6 | Born a Roman citizen to Jewish parents in Tarsus (modern eastern Turkey)

c. 20–30 | Studies Torah in Jerusalem with Gamaliel; becomes a Pharisee

c. 30–33 | Persecutes followers of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem and Judea

MISSION TRIPS

47–48 | First missionary journey with Barnabas to Cyprus and Galatia

48–49 | Writes the letters to the Galatians

49 | At the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), Paul argues successfully that Gentile Christians need not follow Jewish law; returns to Antioch; confronts Peter over question of Jewish law

49–52 | Second missionary journey with Silas through Asia Minor and Greece; settles in Corinth; **writes letters to Thessalonians**

52 | Visits Jerusalem and Antioch briefly; begins third missionary journey

52–55 | Stays in Ephesus; **writes the letters to the Corinthians**

55–57 | Travels through Greece and possibly Illyricum (modern Yugoslavia); **writes letter to Romans**

CONVERSION

c. 33–36 | Converted on the way to Damascus; spends three years in Arabia; returns to Damascus to preach Jesus as the Messiah

c. 36 | Flees Damascus because of persecution; visits Jerusalem and meets with the apostles

36–44 | Preaches in Tarsus and surrounding region

44–46 | Invited by Barnabas to teach in Antioch

46 | Visits Jerusalem with Barnabas to take a famine relief offering

PAUL'S ARREST & DEATH

57–59 | Returns to Jerusalem and arrested; imprisoned at Caesarea

59–60 | Appears before Festus and appeals to Caesar; voyage to Rome

60–62 | Under house arrest in Rome; **writes letters to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon**

62–64 | Released from prison; journeys to Spain; writes letters to **Timothy and Titus**

64 | Returns to Rome; martyred

Timeline adapted from *Christian History*

CHRONOLOGICAL CHART OF PAUL'S WRITINGS:*

BOOK	DATE	RECIPIENTS	PLACE OF WRITING
Galatians	48-49	South Galatian churches	Syrian Antioch
1 Thessalonians	49-51	Church in Thessalonica	Corinth
2 Thessalonians	49-51	Church in Thessalonica	Corinth
1 Corinthians	53-55	Church in Corinth	Ephesus
2 Corinthians	55-56	Church in Corinth	Macedonia
Romans	57	Church in Rome	Corinth
Philippians	60	#Church in Philippi	Rome
Colossians	60	#Church in Colossae	Rome
Philemon	60	#Philemon	Rome
Ephesians	60	#Church in Ephesus - potentially a circular letter written to the churches in Asia Minor	Rome
1 Timothy	62-64	Timothy and church in Ephesus	Corinth
Titus	62-64	Titus	Nicopolis
2 Timothy	64-67	^Timothy and church in Ephesus	Rome

* Dates and locations are suggested but not always exact

Written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome

^ Written during Paul's second imprisonment under Nero

MAP OF PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS



SERMON PASSAGES AND DATES

Jan 8 | Introduction

Jan 15 | Galatians 5:13-26 | *Life in the Spirit*

Jan 22 | 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 | *Perspective and Motivation*

Jan 29 | 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 | *Responsibility*

Feb 5 | 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | *Idolatry*

Feb 12 | 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 | *Shaped by the Cross & Resurrection*

Feb 19 | Romans 3:21-31; 5:1-12 | *The Gospel of Grace*

Feb 26 | Romans 14:1-15:13 | *Unity*

Mar 5 | Colossians 2:6-23 | *Combating False Teaching*

Mar 12 | Ephesians 3:14-21 | *Growing in Grace*

Mar 19 | Philippians 2:1-11 | *Thinking Well*

Mar 26 | 1 Timothy 4:1-16 | *Integrity*

Apr 2 | 2 Timothy 2:1-13 | *Leaving a Legacy*

Apr 9 | Philemon; Colossians 1:3-14 | *Easter: Living the Resurrected Life*

ONLINE VIDEO RESOURCES

FIND THESE VIDEOS ON [HFCINFO.COM](http://hfcinfo.com):

- **What Did the Gospel Mean to Paul?** (7-minute video from N.T. Wright)
- **Paul and the Transformative Gospel** (58-minute video lecture from N.T. Wright) This lecture at Fuller Seminary provides an in depth look at Paul's writings and view of the transformational good news of the gospel. (Based on the book by N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*)
- **Blue Letter Bible Timeline of Paul's life** with scriptural references

BIBLE PROJECT VIDEOS:

The Bible Project videos are listed in the same order as the weekly sermon focus. These short videos provide a helpful overview of each book which will help set the context for the sermon and provide insights into the overall focus of Paul's writings.

- January 15 | Galatians
- January 22 | 1 Thessalonians
- January 29 | 2 Thessalonians
- February 5 | 1 Corinthians
- February 12 | 2 Corinthians
- February 19 and 26 | Romans
- March 5 | Colossians
- March 12 | Ephesians
- March 19 | Philippians
- March 26 | 1 Timothy
- April 2 | 2 Timothy
- April 9 | Philemon

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

If you want to dig deeper into the work of the Holy Spirit, click on the CRU link (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) at hfcinfo.com to get a series of articles and a link to the Bible Project video on the Holy Spirit.



WEEK ONE | JANUARY 15

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:13-26

The book of Galatians is widely accepted as the earliest of Paul's letters. There is some debate as to which region was the target of his letter. Most likely, Paul wrote the letter a few months before his attendance at the Jerusalem Council in AD 49 (Acts 15), a meeting where the apostles would take up the topic of living under the Mosaic Law as a requirement for a follower of Christ.

The issue sparking Paul's writing of the letter to the Galatian gentile Christians is clear: at stake is nothing less than the gospel. (Moo 56) The letter refers to people preaching "another gospel," confusing the believers and keeping them from living the true gospel that Paul

preached when the church was founded. The tone in the letter, at times, is direct and even harsh as Paul reminds the Galatians that it's not the Law that justifies but their faith in Jesus Christ. Some teachers believed that faith by grace would result in too much freedom. Paul's letter reminded the Galatians that the believer's commitment to Christ is based on the free gift of grace through faith, but Paul also articulated that living by faith comes from walking by the Spirit.

The study this week is a good reminder that it is through walking with the Spirit that we experience a life of transformation by grace.

Watch the Bible project video of Galatians on hfcinfo.com to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Galatians 5:13-26.

This passage reminds us that "for freedom we have been set free!" God's goal for our freedom is for us to live as redeemed people. Released from the prison of sin and death, we are free through the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue his purposes for our lives. In your study this week, keep in mind that we have freedom to live a Spirit-empowered life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

1. What word dominates this passage? (It's mentioned 10 times.)
2. What contrast does Paul make in verse 13 regarding how we should live?
3. How does Paul sum up the law?

RESPOND by writing the names of 2-3 people to whom you can show love this week. Write them a note, text or call them, or serve them in some way.

REFLECT on the seriousness of verse 15. Is there someone that you are “destroying” with your attitudes or words? Ask the Spirit to change your attitude so that your words can be encouraging and uplifting.

PRAY. As you conclude your time in the Word today, thank Jesus for the freedom you have been given to love others just as he loves us.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

Continue —→

DAY TWO

READ Galatians 5:13-26.

1. What is the result of living by the Spirit?
2. According to verse 17, what two things are in opposition to one another? What is the result?
3. What actions does Paul say are the result of the sinful nature?

RESPOND by identifying how the sinful nature is revealed in your life.

REFLECT on what it means to live by the Spirit. How would you define what it looks like to live by the Spirit and not by the Law?

PRAY. Take time to sit in silence and ask the Spirit to show you when you are living according to the sinful nature. Ask the Lord to help you surrender those behaviors so that you can live in the freedom he gave you through the redemptive work of the cross.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Galatians 5:13-26.

1. List the fruits of the Spirit. Why does Paul say there is no law that can produce the same fruit as the Spirit?
2. What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit?
3. How does verse 26 connect to verse 15?

