

A Bible Study based on 1 Peter 3:10-15

Loving Life



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Foreword

I can't remember not being a part of the Lord's church and a part of the family of God. I was in church soon after birth, and I can remember being five years old, standing on the pews so I could see better, waving one of those "church fans" to keep cool like all the other church ladies did. At the age of eight I gave my life to Jesus, in high school I was known as the "Christian girl," and I went on to Bible college and later married a minister. You could say I was eaten up with it. I know I am blessed to have a heritage of faith.

How then, for most of my twenties, did I find myself so distraught, so lacking in understanding, so lacking in the experience of walking in the goodness of the Lord? The Word of God says, *"My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; and honorable men are famished, and their multitude is parched with thirst."* The Lord is speaking to His people in this passage through the prophet Isaiah (5:13). His people are struggling and are about to go into exile because they don't really know God and His ways.

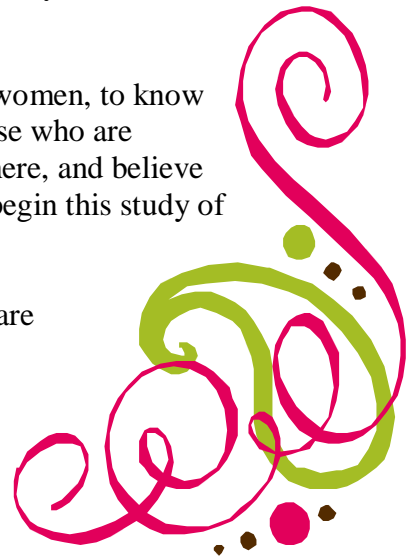
In my early twenties, my life was parched. I felt like I had been put into exile. I struggled with that because I was a Christian. My husband was a minister. I was supposed to have it all together, and although I did a good job of acting like it, I was literally a mess! I didn't love my life—in fact, I despaired of it. How did I end up that way? I will tell you how: a lack of knowledge of God's goodness, of His ways, of His plans and of His LIFE literally dwelling in me. I had the God of the universe alive in me, yet beyond church attendance, some morality choices and a few "Christian activities," there wasn't much else to show for it.

Praise God for His mercy that reached into my pit and showed me a better way to live this Christian life. No matter our circumstances, I believe with all my heart that God desires us to love our life in Him. What an adventure ride it can be when we embrace His LIFE within us. His Truth, His Ways, His Plans can bring a sense of joy and fulfillment to life that is a step above anything this world can offer! We can love our life in Christ. I do! I really do! Praise the Lord for His grace that He brought me to this place of loving life!

Because of that, I have such a heart for women, especially Christian women, to know God's intent for their life. And ... my heart breaks, especially for those who are struggling, who are parched, who are in despair of life. I have been there, and believe me, God has a better plan! Wherever you are, be encouraged as you begin this study of God's Word and He shows you some things about Himself!

Loving Life—it promises to be a journey for all of us. I am glad you are along for the ride!

Blessings!



Week 1

Intent on Loving Life

Memorization

1 Peter 3:10a “Let him who means to love life and see good days...”

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy;
I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.”

I can't wait to get started with you on this study because I know that God has much to show us. But before we dig in, it would be wise for us to consider some background information. The book of 1 Peter was written by Peter to Christians, Jewish and Gentile, who were facing the threat of persecution. This is not the Peter with a divided heart we saw at the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the same person, but he has had a major heart change since Jesus has risen from the grave and Peter has been filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, God lives within him. Now, he has been persecuted for his faith and has even faced death. As you read this book, you find Peter hasn't backed down; he has embraced a life of living in Christ; he loves it and he has called us to do the same. And Peter draws on a rich heritage of faith he has as a Jewish Christian. Several times he quotes scripture from the Old Testament. 1 Peter 3:10-15 is also found in Psalm 34. Consider also, Peter is writing to Christians who are being faced with all manner of persecution and he is saying, “If you are serious about loving your life, if you really mean for that to happen...”

Have you ever done something and said, “I didn't mean to!” I know I have. Sometimes those words are just a way out of a sticky situation, and then sometimes I *really* didn't mean to do it. Whatever happened really wasn't my plan or intent. These words are classic for the child when he spills the milk, forgets his homework, or breaks a window with a baseball bat—that old line “I didn't mean to.” We've all heard it. We've all said it. Here Peter asks us to consider the opposite. He wants us to love our life in Christ on purpose!

The Bible is clear that when we come to the end of our life we will have to give an account to God for the life he lived and what he meant to do (Romans 14:11-12). Sometimes I wonder what we will say about all we have accomplished. Will we say, “I meant this, but I didn't mean that”? And I wonder what God will think of our efforts.

So the question is, as God is living within us, what are we meaning to do with these grand lives that we have been given? Accomplish a bunch of stuff with no substance that really matters, or reach for excellence in a way that causes us to truly love and experience each moment and causes us to give glory to the God who lives within us? Are we just bumbling through, experiencing special memory moments and man's upgrades to society that seem to make our life more meaningful or is there purpose? What is God's intent for your life that He gave you, and what is your intent as you live it?

God's intent is to live abundantly in you. God created man and woman and put them in the most beautiful garden ever; provisions and beauty were abundant, and relationship was unhindered between man and woman and between them and God, too. After creating man, “He blessed them and gave them charge over everything, giving them permission for all their heart desired except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 1:28). It sounds like a good time to me! God meant it that way. However, one chapter later, man lost his way, messed up, chose something else, and struggle entered in. But that doesn't change the original intent of God. Years later He sent us a savior, Jesus, who said, “I have come to give life and life abundantly” (John 10:10). In other words, He was going to literally put His life within us so we could have life abundant, in spite of the fact that we had messed up. His original intent was still there.

God's intent is to live abundantly in you. And guess what—He is the only one with the owner's manual because He created you. He knows what you need to enjoy your life, to love your life. But ... what is *your* intent? God has always given a choice. He didn't make Adam and Eve obey Him and love their life with Him; He gave them a choice. (See Genesis 2:16-17.) He wouldn't make His children in the wilderness obey Him and love their life with Him; He gave them a choice. (See Deuteronomy 30:15.) And also here in I Peter 3:10, it says, "He who desires or means to love his life and see good days." The NIV says "Whoever would." We have to choose.

It has been proven through history that not everyone is interested in loving life with God. Some are hell-bent on messing it up, being ungrateful for it, apathetic to it, or just too lazy to pursue it at all. But for those of us who are intent, who are purposeful to love our life in Him, the Lord has some instructions. In the next seven weeks we will look at them. These instructions are kind of like an umbrella for us to keep us safe, to protect us, and to give us a life in Christ that is abundant. God is going to share His heart with us, so we can enjoy our life.

It is so easy to get wishy-washy. You see, a dreadful thing happened when Adam and Eve made that choice in the garden; a sickness invaded us all. A sickness of sin and self-focus and discontent with all we have. But God was willing to allow His life to live in us to undo our choice. That's why Jesus died—so we could embrace life with Him living in us!

So this isn't just talking about loving any old life, it is talking about loving the life of God in us, His life we have chosen. We have to be purposeful about it. He has given us the opportunity to have His life in ours, full of all its power, full of all its adventure, full of all its excitement. His life in ours—incredible! Because of your sinful nature, your flesh will always tell you that what God has given is not enough, to look to the tree in the middle of the garden and desire that. And in so doing, you get so fixated on what you don't have that you miss the love of what you do have: God living in you. You can easily come to the end of your life and not love it. You won't have spent your days well at all.