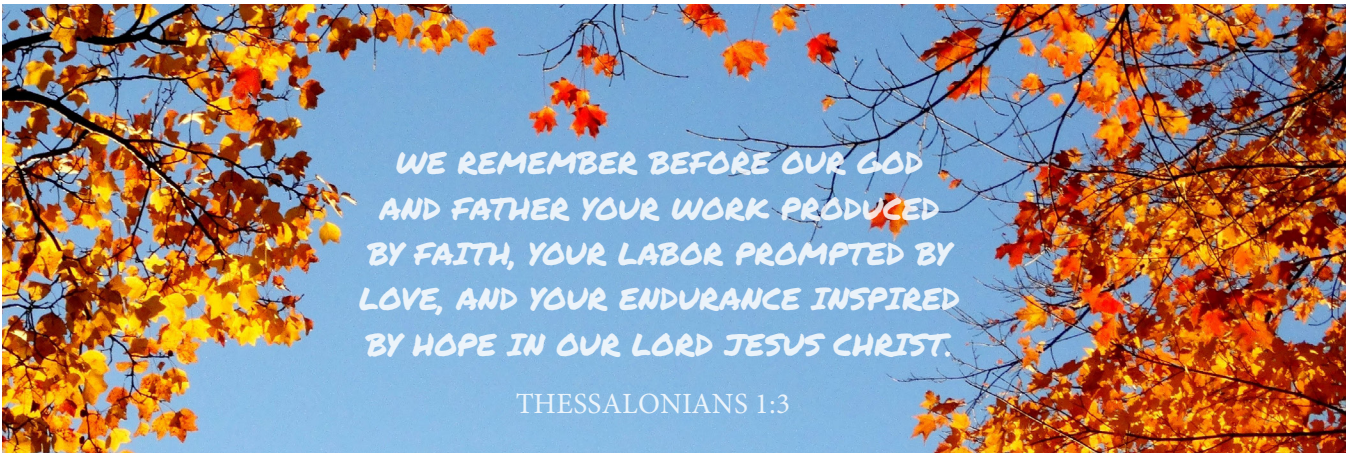
RESPOND by memorizing verses 22-26.

REFLECT on the fruit that Paul mentions in this passage. Why does he use the singular (fruit) instead of the plural (fruits)? Which of the fruit mentioned is a challenge for you to show to others?

PRAY. Spend time thanking the Spirit for his presence in your life. Ask him to transform you so that beautiful fruit grows as a result of his work in your life.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



WE REMEMBER BEFORE OUR GOD
AND FATHER YOUR WORK PRODUCED
BY FAITH, YOUR LABOR PROMPTED BY
LOVE, AND YOUR ENDURANCE INSPIRED
BY HOPE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THESSALONIANS 1:3

WEEK TWO | JANUARY 22

PERSPECTIVE AND MOTIVATION

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonian Christians shortly after founding the church on his first missionary journey. (Moo 88) A key theme of this letter is the return of Jesus Christ, known as the second coming. However, another significant focus in this letter is how these gentile Christians in Thessalonica are living as followers of Jesus. The gospel message made a fundamental difference in how they lived, and Paul celebrates their work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope.

Impressed by the faithfulness of the Thessalonians in the face of persecution, Paul wrote to encourage the Christians in that community with the goal that they would continue to grow in godliness. Paul knew that the people had been exposed to errant

teaching from those in opposition to the way of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. And Paul also understood that unless the young church continued to mature in its faith, the danger would only increase over time. (Swindoll God's Masterwork)

Paul writes in Thessalonians that the gospel was evident in the way they lived and, despite their suffering, they were a model for all the believers in the region. Two thousand years later, they are still an example for us by the way they chose to live by the Spirit as they waited for the return of Christ. May you be challenged this week to grow in faith, love, and hope as you embrace the truth of the gospel.

Watch the Bible project video of 1 Thessalonians on hfcinfo.com to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

Verse one sets the tone for the passage when Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their true identity. Regardless of their circumstances, their identity is in God and in Christ. This passage gives us perspective on how to live. Paul prayed they would continue to be known by their faith, love, and hope. As you read the passage this week, think about how the gospel motivated the Thessalonians to live like Christ. What motivates you in your walk with God?

1. What are the works that produce faith? How does that happen?
2. What is “labor” and how is it prompted by love?
3. How does hope inspire endurance?
4. How do these qualities look in a church environment?

RESPOND by memorizing verse 3 and writing out ways that you can live out these principles.

REFLECT on the people you know or who are in your family/sphere of influence and intentionally pray this prayer for them every day this week.

PRAY that your life would reflect work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and hope inspired by endurance.

Journal your thoughts from today’s study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

1. What do you think Paul means when he states, “our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction?”

Continue —→

2. Guilt has a negative impact on us and causes us to hide, while conviction can have the opposite effect and cause us to face what we've done. Why does it matter that Paul focuses on the word conviction when talking about how the Thessalonians received the gospel message? What does that say to us about how we should present the gospel today?
3. What is significant about how the Thessalonians responded to the gospel? (verse 6) How has the gospel impacted you during times of struggle and hardship?

RESPOND by intentionally choosing to engage in a conversation with someone this week where you bring the hope of the gospel into the conversation.

REFLECT on how you are living your Christian life. Paul states that the Thessalonians were imitating him and the Lord. Would you want people to follow your example?

PRAY for the endurance and faith to maintain a vibrant faith and trust in God even as you experience struggles and hardships.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

Refer to the map in the beginning of this booklet and see just how large the region is that Paul is referencing in these verses. Achaia and Macedonia encompassed an area more larger than the city of Thessalonica.

1. In your own words, state the breadth of the reach of the Thessalonians faith. What would it look like for someone to make the same comment about Hershey Free Church?
2. Paul mentions that the Thessalonian believers turned away from idolatry to follow Christ. What idols or other entanglements exist in your life that would pull you away from wholeheartedly following Jesus?
3. How does the reality of eternity impact the way the Thessalonians were living in their present reality?


RESPOND by thinking of your own life. Make a list of the things that get in the way of your relationship with Jesus and keep you from living and proclaiming the gospel the way that Paul and the Thessalonians did.

REFLECT on what you wrote and engage in a time of confession as you surrender those things that get in the way of living the gospel as a way of life.

PRAY that you would have the same kind of bold faith that impacts others in your family, workplace, and community.

Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping a better understanding of the gospel in you.

NOTES:



NOW MAY THE LORD OF
PEACE HIMSELF GIVE YOU
PEACE AT ALL TIMES AND
IN EVERY WAY. THE LORD BE
WITH ALL OF YOU.

2 THESSALONIANS 3:16

WEEK THREE | JANUARY 29

RESPONSIBILITY

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, though shorter than the first, is powerful in its content. Chuck Swindoll stated the following about it:

*One of the most profound contributions of this letter is the balanced perspective it brings to the subject of end-times prophecy. We ought to be neither passive and ignorant nor fanatical and extreme when it comes to either the big picture or the details of Christ's coming as Judge and King. Rather, we should be alert, aware of all the devilish deceptions around us, and confident in God's plans living our Christian lives **responsibly** (emphasis mine) to the glory of God. (Swindoll Vol.10 103)*

Swindoll's statement captures the essence of this week's focus on what it looks like to live responsibly in the kingdom of God and guides us to take note of one of

Paul's reasons for writing a second letter to the Thessalonians so soon after penning the first one. One of the issues Paul addresses is the Thessalonians' passive posture toward work because they reasoned if Jesus was returning soon, it wasn't necessary to work hard.

Paul affirms the faith of the Thessalonians and urges them to persevere amidst continued suffering and remain strong in their faith as they discern false teaching. Finally, in chapter 3, Paul reminds them that a disciplined life cultivates responsibility. (106)

The themes of perseverance, discernment, and responsibility are as necessary today as they were in the first century. Keep in mind that the discipline of hard work and responsible living are one way we are shaped by the teachings of the gospel.

Watch the Bible project video of 2 Thessalonians to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

The verses in chapter 3 follow Paul's injunction to pray for him (verses 1-2) and the reminder that, because of the Lord's faithfulness, they will be protected from the evil one. Paul then strengthens their faith with words of encouragement to remind them that the Lord will direct their hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance (verses 3-5). Paul is writing again about a facet of being in Christ, which also reveals that being rooted in God's love is an essential aspect of the gospel.

1. What command does Paul give to the Thessalonian people? What reason does he give for them to keep their distance from certain individuals? How did you respond to Paul's statement?
2. How would you describe Paul's vision for the Thessalonian church after reading this passage?
3. Why do you think Paul was able to use his life as an example for the Thessalonians?

RESPOND by choosing to work hard this week because your work ethic reflects obedience to the gospel.

REFLECT on the kind of work ethic that was modeled for you. Does it align with the teaching from this passage?

PRAY for the proper attitude and perspective about work.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

READ 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

1. Why does Paul remind the Thessalonians that he wasn't idle while he was with them? Why do you think he chose to not take food or other necessities from others?

Continue —————>

2. How would you write the main idea behind Paul's statement, "*The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.*" How does that apply to us in our culture?
3. How would you describe the overall tone of these verses?

RESPOND by writing out a work schedule for this week that reflects a biblical mindset about work.

REFLECT on your attitude about idleness and work. Do you tend to be lazy or to be a workaholic? Neither of these extremes are God's design for you.