I love what Paul tells Timothy. **"Pursue a righteous life, a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, courtesy. Run hard and fast in the faith. Seize the eternal life, the life you were called to, the life you so fervently embraced" (I Tim 6:11-12).** You have to purposefully mean to love and embrace this life ... or you won't.

And as we purpose this, we have to acknowledge that God is the only one who knows how we can truly love our life because it is really His life. If God is living within you, then He probably knows the best way for you to live. He has a master plan for how your life could work best. These passages that we will look at in the next seven weeks are going to show us the basics of His overall master plan. When we plan to spend time with someone then we have to make a plan of how it will work out best, what the guidelines are. Usually someone has to take the lead. God has come to live in us for the rest of our days, and we would be wise to let Him take the lead, to share with us what He likes best, how He likes things to work. That is what He does in these verses.

That isn't always the way that I live, though. Why? Because I am not allowing the great God who lives in me to be in charge. Adam and Eve thought they found a better way than God being in charge. As a result, they ended up not loving their life; in fact they lost their life, they lost God within them. And you know what Adam said when God questioned him: "I didn't mean to, Eve made me do it." It sounds like he had his intentions all mixed up. So as we begin this study, this is the foundation from verse 10.

- It is God's intention that you love your life in Him.
- You have to be intentional about loving it.
- The life we are talking about loving is His life within you. Since that is true, you have to let Him lead it.

Purpose yourself. Determine today that God has given you a life, His life within you, and you are going to make the most of every day of it! You aren't going to waste it; you are going to live it to the fullest. And at the end of time, when you stand before God and give an account for your life, He just may say, "You had a good life." And you can say, "I meant to, I really meant to!"

Intent on Loving Life

Study Day One

Understanding “LIFE” Within Me

Walking the face of this planet are millions of people who have invited the Lord Jesus into their lives to save them. They have named Him Lord. If you are a Christian you are part of the many who now have LIFE. Think back to the day you became a Christian. Describe by filling in the blanks.

Where were you? _____ How old were you? _____

What caused you to make this decision? _____

Describe your understanding at that time of what it meant to be a Christian. _____

Has your understanding changed at all? Explain. _____

As we begin, we want to visit our understanding of being “in Christ.”

Look at Romans 3:9, 10 and 23. Who needs Christ? _____ Why? _____

Read Genesis chapters 2 and 3 and Romans 5:12 and 19. How did we end up in this horrible state?

Take a look back at Genesis 2:17. What did God say would happen if they ate from the tree? _____

Did they physically die when they sinned? _____

Was there a death? _____ What do you think God meant? _____

I became a Christian when I was 8 years old. Just as a baby doesn’t understand the life it is being born into, neither did I. I just knew that I believed in Jesus and I wanted to go to heaven. That is where most people start. The problem is that if we never grow in our understanding, it will be very hard for us to love our life in Christ.

I still marvel at the way God gave me understanding when I began to seek it from Him. I don’t think I will ever get over His grace on my life. In fact, the more I think about it, the more I get enthralled with it. God is so good! Even as a young child, I understood that I was a sinner, that Jesus died for me and if I would accept Him, I could go to heaven. It sounded good to me. So I walked forward during the invitation at church one chilly Sunday night in March, accepted Christ, and was baptized into Him. I was a Christian. I had been born again. Now what did that mean? To be honest, I really wasn’t sure. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. Read and think about John 3:1-7.

God brought that scripture to life for me as I sought Him for understanding. That one and many others, too. I had been born as a baby physically, but I needed to be born again spiritually. Why? Remember how God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree they would surely die. Did they die physically? Yes, eventually they did die physically because of this sin, but another death affected them immediately. And when we sin, we experience this same death. Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

So because of sin, our spirit is dead. Our sinful choices and nature won't allow the spirit of God to live within us. We are alive physically but dead spiritually. We need the spirit of God to be born in us again. How does that happen? Can it happen?

Yes it can! Read John 10:10. What did Jesus come to give us? _____

For years I thought that meant that one day I could go to heaven. I thought Jesus died for me to forgive me and give me a chance to be good enough. I thought that if I did all the Christian things right, one day maybe I could go to heaven. But I was wrong. My understanding was hazy at best. The Greek word for life here is "zoe." That word means the life of God. Jesus came to give us an abundant life with God living in us again. Because Jesus died for us, when we receive Him, His spirit literally comes to life again in us; it is **reborn** in us. My spirit is no longer "dead in sin" but is "reborn in Christ."

That is what it means to be a Christian. His life in us will live forever, so yes, we will go to heaven. But God is living in me now and He wants to live there abundantly.

It all started at the fall of Adam and Eve. Ever since, people all over the planet have needed rebirth. Praise God for sending Jesus on our behalf, or we would still be dead in sin, without the life of God in us. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. Think about it. What intention do you see here? What do you think was on God's heart when He sent Jesus on our behalf? _____

So if I am one of the people on the planet who have accepted this gift of grace, then the life of God is living in me. What kind of life is that, anyway? Meet me here tomorrow and we will talk about just that.

P.S. Did you review your memorization work today? Make sure you get started!

Put in
your own
words
what it
means to
be a
Christian.

Intent on Loving Life

Study Day Two

What Kind of "LIFE" Is This?

I always marvel at people who take others into their home, people they don't know. I think God has given them a gift of overwhelming hospitality, to be able to take others in and make them feel like they belong there. Maybe you are one of those people. Or maybe someone has taken you in at some point. Home is a personal place. I am sure this sounds selfish, but if someone is going to come and stay with me, I want to know them. God has never called me to invite someone to live with us; perhaps one day He will. I hope I will be tender to His leading if He asks me to do so.

I remember sitting in the nursery we had decorated for my daughter. We were waiting for her to be born, waiting to get the call from our adoption attorney that she had arrived in this world safe and sound. We couldn't wait to pick her up and bring her home. Rocking back and forth in the rocking chair, my heart was longing to hold her, longing to know her. I didn't just want to bring her home, I wanted to know her, what she looked like, what made her smile, what her dreams were, what her sweet eyes danced about. Likewise, by the grace of God, we become a Christian when the God of heaven comes to live in us, when His spirit is reborn in us. He knows us for sure and certain, even

before we were even born He knew us (Psalm 139:15-16). But, in reality, when most people become Christians, it is like bringing someone home they don't even know. And it isn't temporary; He is coming to live there forever. Talk about invading your personal space—there is no hiding anything from Him. It is all there for Him to see. You can't hide anything in the closet, or stuff it under the bed. He gets free reign of the whole house. Actually, He could see everything before we invited Him in, we just didn't know that either.

So who is this God who has come to live His life in us? Do we know Him? Do we know what makes Him smile, what makes His eyes dance? Do we know what frustrates Him? Do we know what His dreams are? If we have invited Him to live in us forever, we would be wise to know Him. So who is He? The best way to find out is to let Him tell us Himself. He does that in His Word.

What do the following scriptures tell you about God who is now living in you?

- Genesis 28:3 _____
- Exodus 34:14 _____
- Psalms 80:4 _____
- II Samuel 7:22 _____
- John 1:18 _____
- Isaiah 40:28-29 _____
- Numbers 23:19 _____
- Isaiah 40:18-26 _____
- Romans 11:33-36 _____
- Isaiah 57:15 _____
- Jeremiah 32:17 _____
- Psalms 139:7-12 _____
- I John 3:20 _____
- Psalms 5:5-6 _____
- I John 4:8 _____
- Revelation 4:8 _____
- Psalms 121:3 _____
- Psalms 18:30 _____

What is
your
favorite
part about
God living
in You?

Psalm 66:2_____

We could go on and on about our great God who lives within us. There is a lot more to tell than what we just found out. It doesn't matter what you have done or could accomplish on your own; when you invited the God of the Universe to live in you, you made the best choice in the world. Suppose you were telling a friend about the One who came to live in you. How would you describe Him? _____

I shared with you earlier that I think it would be really hard to bring someone home to live with us. I guess I am a little possessive of my space. I just know myself too well. I would have good intentions, I am sure, but after the newness wore off, I am afraid I would start to wonder, "Are you planning to pack your bags anytime soon? It's getting a little crowded in here." As I write this, I am also wondering what I have opened myself up to now! Time will tell.

So what about you? Did you know what you were in for when you brought Jesus home to live in You? Has it ever gotten a bit too crowded? Be honest. _____

The truth is, once we understand who God really is, it is humbling to know that we have the God of the Universe living within us. It can also get a little uncomfortable at times. For goodness sakes, let's be really honest here: it can get a lot uncomfortable at times. When that is the case, and believe me, I have been there, it is just an indicator we really don't know and understand the life living in us.

The title of our lesson today is "What kind of Life is This?" Let's put it bluntly. God living in You through the life of Christ is not some kind of life, He is LIFE. Look at the following scriptures that describe what happens when Christ comes to live in us.

John 11:25_____

Colossians 3:4_____

1 John 5:12_____

The Greek word from which we get the English word "life" is the word **zoe**.

So what is Jesus saying when He says He "is Life"? He is letting us know that the fullness of life is found in all He has to offer, all He brings with Him, all He is. He isn't a kind of life, He *is* life.

ZOE - of the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God, life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed

Somehow we get it all mixed up. But He is so good, He is so patient. When we really want to know, He tells us what He wants us to do with His life living in us. Do you really want to know? Or have you known before, but need to be reminded? Meet me here tomorrow and we'll work it through together.

Pssst! I put your verses right here so you wouldn't forget to review them.

Memorization

1 Peter 3:10a "Let him who means to love life and see good days..."

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy;

I came that they might have life and have it abundantly."

Intent on Loving Life

Study Day Three

Resurrection "LIFE"

I love how the pieces of God's Word fit together, giving one message over and over again. Over the years as the Lord has given me a heart for His Word, I have marveled at the ways it repeats the same message in a fresh way, but in such a way that it never contradicts itself. Amazing!

Earlier this week we looked at Adam and Eve and their sinful choice in the Garden of Eden that caused spiritual death for them and all mankind. Who said our choices affect us alone? Literally their spirit died within them because of the sinful choice they made. God cannot tolerate sin. Literally our spirit died within us, too, because of the sinful choices we made. When something is dead, it is dead. That is the final word, right? It is unless you serve the Almighty God, Creator and Ruler of not only the universe but LIFE itself. He specializes in resurrection, bringing new life to that which was dead. The Word of God is full of that message.

Think about it: Adam and Eve and all of mankind needed a resurrection of the spirit. The penalty for sin was death. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, took all of our sin upon Him and paid the penalty for us so that we could escape it. After He was crucified, all hope seemed lost. Mankind was dead spiritually because of sin, and now Jesus was dead physically because of our sin. It was over; death had won spiritually and physically. But remember... we serve the Almighty God, Creator and Ruler of not only the universe but LIFE itself.

Read Matthew 28:5-6. God took care of it all, the death of His Son Jesus and our spiritual death in sin. What did God do to overcome all of this? _____

The resurrection of Jesus not only brought Him back to life but it gave the opportunity for life in our spirit again, too. He was resurrected, and He gives us the chance to live resurrection lives now and throughout forever. Read the familiar John 3:16. The word used here for life is "zoe."

When we invite Jesus to live in us and resurrect our spirit, it is more than a spiritual ceremony. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, the world has been changed forever. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, God wants you to be affected forever, too. Remember the question we ended with in Day Two, “so what does He want us to do with the life of God in us?” Here is the answer. He wants us to live it in a resurrected way. A way that is full of God life, life that can only be brought about by His hand. Listen to what He says in Romans 8:11. Think about it. What is that telling you?

I believe He is telling us all that the resurrection of Jesus has great potential for us, too. In reality, death that came because of sin affected every part of us. It affected our spirit in that it died; it brought death to our physical bodies in that they are now wasting away; and it also brought death to the way we experience life through our mind will and emotions. Sin affects everything, don't let it fool you.

Well, the resurrection affects everything, too. Not only does the resurrection of Jesus give life to my spirit if I am in Christ, one I will receive a new body, and you will, too. (See I Corinthians 15:51-53.) That sure brings a smile to my face that is starting to sprout wrinkles and a few unwanted hairs here and there. (Are we loving life or what?) And that is not all, either. It is God's intent that our soul or some would say our flesh (our mind, will, and emotions) also get in on this resurrection. God wants to resurrect your spirit, your body *and* your soul. Remember on Day Two when we were honest and shared how it sometimes got a bit crowded having God living within us? What were we really saying?

Full Effects of Resurrection

Spirit which was dead - is reborn

Body which is wasting away – receive a new one in heaven

Soul which makes sinful, dead-end choices – transformed by the life of God as we yield to Him

I know what I was saying. I was coming out with the fact that sometimes I want my own way. Sometimes I get tired of considering God who lives within me. Or to put it bluntly, sometimes I don't even bother; I just do my own thing. But let's not forget Who it is that lives within us. It is God Himself, the One able to resurrect. That kind of selfish living is dead living. God can resurrect us from that, too, and it is His intent to do so. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 in the Message Bible. Here it is.

“It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.”

So not only does He resurrect our spirit and body but our soul/flesh as well. Do you ever feel like your mind, will, and emotions are in a state of death? God allows us to live in death if we choose that. Read Romans 1:24-32. Have you ever found yourself in some of these places? _____

Let's be clear: That isn't God's intent for you. When He comes to live in you, He wants to resurrect you from any kind of living that is self-focused so you can love your life in Him. He will do that as you yield to Him that lives within you. That was His intent from the beginning. It is the message of His Word over and over again.

Same time, same place tomorrow, and we'll bring it all together!

***Hey, don't close that book without hiding God's Word in your heart.
Practice your memorization!***

Intent on Loving Life

Study Day Four

Loving "LIFE," All of It!

Let's review!

Being a Christian means that Jesus is _____ in me.

Because He lives in me, I will live _____.

Adam and Eve chose sin and it affected _____.

Three attributes of God who lives in me are _____, _____, _____.

Sometimes it can seem to get a bit _____ with God living within me.

Jesus doesn't just bring life to me, He is _____.

Jesus rose from the dead and God wants me to live a _____ life.

He wants to resurrect my _____, which is dead because of sin.

He wants to resurrect my _____, which is wasting away because of sin.

He wants to resurrect my _____, which is still leading me in a "dead lifestyle" because of sin.

Now I will fill in the last one for you. It is where we will bring it all together today.

If I am going to truly love any part of the Life of God in me, I have to love all of it!

We all love to talk about the resurrection of Christ. It is the good news. God overcame death; that brings us hope. When we receive Christ, immediately His Spirit comes to live in our spirit, and we know that one day we will have a new body. As we have been discussing, though, there is an area where the resurrection also brings struggle, an area where we have to join in and get involved: our soul.

My soul, mind, will, and emotions are so used to living their own way, doing their own thing and feeling all manner of ways. When I invite Christ to live in me, sometimes it can get a bit crowded. We talked about that on Day Two. This is because I have been in charge; I have made all the decisions. Now the God of the universe is living in me--the God who is LIFE itself is living in me. Too often our ideas seem to contradict. Ever had a houseguest like that? So what needs to happen? It should be quite obvious. If the choice is between God's idea or mine, it doesn't take much to figure out that God's plan is sure to be better. I know that and I know you know that, but we sometimes feel and think and want very differently. Hence, the struggle. So what do we do?