PRAY for discernment to develop an appropriate view of work.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

READ 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

1. In verse 13 Paul states that, "[we should] never tire of doing what is good." What do you think he means by that statement? Do you find it encouraging or discouraging to think about living out this principle? What does it look like to model this principle to others?

2. What does it mean to be a busybody? (Meddling in the affairs of someone else) Have you had those thoughts or acted in that manner?

3. Paul speaks strongly about how to treat someone who is not working hard. He doesn't tell us to shame the person because that doesn't leave room for relationship and restoration. How can you help someone as a brother or sister in Christ have a stronger and more biblical work ethic?

RESPOND by thinking about the times you have grown weary or tired when doing what was right. What caused that attitude to develop? Remember to return to the principles of these verses when you are tempted to give up.

REFLECT on Paul's greetings in verse 16. Personalize these words as a reminder of God's presence and faithfulness.

PRAY for the ability to persevere in the way that you work, remembering that you are modeling God's values and work ethic.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



THESE THINGS ARE WRITTEN

WEEK FOUR | FEBRUARY 5

IDOLATRY

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians has a stronger explicit focus on particular problems in the church than any of his other letters. (Moo 111) Written from Ephesus during his third missionary journey, Paul addresses issues that are causing division in the church. Rather than focusing on a specific theme in this letter, Paul highlights the different issues that are causing strife and disunion. The key to understanding Paul's overarching goal for this letter is found in 1 Corinthians 1:10. He appeals to the people to agree with one another so that they can be united in mind and thought and therefore be united in Christ.

Historically, Corinth was a large, international metropolis, second only to Athens in its influence. Populated with people from different backgrounds, idol worship to gods such as Aphrodite was particularly prominent

in the city. Corinth also contained numerous temptations far beyond her temples. (Swindoll Vol. 7) While Corinth was an ancient city, there are similarities to modern urban areas, containing unending opportunities to engage in sinful behavior without any apparent consequences.

Paul was aware that this kind of culture had a negative impact on the Corinthian church. It's important for us to recognize that Paul did not want the believers to move away from that negative environment; instead he wrote to them about how to live in the culture. He directed them to make a firm commitment to Christ, and to let the gospel message shape a different kind of lifestyle. His vision for the Corinthians includes union with Christ, which results in unity with one another.

Watch the Bible Project video about 1 Corinthians to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

Before reading these verses, it is important to read the concluding verses in chapter 9, where Paul writes about the importance of a disciplined life. Paul pursues his ministry with discipline and self-sacrificial love so that he will not be "disqualified for the prize." (9:24-27) In contrast to Paul are the people of Israel who failed to attain the "prize"

of the promised land. (10:1-13) (Moo 136) Using the historical account of the Israelites in the wilderness, Paul reminds them that straying from obedience to Christ, and substituting our own desires for that obedience, leads to idolatry. Paul's logic in chapter 10 compels us to see the experience of Israel in the wilderness as gospel-shaped and, therefore, can serve as a warning about the dangers of idolatry for Christians today. If those who drank from the spiritual rock of Christ in the past can be led into idolatry, so can we. (Macaskill 68) Anytime we place false confidence in anything but the grace and faithfulness of God, we run the risk of creating an earthly idol. (Moo 136)

As you read these verses this week, be aware of how the Spirit is leading you to think about idols in your life.

1. What connection can you make between the concluding verses of chapter 9 and the opening verses of chapter 10?
2. Why does Paul choose to refer to the Israelite experience in the wilderness?
3. What New Testament reference to Jesus is Paul referring to when he says that the rock was Christ?
(See John 4:14; 6:30-35)

RESPOND by writing down ways that you have experienced Jesus as the bread and water of life.

REFLECT on the disobedience of the Israelites in the wilderness and the consequences that they suffered. Take time to acknowledge ways that you have dismissed the provision of God and confess your actions to the Father.

PRAY a prayer of thankfulness for the grace shown by the Father in your life.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

Continue —————>

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

1. What does Paul say is the reason for writing these things to the Corinthians? (verses 6 and 11)
2. According to verses 6 and 7 what is the source of idolatry?
3. Name the examples that Paul gives from the account of the Israelites in the wilderness.

RESPOND by applying the principles from verses 6-10 regarding idolatry to your life. Are there areas of your life like eating and drinking, sexuality, or even complaining that have become an idol? (Remember, an idol is anything in which we place false confidence and value above God's grace and faithfulness.)

REFLECT on your heart and focus of your life. What idols have you unknowingly created?

PRAY for the courage to dethrone the idols of your heart.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

1. What warning does Paul give the Corinthian believers? How can pride be the root of our downfall?
2. Why does Paul remind the Corinthians that they should not give into temptation? What should they see as the source of their ability to overcome temptation?
3. What is the link between temptation and idolatry?

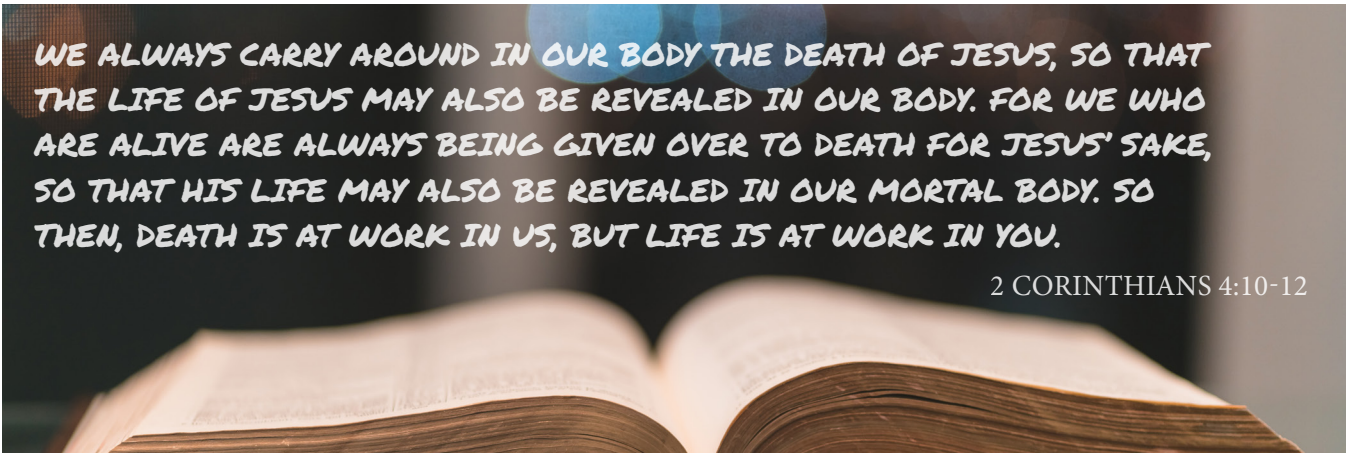
RESPOND by memorizing verse 13 as a reminder of God's faithfulness and power in your life.

REFLECT on the posture you have before the Lord. Do you find yourself struggling with pride and the belief that you can overcome temptation on your own? Admit your own brokenness and need for God's strength and faithfulness in your life.

PRAY for humility of heart and mind. Ask the Spirit to show you when you are tempted to set up idols of your own making instead of surrendering wholeheartedly to God.

Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping a better understanding of the gospel in you.

NOTES:



WE ALWAYS CARRY AROUND IN OUR BODY THE DEATH OF JESUS, SO THAT THE LIFE OF JESUS MAY ALSO BE REVEALED IN OUR BODY. FOR WE WHO ARE ALIVE ARE ALWAYS BEING GIVEN OVER TO DEATH FOR JESUS' SAKE, SO THAT HIS LIFE MAY ALSO BE REVEALED IN OUR MORTAL BODY. SO THEN, DEATH IS AT WORK IN US, BUT LIFE IS AT WORK IN YOU.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:10-12

WEEK FIVE | FEBRUARY 12

SHAPED BY THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church was written one to three years after his first. This letter says more about the connection between his personal life and ministry than any of his other letters. In this letter Paul reflects on the nature and implications of his apostolic ministry and writes about key theological issues that get drawn into his reflections on his apostleship. (Moo 159) The letter contains numerous personal comments as Paul reveals details about the persecution he suffered for the sake of the gospel and mentions a mysterious thorn in the flesh that kept him reliant on God.