Remember, God wants us to love our life in Him; He doesn't want us to just endure it or struggle through it. There will be a struggle, but the struggle should be with ourselves, not with Him.

Consider when Jesus went to the cross. There was a great struggle. His soul, mind, will, and emotions wanted no part of it. What does it say in Luke 22:41-42? _____

As we know, Jesus had to put to death His own desires. He had to crucify them. If He hadn't, there would never have been a resurrection.

We want a resurrection, too. We want to resurrect the lifestyles of sin we have chosen that produce "death-like things" in our lives. There has to be a death first. A death to our own wants, thoughts, and feelings so that His can be resurrected in us. Read Galatians 2:20 and put it in your own words.

If we don't embrace that part of Christ, there is always going to be a struggle going on, a struggle where our will is battling His. It will always seem crowded in the "house." The starting point is this: If we want to love our life in Christ, we must embrace the crucifixion *and* the resurrection. We have to embrace it all! As we understand that God is really living within us, we don't just invite Him in as a guest, we put Him in charge of the house. So how are you doing with that?

God knows that there will be a struggle going on and so He encourages us in that. Read Luke 9:23-24. What is the message here? _____

God has so much life He wants to impart to us. What's that verse you have been memorizing?

"Let him who means to love life and see good days..." 1 Peter 3:10a

I encourage you to embrace this life, to yield to this life and to be intent on loving it. In the coming days, God will share with us some specific ways we can be purposeful in doing that. I can't wait!

In the meantime, remind yourself of those great verses you memorized.

Week 2

The Blessing of Refraining

Memorization

1 Peter 3:10b "...refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile"

Psalms 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer."

What a good life we have! The God of heaven is living within us and producing His life in us. Remember, it is God's good pleasure to produce a life of blessing in you. Oh, may we allow Him to fulfill His role, producing and directing a life we can love!

If I were to describe my husband to you, I would probably tell you what He loves and doesn't like. He loves God and loves people. He loves to be with people and encourage them especially in praying for them. He loves to exercise. He doesn't like for me to tell him things more than once (he calls it nagging), and he doesn't like animals, especially in the house. Believe me, you can't imagine the conversations and jokes that have arisen over the years from that preference. Like it or not, when you meet my husband, these values are apparent in him early on. Well, God has some things that are apparent about Him early on as well. As we spend time with Him, we see He has values and dislikes. We find them in this passage we are studying. He starts off by saying, "Let him who means to love life and see good days, refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile." See what I mean?

I had plenty of instances when I was a child where my mouth got me in trouble. Can you relate? I wish I could say that was just childhood foolishness and the older I got I learned how to control my tongue, that I always said what was right and never said anything inappropriate. But I can't. Our mouths are incredible things! They can get us into great trouble or be a source of great blessing. I wonder what God thought when He gave us a mouth. He knew what we would be able to do with it. He says in His Word, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Think about it—God Himself *spoke* this world into existence. Now that is powerful.

Throughout His Word, He gives so much instruction about our mouths and how we use them for good or for evil. As I have studied this in-depth, I have been amazed at how often God brings it up. Understanding how important it is to him, I am not surprised that it is the first thing He brings up in this passage. He uses the word "refrain." Interesting word. When used in relation to something, it means to keep oneself back, to check oneself from performing an action, to no longer be stirred by its incitements and seductions.

In a sense, God is saying, "If you want to love your life in Me, you have got to know how to keep your mouth in check; you have to no longer be stirred by its incitements and seductions. If you don't learn the blessing of restraint, you won't know many of my blessings and you are going to get yourself in all kinds of trouble." (Paraphrase mine.) Can you relate? To put it bluntly, this is His message: "You have got to control your mouth or you will find yourself not loving your life in Me. There is a *direct connection* to loving your life in Me and what you do with your mouth. That is the way I created it."

It is interesting that He says this because he also says in James 3:8, "No man can tame the tongue, it is restless, evil, full of deadly poison." You know what? That is exactly right—man can't tame the tongue, but let me tell you something, God can. And He is living within you to do it. Now that God is living in you, He calls you to keep your mouth in check, away from evil, and to use it for doing good. He knows the blessing and the curses either will

bring. Remember, these instructions are for us, for a blessing that we might enjoy our life and see good days. God sharing His wisdom like this with us is like an umbrella of mercy over our lives.

This short passage contains three instructions for loving our life. First He says to “keep your tongue from evil.” As a child, I was told not to say anything if I couldn’t say something nice. I don’t ever recall being told to “keep my tongue from evil.” I love that about God—He gets right to the point. What do we mean when we say something is evil? A definition would be:

Morally bad Devilish Harmful Malicious Disagreeable Causing Misfortune
Who decides what is morally bad or devilish or harmful? **God’s word is the standard by which you decide that.** You can’t dictate that for someone else, but you can let the Spirit of God living within you convince you and lead you. He can resurrect our mouths, too.

We can get caught up in all manner of speaking evil. We say things that are morally on the edge, devilish, harmful, malicious, disagreeable, or things that could cause others misfortune. Many times we live according to the moment and we end up using our tongue to “flatter” the situation when we really didn’t intend to do so. So often we don’t realize the harm we bring to ourselves. We may not see the blessings we have thwarted, the doubt we have planted, or the hurt we bring to others and ourselves, but little by little evil speech corrodes God’s blessings. And we have no idea what we bring into our lives when we don’t restrain our speech.

We don’t want to be people whose mouths are motivated by the moment. Listen to Psalm 5:9: “There is nothing reliable in what they say...they flatter with their tongue.” Instead we want to be people motivated to speak by God who lives in our hearts. Proverbs 16:23 says, “The heart of the wise instructs His mouth.” In other words, God living in our hearts should instruct our speech.

You may think that there are certain areas where you could never restrain your speech, and you are probably right. But Christ can. Throughout Jesus’ crucifixion, the Bible says that He didn’t open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7). Can you imagine what He could have said? But He restrained Himself. For whatever reason, He, being God knew that was best. I won’t question that. He is the same God living in you. If you give Him control, He can restrain yours too.

I love the imagery of Psalm 39:1: “I said, ‘I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle while the wicked are in my presence.’” I try to think of Jesus living in me as a muzzle over my mouth, restraining my mouth. But, He will only do that if I allow Him to.

The next section of our key passage says for us to refrain our lips from speaking guile. Isn’t it interesting that God didn’t say refrain your tongue from lying? Most Christians try to avoid lying, but what is guile? Guile is a cunning, deceitful, and treacherous quality or type of behavior; a particular skill and cleverness in tricking or deceiving people. The truth of the matter is that guile is a real part of our culture and the church. There are subtle deceptions going on all the time. We don’t all try to stay away from guile, and yet God includes it here right in the first part of these instructions about loving our life. Look at Jeremiah 9:5: “Everyone deceives his [neighbor](#) and does not [speak](#) the [truth](#), they have [taught](#) their [tongue](#) to [speak lies](#); they [weary](#) themselves committing iniquity.” This isn’t talking about the straightforward lie but the subtle deceptions that go on all the time.