It is significant that Paul refers to his ministry and personal experiences as the believers in Corinth are struggling with the authority Paul has as an apostle. Their dissatisfaction with Paul leads him to take a more defensive posture to those who devalue his message

because of their biases toward his use of authority and speaking mannerisms. Eventually Paul confronts their criticism by arguing, paradoxically, that the power and authority of his ministry are manifested in his humble and even embarrassing personal experiences.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is a relationship between the old covenant and the new and that there is life in the midst of death. (4:10) He refers to the essential theological view of reconciliation as a key component in the life of the believer. However, the overall theme of the letter is the glory and nature of the new-covenant ministry. (159) Ultimately, Paul is leading the Corinthians to understand and experience a Spirit-filled life that is transformed in Christ and shaped by the cross.

Watch the Bible Project video about 2 Corinthians to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.

This passage begins with the word “therefore,” which is an indicator to look at what Paul has said earlier. The first six verses of this chapter connect to earlier chapters in the book where Paul reminded the Corinthians of the legitimacy of his apostleship. His “therefore” in 4:1 directly links to the truth that believers are “*being transformed into his (Christ’s) image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*” (3:18) With that as a foundation for his focus in chapter 4, Paul wants the reader to grasp the truth of the depth of the gospel message.

He uses powerful words in this chapter that point us to the reality of who we are as “*treasures in jars of clay*,” and who Jesus Christ is as Lord. He doesn’t mince words as he reminds us that we will face hardships and challenges brought on by sin in the world, but that in us is the life that renews us every day.

1. What ministry has God given you? At your workplace? School? Family? When are you tempted to lose heart in proclaiming Christ through your life?
2. Paul mentions that he is careful not to distort the gospel message or deceive others when sharing the gospel. What does he say is the cause for not receiving the message of the gospel?
3. Why is it important to remember that the gospel is about Jesus and not about us?

RESPOND by taking the opportunity to share the gospel with someone this week, keeping in mind that you are sharing the light that is in you.

REFLECT on the connection between 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 3:18. What does it mean to you that you are being transformed into Christ-likeness? How have you seen this in your life and how has this kept you from losing heart in your daily life?

PRAY that you will shine around others with the light of the gospel. Ask the Spirit to show you how you may be dimming that light with attitudes and actions that don’t reflect Christ.

Journal your thoughts from today’s study in the space provided after the devotional.

Continue —————>

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.

1. What is the treasure that Paul is talking about in verse 7? Why does he contrast the image of jars of clay with the truth of God's all-surpassing power?

2. Look at the descriptors Paul uses in verses 8 and 9.
 - a. Hard-pressed (on every side), but not crushed
 - b. Perplexed, but not in despair
 - c. Persecuted, but not abandoned
 - d. Struck down, but not destroyed

How do those words describe the reality of life as a Christ-follower? Why is it important to understand these realities? Where do you find hope in these descriptors?

3. What does Paul mean when he says we carry the death of Jesus in our body so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed?

RESPOND by talking with another believer about the realities Paul writes about in these verses. Take time to share how these realities have been true for you and listen to the other person as they share what they have experienced. Remember how important it is to encourage each other on this journey of following Jesus and that other people can be used by God to shape us into the character of Christ.

REFLECT on what it means to you to know that *"death is at work in us, but life is at work in you."* (4:12)

PRAY for the Spirit to show you where you are focusing on death in your thinking or actions instead of the life that is available to you through the transforming work of the cross.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.

1. Paul makes a statement in verses 13-14 that connects to Romans 6:5, where he talks about being united in death and resurrection. How does Romans 6:5 help us understand what Paul means when he says it is with that Spirit of faith we believe and speak? What does this phrase mean to you? How are you living with this perspective?
2. What does Paul mean when he says *"the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God?"* What does this phrase mean practically for us today?
3. What do you think about the current troubles or struggles you are facing? How do these verses help put our circumstances in perspective?

RESPOND by writing verse 16 in your own words.

Continue —————>

REFLECT on what it means to you to be renewed inwardly every day. What rhythms do you have in place to give space for the Spirit to renew your daily life?

PRAY for the courage and perseverance to create daily rhythms that renew your soul.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



ROMANS 5:8

BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE FOR US IN THIS:
WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.

WEEK SIX | FEBRUARY 19

THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

Romans 3:21-31 and 5:1-12

Mostly likely written in 57 A.D. during Paul's third missionary journey, Romans is often considered the most comprehensive rendering of the gospel. It contains over 50 direct references to the Old Testament and addresses key themes of the gospel, such as salvation, justification, grace, righteousness, and reconciliation. The 17th century Puritan, Thomas Draxe, called Romans "the quintessence and perfection of the saving doctrine." (Moo 192) A number of theologians have stated that no other writings have had the same formative influence on scholars as the book of Romans. Theologians from Augustine to Luther have been foundationally changed in their thinking about the gospel because of Paul's truths presented in Romans. With that historical background, it stands to reason that the book has significant meaning in our lives as well.

The circumstances of the letter are fairly clear; the particular issues that led Paul to write this wide-ranging theological treatise are not. (Moo 193) Swindoll posits that there are three potential purposes for the book:

1. The letter confirmed the Romans' understanding of the gospel and clarified what might have been confusing.

2. The letter affirmed the authenticity of their faith and commended them for their obedience.
3. The letter cast a vision for the future and urged them to become Paul's partners in accomplishing it. (Swindoll Vol. 6 7)

These three ideas are important to us today as they provide insights into what it means to better understand the gospel message and apply it to our everyday lives. Additionally, there is also a strong unity theme in the letter, which is highlighted in the final chapters of the book.

Paul's encounter with the risen Christ transformed him. His future was not in presenting the Law or stamping out Christians, but in preaching grace and living by faith. (Swindoll 7) As we study Romans, it is necessary for us to examine our own lives to discern how our encounter with the risen Christ has transformed and continues to transform us. We need to ask if we truly comprehend the richness of the grace offered by God through Jesus Christ in a manner that transforms our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Paul's life was never the same because he encountered God's grace in a life-changing way. May the same be said of us.

Watch the Bible Project video about Romans to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Romans 3:21-31.

The theme for this section of Romans (3:21-5:21) is the Grace of God. The passages this week and next will show how the grace of God is manifested in our lives, not just in salvation but also in the ongoing work of transformation through justification. Paul starts this section of Romans by explaining the righteousness that comes from God. As the passage continues, there are four truths revealed about our salvation:

- Salvation is a transfer of righteousness.
 - Salvation is a gift of grace.
 - Salvation is a display of love.
 - Salvation is a declaration of faith. (Swindoll Romans 83)
1. How does Paul define righteousness? How does his understanding of righteousness help you get a better picture of your righteousness?
 2. How do verses 23 and 24 give us a clearer understanding of God's desire for all people?

RESPOND by writing a prayer of gratitude for the salvation you have received by God's grace and the work of the Jesus on the cross.

REFLECT on the four descriptors of salvation written above. How do they help you process your own salvation?

PRAY today with an attitude of rejoicing that you have been given the righteousness of God by his grace and through faith in Jesus.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

Continue —→

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Romans 3:21-31.

1. Verses 25 and 26 speak of justice. What does Paul say about God's justice? How are we justified?
2. Why does Paul speak of boasting? What does he want the believers to understand about the reason not to boast?
3. Is Paul denying the value of the Law? Why or why not?

RESPOND by intentionally interacting with others with grace because you have received God's grace in your life. Be willing show patience to them because you recognize that we have all sinned and all fall short of God's righteousness.

REFLECT on ways that you boast in your salvation. How do you mix your own thoughts about righteousness with God's righteousness?

PRAY that you would be aware of the times when you boast in your righteousness and confess that to God. As you do that, pray for the humility to receive the true righteousness that comes from God's grace through faith in Christ.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Romans 5:1-12.

The first 12 verses in chapter 5 point the reader to the reality of God's love, the justification we have through Christ, and the work of the Spirit that produces ultimate salvation and glory despite the tribulations that believers encounter in this life. (Moo 216) In many ways, this passage encapsulates the journey of faith, beginning in verse 1 with the truth that we live in a state of peace with God and concluding in verse 12 that we have been reconciled to God through Jesus.

1. What are the key components of our salvation that are expressed in verses 1 and 2? What do these verses tell you about your status as a believer?
2. What does Paul mean when he uses the phrase "*at just the right time?*" Why is it important to understand God's timing?
3. What was our status in God's eyes before Christ died for us? What does it mean to you to know that you have been reconciled to God both now and for eternity?