Whatever we may gain by speaking guile is lost quickly, and it takes our love of life right along with it. Read Proverbs 21:6: “The [acquisition](#) of [treasures](#) by a [lying tongue](#) is a [fleeting vapor](#), the [pursuit](#) of [death](#).” How much better off would we be to concentrate on loving our life by leaving guile in the back alley where it belongs. It has no place in our lives if we are interested in God’s plans. O Lord, deliver our souls from deception and establish truth in our mouths. (Psalm 120:2, Proverbs 12:19)

Well, that is some pretty heavy stuff there. Keep the focus where it belongs. You can't change yourself by making rules for yourself. It may work for a time, but it will fizzle. I wish I had learned that years ago. You need to be aware of these truths, what evil speech is and what guile is, and then be led by the Spirit within you. So then—the Lord tells us not to do these things with our mouths; what would He have us do with them? What was His purpose when He created our mouths? Although this passage doesn't state it, there are many that do. He created our mouths, and He has a good plan for them.

I love the passage in II Samuel 23:2 where David says, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue." What can happen when we allow the Lord to use our tongue, when we surrender our mouths to His will, when He literally speaks through us? I have found I can put my focus on Christ within me and give Him the minute-by-minute control of my mouth. When I do that, He uses my mouth for a blessing, and then many of the things that I struggle with in my speech actually take care of themselves.

How can we do that? Where do we begin? How is God interested in me using my tongue for good? This week in our daily study times, we are going to look at the influence of the heart on the mouth, and we will conclude by seeing how God wants us to use these grand instruments that He created. Remember, this is about loving LIFE, and God will use your mouth to help that happen if you consider and give heed to His ways. Proverbs 13:2 says, "From the fruit of a man's mouth, he enjoys good." O Lord, let it be so!

The Blessing of Refraining

Study Day One A Definite Connection

During my high school cheerleading days, many mornings I went off to practice with a prayer on my lips, "God, please help me not to gossip today." Most days I would go home defeated, wondering how I fell in the trap again. Ever been there? I am sure you have. The things you purpose not to say become the very things you do say. No wonder that James calls the tongue a fire that can't be controlled. I have certainly felt that way about mine sometimes. But then in walks Truth. Truth declares there is a definite connection between our heart and our tongue. I not only need to guard my tongue but my heart as well. I didn't know that then, but I sure do now. Read Luke 6:45: "**The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.**"

Put the message of this verse in your own words. _____

We all like to think that others can't see what is really in our hearts, and to a certain extent that is true, but at times it will all just come tumbling out. I will never forget a scene in our house one winter. We had just moved from Atlanta to Virginia and were going to rent a small house for a while. It had been a hard move, a move of faith and we were not sure at all what God was up to. This little house had been a mess and so for about a month, while we lived with my parents, we and the owners spent hours upon hours cleaning and scrubbing and painting. Finally it looked "cute," not nice, but "cute." Do you understand what I'm saying? Moving day came and we were thrilled to be getting settled in this cute little (finally) clean house. After a long day, the beds were made and the kids tucked in. I was in the kitchen getting some things settled and my husband had just gone back to the laundry/half bath to use the restroom. We were so tired. All of the sudden I heard him scream.

I went running, wondering what on earth had happened. Not to be too graphic, but the toilet had literally exploded and was like a volcano going off. I had never seen anything like it in my life. I should have included something else for you on my husbands like/dislike list a while back. He doesn't do so well with bodily "stuff" either! Well, he had to get over it now because the toilet was spewing all over the place. He was on his hands and knees trying to cut the toilet off and I was in a panic, trying not to laugh (I always laugh at the wrong times), but also trying to help. Suffice it to say, by the time the kids jumped out of their beds and came running, we were both on top of the washing machine trying to escape. What a mess!

But who would have ever known? When we moved in we had that bathroom looking so nice and cute. I had scrubbed that toilet and bleached it. We had painted and hung a curtain. However, there was all manner of mess going on beneath the surface that we couldn't see, and at just the wrong moment, it all came surging out. It took a while, but we finally got it all cleaned up. I have to tell you though, for the 18 months the Lord had us in that house, I never did like that bathroom.

That is the way it is with us. We can look so nice on the outside; our speech can be trained and pleasing. But at some certain moment, when something sets us off, if there is junk buried in the heart, it is going to come spewing out, and who knows what kind of mess it is going to make. If we want to refrain our lips from evil and speaking guile, it all begins with the state of our hearts.

So what is going on in your heart? Read Psalm 139:23-24. What does that say? _____

When we give Jesus the lordship of our lives, He can resurrect the hidden places of the heart, too. Before we do any more studying about the tongue, we have to deal with the heart because that is where it all starts anyway. If you are willing, pray Psalm 139:23-24 now before you answer these questions. Remember our definition of evil. Is there anything going on in your heart and mind right now that is:

Morally bad _____

Devilish _____

Harmful _____

Malicious _____

Disagreeable _____

Causing Misfortune _____

Search me O
God and know
my heart; try
me and know
my anxious
thoughts. See
if there be any
hurtful way in
me, and lead
me in the way
everlasting
Psalm 139:23-24

If you answered yes to any of these questions, consider letting God deal with you and cleanse your heart. They are all representative of evil whether we want to admit that or not. If we entertain them and bury them, it will at some point come spewing out in our speech. But if we allow God to cleanse our hearts, we are on our way to refraining our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking guile. And therefore we're on our way to loving life.

One of the best ways to keep our hearts pure is to memorize scripture. Don't forget!

The Blessing of Refraining

Study Day Two

Lord, Touch My Mouth

Earlier I mentioned that I have been amazed to see God's level of interest concerning our mouths. Obviously God is interested in every single part of us, but scriptures abound about the "mouth," "tongue," and "lips" of God's people. God used His own mouth to create the world. It is mind-boggling to consider how He spoke the world into existence. I sure wish I could do that for dinner sometimes.

God gave us our mouths, and they can be used for good or for evil. I found something else very interesting as I was studying God's Word about the mouth. It seems when God called someone to be his servant and messenger, He had a "talk" with them about their mouth. Let's take a look.

Read Exodus 3:1-9. What is God telling **Moses** in this passage? _____

Now read Exodus 4:1-18. As you read, zoom in on verses 10-17 and describe Moses' biggest fear. _____

Now describe what God says to Moses about this fear. _____

Let's consider someone else as well. **Isaiah** was a prophet to the nation of Judah during some of its darkest times spiritually. When God commissioned him to this task, Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord and some of His angels. Interestingly enough, the conversation quickly turned to Isaiah's lips. Read Isaiah 6:1-8. After being in the presence of the holy God, what does Isaiah blurt out about himself and his people? _____

In response, what does God do to Isaiah's lips? _____

Notice that after God does this, Isaiah says something indicating he is now ready to serve. What does he say? _____

Now, on to someone else. **Jeremiah** was another of God's prophets to the nation of Judah. Let's take a look at what happened when God called him. Read Jeremiah 1:4-9. God speaks to Jeremiah in verse 5. What does He tell him? _____

What is Jeremiah's response in verse 6? _____

How does God remedy the situation in verse 9? _____

Ok, let's look at one more of God's servants here. **Ezekiel** was also a prophet of God and a very interesting one at that. God speaks through him in some of the strangest ways. But when God calls him, once again we see the "talk" about his mouth taking place. Read Ezekiel chapter 2 through 3:3. This time how does God fill His servant with His words? _____

Are you seeing a common pattern here? God seems to be very interested in their mouths, doesn't He? He could have talked to them about their feet, their minds, their hands, their brains, but He talks to them about their mouths. We don't have time to look at all the examples, but take a look at just a one more thing.

Read Psalm 19:14. What does David say about his own mouth? _____

Sometimes we just need the hand of the Lord on our mouths, don't we? I know I do. Just like these servants, there are times I need Him to set my mouth free to speak boldly for Him, there are times I need Him to fill me with His Words, and there are times I just need Him to shut my mouth so I can't speak at all. I'm serious. Left to myself, I can make a mess of things with my mouth. You know what? I am not the only one, either. How do I know? The Bible tells me so.

In the book of Luke, we see that God was getting everything ready for the most important event in history, the birth of Jesus Christ. He sends an angel to his servant Zechariah to tell him that he and his wife will have a son who will be the one to prepare the way for the Messiah. This is pretty amazing news to Zechariah because he and his wife are very old and childless. Read Luke 1:5-23.

What did the Lord do to Zechariah's mouth and why? _____

I personally find this a bit humorous. It seems to me that God isn't too convinced Zechariah will be able to handle the responsibility of using his mouth in the right way during this very important time. So what does He do? He simply shuts it tight for nine months. Zechariah certainly can't say the wrong thing now; he can't talk at all. Read Luke 1:57-66. How does God redeem the whole "Zechariah can't talk" situation after the John the Baptist is born? _____

I think it is pretty clear that throughout the pages of God's Word, we see Him very involved in what His people do with their mouths. I don't think that is any less true now. God has called us all to something as well. He has called us to **LIFE!** We all have different callings in this life as we serve Him, but the common foundation we all share is His life living in us. And in this passage of 1 Peter 3:10, I think He is making it pretty clear that He has certain intentions for us in regards to our mouths. In the coming study sessions, we are going to look at those intentions in a deeper way, but in the meantime, let's offer our mouths to the Lord that He might touch them.

Consider how God dealt with each of these servant's mouths. What has God called you to do? How might you need Him to touch your mouth? Write out a prayer expressing your thoughts to the Lord.

Now finish by reviewing your memorization that includes David's statement above.

The Blessing of Refraining

Study Day Three

“Refrain his tongue from evil...”

I would venture to say that when most of us think of evil, we are thinking of something outside of ourselves. This passage says to “refrain his tongue from evil.” Evil—it is a really strong word. To me, in a physical sense, the tongue seems like a pretty vulnerable part of our body. Have you ever bitten your tongue? I will never forget the time when I was 5 years old and climbed up on the kitchen counter to reach for a straw. Even though I had been instructed not to do so, I was very intent on getting one out of the top cabinet. Standing straight up on the counter and reaching as high as I could, I grabbed a straw, proud of myself and wondering what all the boundaries and fuss were about. However, when I started to jump down, my foot slipped, causing my chin to slam down on the counter and my front tooth to bite a hole right through the middle of my tongue. Ouch! In fact, it was more than ouch, it was excruciatingly painful and messier than you would want to imagine. Since then, I guess I have been a little protective of my tongue, knowing how painful it can be to injure it.

I believe the Lord knows how vulnerable our tongues can be in the spiritual sense, too. I can gather from this passage that the Lord knows how painful it can be for us if we don’t protect our tongues from evil. As a five-year-old, I couldn’t understand the rules about not climbing on the counter. I’ll be fine, I thought. But danger was just one jump down. As Christians, evil so often seems like something far away, yet we often can be one step away from it—or even worse, inviting it right into our mouths.

When you think of evil, what are some images that come to mind? _____

Let’s look again at the definition of evil. Go back to your study notes at the beginning of this lesson and remind yourself of the six words that describe evil.

- | | | |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 2. | 3. |
| 4. | 5. | 6. |

The Bible says that the tongue is full of evil. Read James 3:1-10. What image of the tongue does it present?

Now consider and give examples of how one might use her tongue in these ways.

Morally bad _____

Devilish _____

Harmful _____

Malicious _____

Disagreeable _____

Causing Misfortune _____

Our aim is that the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts would be pleasing in His sight; yet if you are like me, you may have found that evil is actually coming out of your mouth. Go back to the list above and the descriptions you offered and pick the description of evil speech that you struggle with the most. Write it down here. _____

Now, if someone closest to you were to look at the list and write down which description of evil speech they think you struggle with the most, which would it be? _____

How is that kind of speech corroding your life? _____

The word that God uses in 1 Peter 1:10 is “refrain.” Here is what it means:

- to keep oneself back
- to check oneself from performing an action
- to no longer be stirred by its incitements and seductions

God knows the damage that evil speech can bring to our lives. He knows it will destroy the enjoyment of our life in Him. Stories abound of lives and relationships that have crumbled underneath the power of an evil tongue. Using the words from this definition, write out a prayer to God about the areas of speech you struggle with. Ask Him to show you how you might “check yourself” against this type of speech. Then commit to listen to His spirit as He prompts you to do so.

The same word, “refrain,” appears in the next part. He says to refrain our lips from speaking guile. Once again, go back to your study notes and state the definition of guile. _____

To put it simply, guile is subtle deception. Since I started writing this week’s lesson, I can’t tell you how many times the Holy Spirit within me has whispered in my ear, “Now that is guile.” The problem is, He wasn’t talking about what someone else was saying but about what was coming out of my own mouth. Yikes! I had no idea. List five ways we can be subtle in deceiving others with our lips.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How can this kind of speech decay our quality of life in Christ? Be specific and focus on your own shortcomings in this area. _____

In Matthew 5:37, Jesus addresses our speech. He says, “But let your statement be, **‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil.**” In other words, we need to mean what we say, and it ought to stand in all situations, at any time, and in front of any person. If not, our words might be full of guile. Only you and the Lord living in you can know for sure.

Who would have known that this word “refrain” could be such a power-packed word? If we are intent on loving our life in Christ, it certainly is worthy of our time and attention in the days to come. This lesson is titled “The Blessing of Refraining.” What do you think that means in regards to I Peter 3:10? _____

If you are willing, pray the following verse as a prayer for your life.

Proverbs 4:24 says, “Put away from you a deceitful mouth. And put devious speech far from you.”

Thanks for hanging with it today. I know this was a long and maybe an uncomfortable lesson, but as they used to say in my swimming days, “No pain, no gain.” Don’t forget, God wants you to love your life. He is doing a work in you to put you in the position to experience that. O Lord, may we let You do Your perfect work in us.

Oops, one more thing—don’t forget your memorization verses. You may not even need to look at them, but just in case, here they are.

Memorization

I Peter 3:10b “...refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile”

Psalms 19:14 “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”

The Blessing of Refraining

Study Day Four The Righteous Tongue

You see, all of this talk is a part of being intent on loving our life in Him. Loving our life in Him is not just a big Rah Rah party saying we love Jesus. Don’t get me wrong, I love to do that. I love throwing my hands in the air and worshipping the Lord. What a place of freedom. I love it. But my love is also shown when I listen to what He says and yield to it. It is a belief that shows itself in action.

We have seen that He has quite a bit to say about our mouths. For the past three study days, our focus has been on purifying our hearts, listening to God, and restraining our tongues. I am excited about today because our shift will focus as we will study the blessings of a righteous mouth.

When we use the word “righteous,” what are we saying? Simply put, we are talking about something that is right in God’s eyes. So when we use the phrase “a righteous tongue,” we are talking about a tongue that is being used in ways that God affirms and is pleased with. As we have seen, God addresses the use of the tongue in many ways. Today we will explore some of the uses of the tongue that He deems righteous. The Bible uses some very clear imagery that I believe the Holy Spirit will use to remind us in the days to come. And may we not forget as well that when we use our mouths in these ways, they spur us on to loving our life.

Read the following scriptures and list what each says about the tongue.

Proverbs 10:11

O Lord, let
our mouths
overflow with
fresh life-
giving words!