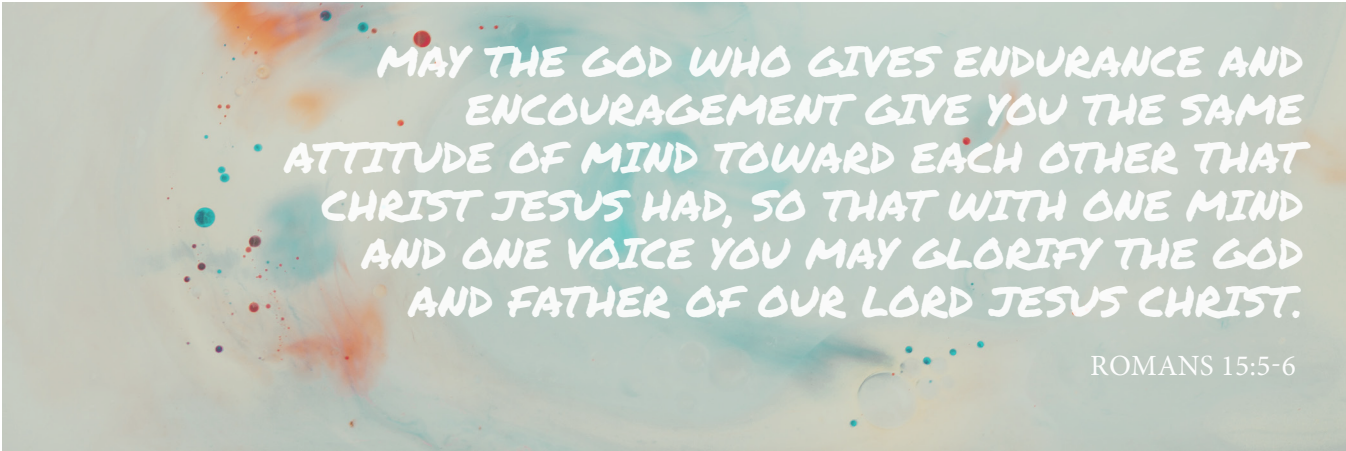
RESPOND by writing what it means to you to be the recipient of God's love as demonstrated through Jesus' death on the cross.

REFLECT on the progression Paul describes in verses 3-5. How has suffering led you to experience hope?

PRAY for family, friends, and co-workers who don't know Jesus to experience his peace and reconciliation through the grace-gift of salvation.

Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping a better understanding of the gospel in you.

NOTES:



MAY THE GOD WHO GIVES ENDURANCE AND
ENCOURAGEMENT GIVE YOU THE SAME
ATTITUDE OF MIND TOWARD EACH OTHER THAT
CHRIST JESUS HAD, SO THAT WITH ONE MIND
AND ONE VOICE YOU MAY GLORIFY THE GOD
AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

ROMANS 15:5-6

WEEK SEVEN | FEBRUARY 26

UNITY

Romans 14:1-15:13

These verses fit within a larger framework in the book of Romans that focuses on the transforming power of the gospel, revealed through the conduct and behavior of the believer. In chapter twelve, Paul shifts his writings to the implications for living that flow from a correct understanding of the gospel. The imperative of a transformed life is not an optional second step after we embrace the gospel: it is rooted in and indeed part of the gospel itself. (Moo 237)

Paul makes it clear that a transformed life comes via a transformed mindset and encompasses all areas of

life. (Romans 12:1-2) He invites believers into a life of service, love, and unity.

An interesting historical insight provides more context for this letter. The Emperor, Claudius, persecuted the Jews by exiling them from Rome. In their absence, the church becomes predominantly Gentile. As the persecution lifts and Jewish Christians return to Rome, tension occurs between them and the Gentile Christians.

If you haven't done so, watch the Bible Project video about Romans to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

The study this week encompasses longer passages of scripture as we delve into Paul's directive about how to live in unity. In these verses are insights on how to put grace into action. Paul knows that differences can lead to disunity and disharmony, so he specifically addresses divisive issues. These verses are a necessary reminder that as we understand what it means to be "in Christ," we will also experience unity with other believers.

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Romans 14:1-23.

1. What is the specific focus of Paul's writing in the opening verses of chapter 14? Given this circumstance, what are the believers to do? (verse one)

2. Who is the ultimate judge? How will each of us respond when we stand before God?

3. How does Paul describe the Kingdom of God? (verse 17)

RESPOND honestly as you think about people you judge. Make a conscious effort to extend grace to them. What is it that causes you to be judgmental? How do these verses redirect your understanding of judging others?

REFLECT on the acceptance and grace you've been shown by God. Take time to process that reality and allow it to sink deep into your understanding of God's love for you.

PRAY that you extend grace instead of judgment in your thoughts and interactions.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Romans 14:1-23.

Continue —→

1. Paul asks the believers to make every effort to live in a way that leads to peace. What is the difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper? How does the gospel go forward when we live as peacemakers?
2. Verse twenty states, “*do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.*” How would you restate that verse in today’s culture?
3. How would you interpret Paul’s statement in verse twenty-three that everything that does not come from faith is sin?

RESPOND by making every effort this week to be a peacemaker and practice mutual edification in your interactions. Choose to intentionally focus on individuals with whom you struggle to live at peace.

REFLECT on verse twenty-two. Why does Paul direct us to keep thoughts that bring disunity between us and God?

PRAY for wisdom as you interact with people who live differently than you do and relate to them in a spirit of grace rather than judgment.

Journal your thoughts from today’s study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Romans 15:1-13.

1. What directives in verses 1-4 are challenging for you to live out?

2. What is the result of living in unity with other believers?

3. On what basis are we commanded to accept others?

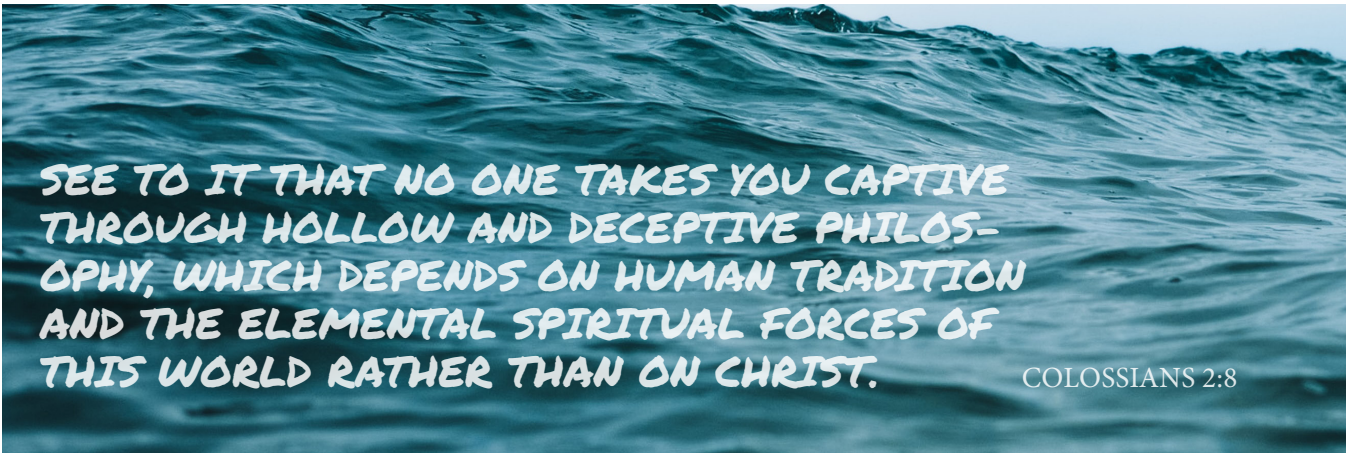
RESPOND by writing your own psalm of praise just as Paul did in chapter 15. As you write, think about the reasons you have to rejoice in God's mercy and acceptance.

REFLECT on verse thirteen. Commit it to memory so you can be encouraged with the work the Spirit is doing in you.

PRAY that you would be a catalyst for unity and not divisiveness as you depend on the Spirit for strength and insight. Pray for the church to live together in unity.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE TAKES YOU CAPTIVE
THROUGH HOLLOW AND DECEPTIVE PHILOS-
OPHY, WHICH DEPENDS ON HUMAN TRADITION
AND THE ELEMENTAL SPIRITUAL FORCES OF
THIS WORLD RATHER THAN ON CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS 2:8

WEEK EIGHT | MARCH 5

COMBATING FALSE TEACHING

Colossians 2:6-23

Chuck Swindoll captures our attention regarding the book of Colossians when he says, “A dense fog of religious pluralism has rolled in, clouding the church’s spiritual discernment and muddling the clarity of the gospel.” (Swindoll Vol. 9 101) Written from Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment, the book of Colossians addresses issues of heresy and false teaching. Although Paul had not visited the Colossian church, he had heard good reports about the congregation. In Colossians 1:7, Paul refers to the visit by Epaphras when he received more detailed information about the church. Based on Colossians 4:12, Paul states that Epaphras constantly prayed that the church would “*stand firm in all the will of God.*” From this information, we can deduce that Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians to strengthen their understanding of the gospel so they would not be led astray by false teaching.

The city of Colossae was located in the Lycus River valley in west-central Asia Minor. Once a larger, more

important city, it had declined in influence more than the neighboring city of Laodicea. However, being located on a major highway meant a diversity of religious and philosophical viewpoints, which created a mixing of ideologies. These circumstances explain why Paul’s letter focused on maintaining a true and accurate perspective on the gospel.

The book contains a rich combination of theology and practice and reminds the believers that the true gospel is firmly tied to being in Christ. Paul’s exhortations in 3:1-4:6, though brief, summarize and illustrate the basic ethical principles that have provided significant guidance for believers seeking to translate their commitment to the Lord Jesus into practice. (Moo 244) The language in Colossians 3:1-4:6 is one of the strongest passages in scripture that speaks to the transformational process of the believer.

Watch the Bible Project video about Colossians to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

The central idea of Paul’s letter appears in 2:6-7 when he writes, “*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*” Colossian believers needed to be careful to continue on in the way they were first taught and reject false teachers and their message. (2:8-23) Central to the book of Colossians, and evident in this chapter, is the “in Christ” message. Paul clearly wants the Colossians to understand that teaching that reflects the gospel must depend on being in Christ.

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Colossians 2:6-23.

1. What are the four words Paul uses in 2:6-7 to describe a maturing walk of faith?
2. What contrast does Paul make in 2:8 that distinguishes how a believer determines what is true in how they live the gospel?
3. What does it mean to have been given the fullness of Christ? (verses 9-10)

RESPOND by identifying the ways that you are likely to choose human wisdom and principles of this life over dependence on Christ.

REFLECT on your salvation experience. How have you grown in your faith? Are you more deeply rooted now than you were when you started following Christ?

PRAY that you would be aware of ways that you are choosing earthly wisdom over the discernment and wisdom we have in Christ.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Colossians 2:6-23.

Continue —————>

1. What is the intent behind the concepts Paul states in verses 11 and 12? Why does it matter that our circumcision has been done by Christ? What does Paul want us to understand when he uses imagery of being buried and raised by him?
2. What powers is Paul referring to in verse 15? (See Colossians 1:16 and Ephesians 6:12)
3. These verses have a powerful theological foundation rooted in Christology, or the work of Christ. Why do you think Paul took the time to explain these principles to the Colossian believers?

RESPOND by writing out what these verses mean to you, specifically thinking about these ideas: What does it mean to you to experience the fullness of Christ? Why does it matter that Christ, once and for all, defeated the powers and authorities that stand against us?

REFLECT on how you think about your salvation. Do you live with the joy and freedom that comes with knowing you have been given the fullness of Christ?

PRAY that you would have a surrendered heart that is open to living a life that reflects the beauty of Christ.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Colossians 2:6-23.

1. Paul starts verse 16 with the word “therefore.” What principle is he referring to in the previous verse?
2. What do verses 17-19 tell us about ways human rules and regulations can undermine the work of grace that comes from the gospel?
3. What contrast is Paul making in verses 20-23? Why does he want the Colossians to understand the foundation of human rules?

RESPOND by evaluating the way you interact with others. In what ways are you being judgmental and criticizing people based on a set of legalistic and human behaviors? Ask the Spirit to guide you in this process and help you change your attitude when it reflects personal pride or human wisdom.

REFLECT on your beliefs. How do you substitute human rules and regulations in place of following the example of Christ and his way of life? Where have you mixed legalism with the gospel?

PRAY for the discernment and insight to live in a way that reflects death to self and life that comes from knowing Christ.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DO IMMEASURABLY MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO HIS POWER THAT IS AT WORK WITHIN US, TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER AND EVER! AMEN.

EPHESIANS 3:20-21

WEEK NINE | MARCH 12

GROWING IN GRACE

Ephesians 3:14-21

The book of Ephesians provides the explanation of the gospel and life in Christ in powerful and direct ways. If read receptively, it is a bombshell. (Snodgrass 17) John Mackay stated that he believes this letter is the most contemporary book in the Bible. (19) Given the overall tone of the book, it could have easily been written to a church in our time. Unlike other letters, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. It was written to expand the understanding of God's grace and the goals for the Church.

At its core, the message of Ephesians is rooted in understanding our union with Christ, made possible by life in the Spirit. Ephesians presents a gospel of union with Christ more powerfully than any other New Testament letter. (18) While the theme of "in Christ" repeatedly

recurs in Paul's letters, the book of Ephesians has a greater proportion of references than any other letter. (Moo 267) Union with Christ and communion with his body form an integral pattern throughout this epistle. (Horton 735)

The book of Ephesians was likely written as a circular letter, meaning that it was distributed to other churches throughout the region of Asia Minor. Because it was written with a large audience in mind, Paul wanted to convey the idea that Jews and Gentiles alike had a home in this new community based on life in Christ. The message that God's grace and the gospel are open to all rings out in this letter. God's desire is for all who believe to find unity in Christ.

Watch the Bible Project video about Ephesians to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Paul has been writing amazing truths about what it means to be in Christ. Prior to this passage, he declared that we can approach God with freedom and confidence. He now models that by coming to God in prayer for the Ephesian believers. Paul desires that the people would fully appropriate and appreciate God's many spiritual blessings stated in 1:13-14. (Moo 283) As you read and reflect on these powerful verses, may you have a deeper understanding of God's heart for his children.

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Ephesians 3:14-21.

1. Who is the family Paul refers to in his prayer? (verse 14) What is significant about the phrase “*from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name?*”
2. What are the “*glorious riches?*”
3. Why does Paul want the Ephesians to be strengthened with power in their inner being? From whom does this power come?

RESPOND by writing what it means to you to be part of God’s family in heaven and on earth.

REFLECT on the work of the Spirit in your life. Have you given him the freedom to work so that Christ has a more prominent role in your life?

PRAY for the Spirit to awaken these truths in your life.

Journal your thoughts from today’s study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Ephesians 3:14-21.

Continue —→

1. What are the four things Paul prays the believers would experience? (verses 17-19)
2. Describe each of the four things Paul mentions in your own words.

RESPOND by intentionally showing God's love, the kind that surpasses knowledge, to someone you know.

REFLECT on how you have experienced God's love in your life. What barriers stand in the way of believing that you are deeply loved beyond human understanding?

PRAY for the Spirit to help your family realize these truths about their lives.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Ephesians 3:14-21.

1. How would you describe Paul's tone and heart as he writes verses 20 and 21?
2. Why are we able to ask immeasurably more than we can imagine?

3. How should these verses eliminate pride in our understanding of who we are and what we do?

RESPOND by worshiping in a posture of humility and honor as you allow these verses to permeate your understanding of what Christ has done for you and what it means to be united with him.

REFLECT on the work that the Spirit is doing in you by the power of Christ. Identify how you are being changed by his power.

PRAY for the Spirit to help our church family to realize these truths about their lives.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



THEN MAKE MY JOY COMPLETE BY BEING
LIKE-MINDED, HAVING THE SAME LOVE, BEING
ONE IN SPIRIT AND OF ONE MIND.

PHILIPPIANS 2:2

WEEK TEN | MARCH 19

THINKING WELL

Philippians 2:1-11

Philippians, most likely penned in 62 A.D., is another of Paul's letters written while imprisoned. The exact location is uncertain, but he was in Rome. Located in Macedonia, Philippi was on the main highway from Asia to the west and was named after King Phillip II, the father of Alexander the Great. It was a prosperous Roman colony which meant that the citizens of Philippi were also citizens of Rome.

Acts 16 provides background to Paul's first eventful visit to Philippi. It details the conversion of Lydia and her household, the disruption Paul caused when he freed the slave girl from a demon, the ensuing beating and imprisonment for his actions, and the dramatic conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family. These events formed the foundation of the church in Philippi.

Most scholars now agree that, in general, Philippians is a "letter of friendship." It has a warm tone that indicates close, positive, reciprocal relationships and shared fellowship with the gospel. (Moo 298) The message of this

letter focuses on the gospel and its implications in the shared Christian community. Prominent in this letter is the idea of mindset.

Because Paul was writing to Roman citizens, he wanted the Philippian Christians to find their identity in Christ and the gospel message, not in the status or benefits of Roman citizenry. Paul implicitly contrasts the claims of Caesar as "savior" and "lord" with the truth that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord.