I love fountains; most people do. List some of the attractive qualities of a fountain. _____

When I think of a fountain, I see something that is always flowing with fresh water, is beautiful, and is enjoyable. How can what comes out of our mouth be like a beautiful fountain? _____

Proverbs 10:20

I think the idea here is value. Are the words that we are speaking valuable? What kinds of words do you think have value in God’s

eyes? _____

The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver—words that have value and are classy. God wants us to speak things of value into others. Silver is classy; it adorns in a beautiful way. We need what comes out of our mouths to be classy.

Proverbs 10:31

Do you ever feel like your mouth is flowing? I know sometimes I do. God values a mouth that is flowing with wisdom. Where can we get wisdom? Whose mouth does it flow out of first? Read Proverbs 2:6 to find out. _____

O Lord, let my mouth be
a continual flowing of
Your wisdom!



God wants our mouths to flow with good instruction and understanding that we can only get from Him. When something flows, it is a continual pouring out. God wants us to allow all the things he has been teaching us from his mouth to flow out of our mouths.

Lord,



Help me
choose words
of value.

Proverbs 12:18

How can we be wise with our words so that they bring healing? Has anyone ever done that for you? If so, describe it here. _____

A doctor or even a parent will carefully pick medicines and treatments aimed to heal. In the same way, our words must be chosen carefully if we desire to have a mouth that is righteous in this regard.

O Lord, may
our words be
ones that
bring healing
to others and
ourselves.



Proverbs 15:4 talks about a “soothing” tongue. What does it say? _____

How can words be soothing? _____

When I think of a tree of life, I think of a gift from the Lord. He gave the tree of life (Genesis 2:9), and it is a very valuable tree, the most valuable ever. That He would even consider that our words could be a tree of life is an incredible concept. May we understand the value of our words.

Proverbs 15:28 _____

O Lord, let our words be like
a tree of life.



When we ponder something, we weigh it carefully. So often our words don't fall into the righteous category because they are impulsive and we are quick to let our tongues loose. Here in this scripture we see the connection again between the heart and the mouth.

O Lord,
remind me to
ponder my
words.



Ok, so we have some great images to frame in our hearts and minds as we consider the righteous mouth. But let's make some connection here between these images and loving our life. Go back through each image and consider why God considers these righteous and why this type of heart and speech could spur us on to loving our life in Christ.

Fountain _____

Silver _____

Flowing Wisdom _____

Wise Healing _____

Tree of Life _____

Pondered Words _____

We have covered a great deal of ground over the last several sessions, and I am glad you stuck with it. God's intent is for you to love your life. He wants to continue to communicate with you so you will know how to do that. After all of this discussion, take some time to go back and reflect on this week's study. These questions may help you as you do.

1. What impacted you most in your study time this week? Why?
2. What understanding have you come to about the connection between loving your life and how you use your mouth?
3. Is God calling you to make some specific changes? If so, what are they and how will you approach this task.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**“Life and death are in the power of the tongue.”
Proverbs 18:21**

Memorization

1 Peter 3:10b "...refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile"
Psalms 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my rock and my Redeemer."

Week Three

Turning Away From Evil

Memorization

1 Peter 3:11a “And let him turn away from evil...”

1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

Well ladies, there is that word again, “evil.” Last week we used a simple dictionary definition to define it, and I hope you memorized it by using **MDHMDC**. If so, I imagine the Lord will use that to whisper discernment to you as you seek to refrain your tongue from evil.

But now here it is again, staring us in the face. God is telling us if we want to love our life, we must turn away from evil. It almost sounds simple, kind of like the “just say no” approach to drug abuse. I have personally never had much respect for that approach. It seems to assume that understanding and yielding to the Lord have no key roles, like I should say, “Oh sure, silly me, all I need to do is say ‘no!’” But here in God’s Word, that isn’t the approach, although it could look that way at first glance. We need to look closer and see there is much more to it than that. I just have to believe the Lord wants us to understand **why and how** to turn away from evil because He talks about it all over His Word. He says, “My people go into exile for lack of knowledge” (Isaiah 5:13). God doesn’t want us in exile; He wants us to understand and to love our life. So we want to seek to understand what He is telling us and why He is telling us to turn away from evil.

During our last major move we were relocating from a large house to a very tiny house. I had to strategically pack, or we were going to be living in chaos. Someone shared with me a numbering system for our boxes, and I set about this very detailed task. Basically I numbered each box and then wrote in a notebook what was in box number one, what was in box number two, etc.. That way we only had to unpack certain boxes, but if we really needed something, I would know how to find it. I didn’t have room for a bunch of boxes to just be sitting around that small house.

If you think about it, we categorize life into lots of boxes, too. We have a box for evil things and a box for morality and a box for education. In the “evil box” we put things like murder and child molesting, robbery and witchcraft. We put it way far away from us, certain we won’t ever unpack it in our life. Although that may seem neat and tidy, in reality, it isn’t a Biblical view of evil at all. All the things I mentioned would certainly be categorized as evil, but there is no box. We can’t put evil in a box to make sure that we don’t unload it in our lives, because guess what? According to the Word, it has already been unpacked at your address and at mine, too.

The Bible teaches that evil is within us (Romans 7:21). In fact, the Word teaches that evil comes from within us, from our own wayward desires. Matthew 15:18-19, James 1:14, and Jeremiah 17:9 all point to this. The Greek word for evil in our passage is “Kakos.” The Hebrew word for evil which is used in this same passage in Psalms 34 is “Ra.” Both of these words carry the same meaning: “of a bad nature, not such as it ought to be.” The root of the Hebrew word carries an interesting denotation. It suggests that when something is used other than for the purpose it was created, it is considered evil.

It would be like a woman using a bowl to make a cake, stirring it, and then throwing the bowl down on the floor and breaking it. Therefore, the bowl can no longer be used for its intended purpose. According to this analogy, it would then be considered “evil.” “Evil,” then, is anything that is not such as it ought to be in God’s eyes.

Just like the bowl, we were broken because of sin. Our original purpose was destroyed by Satan and it is his aim to continue the brokenness in our lives. He works inside our hearts to do that and before we knew Christ, we were literally slaves to his evil purposes. But as Christians, we have been reborn, we have been remade. The Bible says that we have become a new creation in Christ. Because we are still in the flesh, Satan will try to entice us to be used for purposes other than that for which we were created, but we no longer have to be slaves to the evil impulses within us. We can turn away from them because we now have a choice. But we can’t ignore the fact that there is a war going on within us between evil and our reborn purpose in Christ (see Romans 8).

So a simple Biblical definition of evil would be “anything in our life that holds us back, discourages, destroys, or distracts us from the purposes of the new life of God in us.” It could be worry, murder, lust, greed, anxiousness, sexual immorality, guile, stealing, gossip, bitterness, selfishness, overeating, and many other things. All these things can be evil. The Bible says that whatever the form, we are to stay away from it (I Thessalonians 5:22). That is a strong word to us, but evil to God is any desire that wells up within us that we allow to hold us back, discourage us, or destroy or distract us from the purposes in our life that He has restored. Evil is not something that we can only apply to murderers and prisoners and immoral people. It is within us, and the sooner we come to terms with it, the sooner God can do something about it in us so that we can love our life.

And so He tells us to turn away from it (I Peter 3:11a). In fact, God has been sharing this message since the beginning of time. He told Adam and Eve to turn away from it, but they didn’t listen. He also told their son, Cain. In Genesis 4, God presents a question to Cain. Somehow Cain had not measured up to the purposes that God had for him, and as a result he was downcast. God told him, “Cain, if you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” In other words, “Cain turn away from the evil desires in you; evil wants to master you, but you don’t have to let it.” Cain didn’t listen, though, and the evil within him only grew larger—so large, in fact, that he killed his brother and Cain is now remembered as being “of the evil one” (I John 3:12). I don’t want that for my legacy!