Additionally, joy is often seen as the key theme in Philippians. Paul didn't write this letter to answer any theological question or address an issue in the church. Instead, he wrote it to express and encourage joy. (Swindoll Vol. 9 11) The book of Philippians guides the reader to think correctly about Jesus and themselves while reminding them that our salvation brings joy that causes us to shine like stars. (Philippians 2:15)

Watch the Bible Project video about Philippians to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Paul begins chapter two by repeating a call to unity using the language of thinking or "mindset." (Moo 303) This passage has both a corporate and individual focus on humility. Unity is possible when self-interest and the interests of others are in balance. The result of holding these two in tension is love. The key to living in this manner is rooted in understanding the person and work of Christ, who exhibited humility and self-sacrifice.

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Philippians 2:1-11.

1. Identify the “if” statements Paul makes in 2:1. According to this verse what is the result of those statements?
2. What are the four qualities mentioned in verse two?
3. How do unity and humility go together?

RESPOND by intentionally looking for ways to “esteem others” and consider their interests over yours. Do this at home and in the workplace this week.

REFLECT on what it means as a believer to be like-minded in love, spirit, and purpose with other believers.

PRAY that the Spirit will give you wisdom in how you can encourage others because of the unity you have in Christ.

Journal your thoughts from today’s study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Philippians 2:1-11.

1. How are attitude and mindset similar terms? What does it mean to you to have the attitude or mindset of Jesus?

Continue —→

2. Rewrite verses 6 and 7 in your own words. What do these verses say about the character of Christ? About his purpose?
3. What does verse 8 reveal about the deity of Christ? About his humanity? About his choices?
4. How would you define humility?

RESPOND by choosing a posture of humility in your actions with others. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings in those interactions. What makes it challenging to practice humility?

REFLECT on the indescribable choice that Jesus made to come to earth as God in the flesh. Spend time this week allowing that reality to penetrate your understanding of what your salvation cost.

PRAY a prayer of gratitude to Jesus for the work of the cross and the gift of redemption.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Philippians 2:1-11.

1. Describe in your own words what God did when he exalted Jesus above every other name. How does (should) that reality impact you and how you live?
2. What does it mean that every knee will bow at the name of Jesus? Does that refer to believers or non-believers? What does the phrase, “*under the earth*” mean?

RESPOND by writing ways that you acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus in your life.

REFLECT on the glory of Jesus. Let that understanding permeate your thinking about the way that you think about your salvation. Ask yourself if the example of Jesus’ humility and sacrifice motivates you to live the same way.

PRAY that you will live with a posture of humility toward others.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



1 TIMOTHY 4:6

IF YOU POINT THESE THINGS OUT TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS, YOU WILL BE A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS, NOURISHED ON THE TRUTHS OF THE FAITH AND OF THE GOOD TEACHING THAT YOU HAVE FOLLOWED.

WEEK ELEVEN | MARCH 26

INTEGRITY

1 Timothy 4:1-16

Although some debate the authenticity that 1 Timothy was written by Paul, the majority of theologians acknowledge that this pastoral epistle was authored by him.

The book of Acts ends with Paul sitting in a Roman prison awaiting his hearing before the Roman emperor, a privilege of appeal that all Roman citizens possessed. However, the writing of the Pastoral Epistles clearly dates to a time after the events of Acts. So where was Paul when he wrote 1 Timothy? Paul had expected the Romans to release him from prison, something that likely happened near the end of AD 62. His release allowed him the opportunity to travel to Ephesus and eventually place Timothy in ministry at that church. Paul then went on to preach in Macedonia, where he heard reports of Timothy's work at Ephesus that prompted him to write 1 Timothy, probably in AD 63. (Swindoll God's Masterworks)

Although the book is written to the church in Ephesus, 1 Timothy opens with Paul greeting Timothy as a son in the faith. This personal salutation indicates the close relationship between the mentor, Paul, and his mentee, Timothy. From the town of Lystra, with a Greek father and a Jewish mother, Timothy was enlisted by Paul in his missionary work on his second missionary journey. (Moo 318) From then on, Timothy is closely associated with Paul and is mentioned eighteen times, in addition to the references in 1 and 2 Timothy.

All three pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) address issues of false teaching. Paul is clearly encouraging Timothy to instruct teachers to stop teaching false doctrines. (1:3) Additionally, 1 Timothy addresses practical concerns about worship, qualifications for leadership, how to care for different groups of people, and a personal charge to Timothy on how to live as a young leader.

Watch the Bible Project video about 1 Timothy to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

This passage opens with a stern warning to avoid the false teaching that deceives Christ-followers into believing that outward behavior is enough to bring about spiritual growth and maturity. Paul may be referencing first century "sorcerers" or preachers who would wander around the Roman empire perpetuating scams where they would cheat or swindle people by teaching false doctrines that said the material creation was inherently evil. (Leifeld 150) Therefore, Paul urges them to remember that everything God created is good and should be received with thanks-

giving. Paul wants the Ephesian Christians to see how God gives good gifts and that receiving them can be an act of worship. The passage goes on to provide insights about living a life that reflects Christ.

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

1. What is meant by the term “*later times?*”
2. Why is the false teaching Paul mentions in 4:2-3 so detrimental to the truth of the gospel?
3. Rewrite verse 4 in your own words to better grasp the meaning. How does this verse help us embrace the goodness of the world God created?

RESPOND this week by enjoying the simple things of each day as a gift from our creator God. Take time to worship the beauty of the day, the pleasure in a meal, or the joy in your marriage or a deep friendship.

REFLECT on how believing false teaching has caused you to compromise the truth of God’s Word and the message of the gospel.

PRAY that you will be able to discern truth and embrace God’s good gifts with an attitude of worship.

Journal your thoughts from today’s study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

Continue —————>

1. What does Paul instruct believers to do in verse 6? How do interactions like he's suggesting impact the body?
2. Paul's inference is that we should train for godliness. Why?
3. What purpose does Paul give to labor?

RESPOND this week by intentionally practicing rhythms that will train you for godliness. If you don't know where to begin, start with a consistent time with Jesus by reading his Word and praying. Use this devotional guide to get you started.

REFLECT on the hope you have in Christ and how you are living that out in your attitudes and interactions with others. Ask yourself if people who know you would say that you are a hopeful person.

PRAY for the strength and perseverance to practice rhythms and habits that will result in a godly character and lifestyle.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

1. To whom is Paul writing in 4:11? (See 1:2) Paul specifically writes verse 12 to young people, but how does this verse instruct believers of all ages to live?

2. What three actions is Timothy told to practice devotedly?

3. Why is Timothy to be diligent in how he lives? (4:16)

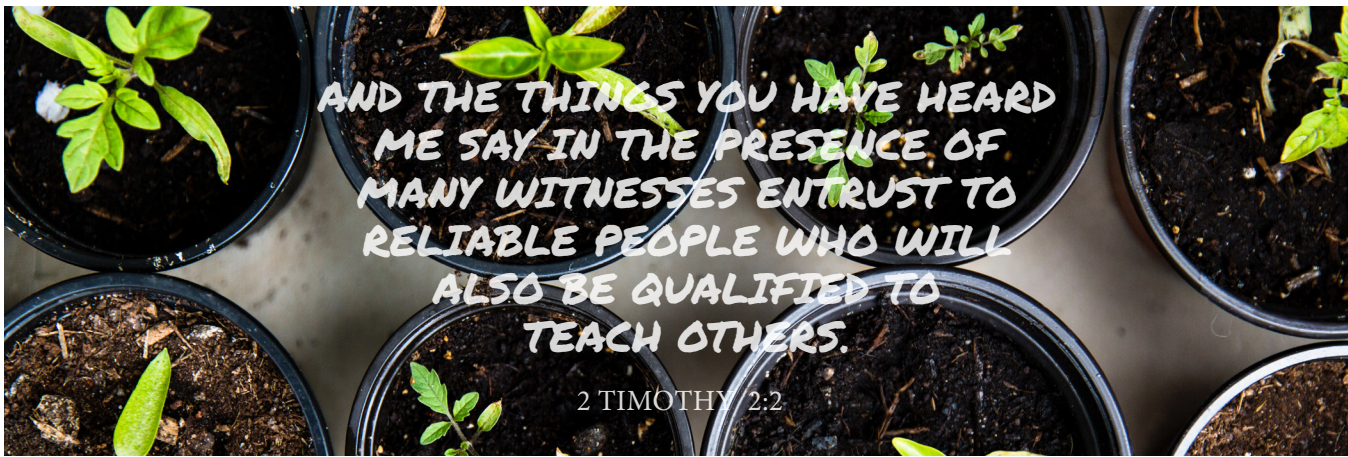
RESPOND by setting an example for others in the way you speak, love, and reveal faith.

REFLECT on the gifts and abilities that you've been given. Are you choosing to use those gifts for the good of others?

PRAY that you would believe the true gospel and that you would live that out in your life each day.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



WEEK TWELVE | APRIL 2

LEAVING A LEGACY

2 Timothy 2:1-13

After being released from prison in Rome 62/63 A.D., and after his fourth missionary journey and the writing of 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul was again imprisoned by Nero in 66 or 67 A.D. Paul writes his second letter to Timothy under sentence of death: “*For I am already poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.*” (4:6) Unlike his first imprisonment in Rome where he was in a rented house, this imprisonment is much worse, and he languished like a common criminal chained in a cold dungeon. Paul knew that his ministry and his earthly life were nearly over.

Paul’s purpose in writing 2 Timothy was similar to that in 1 Timothy and Titus. False teaching continued to be an issue, although there was a shift from teaching about

others to focusing more on the character and ministry of Timothy himself. Paul is aware that this is his last opportunity to speak into the life of his close friend and colleague (his “dear son” 1:2), as he seeks to form him in his own faith and character as a minister of the gospel. (Moo 340) While the desire to speak into Timothy’s life and ministry is one focus of the letter, Paul was also concerned about the condition and future of the church under the persecution of Nero. His impending death means he will no longer be around to teach believers, plant churches, and preserve doctrine. (340)

The gospel is now in the hands of others, like Timothy, who will teach and, having been taught, will teach others who will teach.... (2 Timothy 2:2)

Watch the Bible Project video about 2 Timothy to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Chapter two opens with a personal word of encouragement to Timothy and a renewed challenge to be strong in God’s grace. Verse 2 is the crux of this passage as he exhorts Timothy to entrust the word to qualified and faithful teachers who would be able to preserve true Christian doctrine. (Moo 342) Three illustrations in this passage reinforce Paul’s message to Timothy. Each one helps to clarify the importance of discipline in moving the gospel forward, especially in challenging circumstances. These verses speak to the faithfulness of God and the power that we have because Christ has been raised from the dead. Inherent in this passage is the ongoing legacy that we leave as we entrust the gospel to others who continue to do the same.

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13.

1. What is the tone of verse 1? Think about how Paul addresses Timothy. How do you think Timothy responded to Paul's greeting?
2. What does it mean to be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus?
3. What is the intent of verse 2? Use one word to describe the overall focus of the verse.

RESPOND by looking for ways to disciple people in your life. If you are a parent, take time to intentionally invest in your children so that they grow in their faith.

REFLECT on individuals who disciplined you and helped you grow in your faith. Take time to thank them for their impact in your life.

PRAY for the discipline and desire to walk with someone on their faith journey. Look for practical ways to invest in that person's life.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13.

1. What are the three examples Paul uses in verses 3-8?

Continue —————>

2. What is the focus in the example of the soldier?
3. What does Paul want Timothy to understand from the example of the athlete?
4. What is the reward of the farmer who works hard?

RESPOND by choosing to discipline yourself, like the soldier, athlete, and farmer, to spend time in the Word and praying.

REFLECT on verse 7. Paul tells Timothy to reflect on what he has just said. What insights did you glean from reflecting on these examples?

PRAY for the desire to diligently live with Jesus, love like Jesus, and lead others to do the same.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13.

1. Why does Paul want Timothy to remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and that he was also a descendant from David?

2. How did that knowledge give Paul the courage to live for the gospel even while chained in prison? What picture does Paul create by using the word chained two times in verse 9?

3. What are the “*trustworthy sayings*” that Paul makes in verses 11-13? How are you challenged by these realities?

RESPOND by journaling your thoughts on the trustworthy sayings. When have you endured, disowned, or been faithless in your faith? Thank God for his grace in your life and confess times you have not been faithful in your relationship with Jesus.

REFLECT on what it means to endure everything so that the elect may gain salvation in Christ Jesus. Ask yourself if that statement is true of you.

PRAY for clarity on what it means to live a life that leaves a godly legacy. Ask the Lord to give you insights on how you can do that starting today.

*Journal your thoughts about how this passage is shaping
a better understanding of the gospel in you.*

NOTES:



THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

WEEK THIRTEEN | APRIL 9

LIVING THE RESURRECTED LIFE

Philemon; Colossians 1:3-14

As we prepare for Easter, Philemon provides a practical example of how we can live a resurrected life.

This personal letter from Paul to Philemon could be described as a postcard. Twenty-five verses long, the letter appeals to Philemon to see value in Onesimus, a slave from Philemon's household who had run away from his owner, possibly because he had stolen from his master. (Swindoll Vol. 9 202) Onesimus fled to Rome from Colossae where, in God's providence, he met Paul and became a follower of Christ. Paul's letter to Philemon details the story of Paul's appeal to accept Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother in Christ.

This short letter contains important messages of forgiveness, freedom, grace, and love. Each of these actions sums up the redemptive work of the cross and reminds us of all we receive from Jesus through his death on the cross. Our study in Philemon this week gives us the opportunity to reflect on the gifts we have received because of Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. Read this letter and imagine yourself as Onesimus. Reflect on

the forgiveness and freedom you've received because of the grace and love of God. This book is a great example of what it means to live the gospel.

On an interesting historical note: Onesimus, the slave, later becomes the bishop of Ephesus. He is described by Ignatius as a "man of inexpressible love." (202) As a church leader, now most likely 70 years old, he contends for the faith by standing up against false teachers. Ignatius writes to the church in Ephesus, "Onesimus himself praises your good discipline in God, because you all live according to the truth and that no heresy dwells among you, but you do not even so much as hear anyone unless he speaks truthfully about Christ Jesus." (Ignatius Ephesians 6.2)

What an example for us today! May our lives reflect the same transforming power of the cross as that of Onesimus as we embrace the redemptive work of the gospel in who we are and what we do.

Watch the Bible project video of Philemon to get a context of the book.

DAY ONE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Philemon and Colossians 1:3-6.

1. Paul is writing this letter from prison to Philemon, who is a believer in the church in Colossae. What is the tone of verses 1-3? Think about each phrase that Paul uses in this verse. Why do you think he chose them?
2. How are the prayers in Philemon and Colossians similar? What is different?
3. How does verse 6 in Paul's greeting to Philemon lay the foundation for the request that follows?

RESPOND by applying verse 6 of Philemon and share your faith with someone this week. Intentionally guide a conversation toward the gospel, serve someone in a practical way whom you are struggling to appreciate, or choose another way that the Spirit is leading you to actively practice your faith.

REFLECT on verses 4 and 5 of Philemon. What people can you identify that fit Paul's description in the way they live their faith? Are there people who would write to you like Paul wrote to Philemon because you are living your faith in a similar manner?

PRAY for opportunities to live your faith in a way that brings joy and encouragement to others.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY TWO

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Philemon.

Continue —→

1. Describe the way that Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus. What is the basis of his appeal to Philemon?
2. How does Paul describe the relationship he has with Onesimus?
3. How does Paul want Philemon to view Onesimus?

RESPOND by forgiving someone who has hurt you and think about ways you can restore the relationship. (Forgiveness is a powerful step toward freedom in your own life. But it doesn't always require a restored relationship if the reason for the hurt was the result of an abusive relationship.)

REFLECT on how Paul perceived Onesimus. Paul saw the worth and value of Onesimus through the lens of the transformation he experienced in Christ. Take time to think about how you have experienced transformation in your life.

PRAY words of gratitude for the work of the Spirit in you, changing and transforming you into Christ-likeness.

Journal your thoughts from today's study in the space provided after the devotional.

DAY THREE

Pray for openness and receptivity to the Word and the Spirit.

READ Philemon.

1. How is Paul challenging the way Philemon thinks about receiving Onesimus? How does Paul's use of the word partner stretch your understanding of how we look at one another in the body of Christ?

2. Carefully read verses 19-21 and imagine that you are receiving Paul's letter. Describe the tone of these verses. How do you think you would have responded to Paul's request?

3. What can we glean about the importance of life in the church from verses 22-25?

RESPOND by offering words of encouragement to your family, friends, and people you know at Hershey Free Church. Take to heart the words of verse 21 and apply them in your relationships.

REFLECT on those who are your friends on your journey of faith. How do you give them permission to challenge and encourage you the way Paul did in his letter to Philemon? Are you willing to have deep relationships with a few people who know you best?

PRAY for the Spirit's work in your life to treat one another with the grace, mercy, and truth revealed in this letter to Philemon.

During this Easter season, journal your thoughts about how this letter to Philemon is an example from Paul to you about how to live the gospel.

NOTES:

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