We have to understand that the box of evil was sent C.O.D. right into your heart when Adam sinned, and it will be there, unpacked, until you reach heaven. Its desire is to master you but you must not let it. God is basically saying, “Understand that it is there and turn away from it because you also understand that I have so much more for you than that.”

I don’t believe that anyone starts with the intent of being totally overcome by evil. I don’t believe that Cain did, and I don’t believe that we do. When we first nurse that hurt of bitterness in our hearts, we have no intent of having it overcome us to the point that we have to be on medication to deal with the hurt. When we first take that cigarette, we have no intention of becoming addicted and getting lung cancer. When we first allow our hearts to swell because our boss speaks a kind word, we have no intention of getting involved in an affair. When we first feel that twinge of jealousy, we have no intention of following down the path of gossip and manipulation. When we first experience that small dissatisfaction with life, we don’t plan to enter into some kind of indulgence trying to fill our needs.

We have to begin by differentiating the purposes of God in our life and anything that presents itself contrary to those purposes; we must turn away immediately because the desire of evil is to master us. Satan would like nothing better than for you to think that evil is only a term for murderers and child molesters. If he can convince you about that, then you will skim this verse, not seeing it as applicable to you, and he will have you in his grip. The Bible says that Satan is a lion, roaming around, constantly pointing out the desires that are enticing to your sinful nature. Popular Bible Teacher and Author, Beth Moore, says, “Satan cannot force us to go where he leads, but he certainly can choose a scenic route for the lure.” He will use whatever tempts us to be distracted from God’s purposes. Think about the Christians at this time whom Peter was writing to. Probably all manner of evil was lurking in their hearts, wanting to retaliate, to hate, to steal, to complain, to be ugly and not loving. Peter says, “Turn away from evil.” For your own good, turn! Remember the purposes to which God called you.

So what are the purposes? Do you know them? Your main purpose is to bring glory to God. What does that mean? Simply put, to become a reflection of His nature. That is what you were created for. You were created in His image (Gen. 1:27), and His image should be seen in you. You can’t reflect His image if you are distracted from it. That is why we have to transform our thinking. We have to allow God to shine a light on our thinking so we can begin to love what God loves and hate what He hates. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.” In other words, I have such a reverence for God and His purpose in my life that I hate evil, all kinds of evil.

The more you are not in the Word, the more you will fall victim to Satan’s lies because the world agrees with him. The Bible says, “He will masquerade as an angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:14). Because of that, it is so easy to get all this mixed up.

That is why the Bible says: “Don’t even talk about what the disobedient do in secret” (Ephesians 5:11-13). Our culture not only talks about it, it is entertained by it. May that not be us. God says “turn” if you want to love your life. This word for “turn away” actually means to shun. In the Amish community, if someone is shunned, he still lives among the people, but the people act as if he is not there, as if he is dead. That should be our attitude toward evil. It is among us; in fact, it has been unpacked in our lives. But we need to shun it because God has better plans for us, plans for us to love our LIFE—the LIFE He offers is so much better than anything that any manner of evil could ever give.

The message is consistent: YIELD. We should yield to the desires of God for our mouths (lesson 2), and we should yield to the purposes of God instead of the evil desires within us. To be honest, that is difficult and may not make sense. And it brings to mind the question, “How will that help me to love my life?” With God, not all things always make sense in our way of thinking, but they are true. I love how these words originally penned by St. Francis of Assisi show how God thinks so differently from us and blesses us as we yield to His ways.

“It is in giving that we receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Make me an instrument of your peace
I want to know what it means to follow you
When You look at me, I want You to see, the light of the world inside.”

When we give up our ways, God sheds His glory on our life. Consider what Jesus said: “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24), and then, “Take up your cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). And as we yield, we say, “Sure, Satan, unpack your box. I don’t even care what is in it; my Father has something much better.”

Turning Away From Evil

Study Day One Evil In Me?

What great news it was when we discovered that the Spirit of God has been reborn in us. What a blessing to have Him living in us. On the totally opposite side, we may feel saddened to come to the understanding that evil is also within us.

In this country we don’t have formal class systems, but in our minds we certainly put people into categories. Many of us fall into the Christian Middle Class Category. We have good jobs, we try to be good parents, we have nice homes and two cars in the driveway. We participate in our children’s education and we attend church. All that said, when the Word of God shows us that evil is living in our antibacterialized homes, it can be quite a shock, but it is true. Let’s review some of these scriptures to make sure that we grasp that information, shocking as it may be. Look up these scriptures and record the message they give about evil and its presence in us.

Romans 7:21 _____

Matthew 15:18-19 _____

James 1:13-15 _____

Jeremiah 17:9 _____

Now summarize what the Word is saying in all of these scriptures _____

You see, Satan takes the dormant desires in each of us and tries to awaken them by enticing us in certain areas. What may be a temptation to you may not be one to me. The box that was sent to your address may not be the same as the one sent to mine, but the label is the same: EVIL. And I can guarantee you that the intended purpose is the same. To clarify that intended purpose, let’s look back at how we have been defining evil over the last two lessons and bring these definitions together.

Look at your study notes for this lesson. They define evil in two ways (week 3 study notes, page 2 at the top and at the beginning of the second paragraph). Join these two thoughts in your own words.

Now see if you can remember the categories of MDHMDC from lesson 2 and write them out here. (If you can’t remember, look back at your study notes.)

M _____ D _____ H _____ M _____ D _____ C _____

Now that you understand that evil is anything that distracts you from God’s intended purpose in your life and that it usually falls into these categories, let’s do some soul-searching to see what Satan might

have unpacked in our lives. Consider what he has been enticing you with, or what he often entices you with in these areas. This may get a bit uncomfortable and saddening, so before we begin, let's remind ourselves that the intended purpose of God in doing all of this is that we might love our life. We can't forget it. Let's remind ourselves of that by doing a quick memorization review from lesson one. Do you remember 1 Peter 3:10a and John 10:10? Write them in the box.

Memorization Review—Week One

1 Peter 3:10a _____

John 10:10 _____

That is like a breath of fresh air for us before we begin this time of soul searching. Remember, if Satan can keep us from seeing the evil in ourselves, then he will continue to imprison us in lives that are less than abundant. God intends more for us than that. He wants to shine a light on the evil we entertain and flirt with so that He can bring it out in the open and give us the choice to turn away. So take this time seriously and before you begin, pray and ask the Lord to shine His light.

Morally bad – Is there anything of this nature going on in your life, any manner of this in thought or action that you are entertaining? _____

If so, how is it holding you back from the purposes of God in your life? _____

Devilish – When we think of devilish, we think of rebellious. Is there anything devilish or rebellious in your thoughts or actions right now? _____

If so, how is it holding you back from the purposes of God in your life? _____

Harmful – This could mean harmful to others or harmful to self. As you ask the Lord, is He pointing out anything in your life that is harmful? If so, what is it? _____

Now, how is it holding you back from the purposes of God in your life? _____

Whew, let's take a breath for a moment. It is hard to think of these kinds of things being "in" us. But we can't forget Who also lives in us. As you take a breather, read Colossians 1:27. What does it say? Who is in you and what does He give hope for? _____
Keep that perspective as you continue.

Malicious – This word carries the idea of spite—actions or thoughts that are intended to hurt and that are based on bitterness. Any of that showing up in your life? _____

Consider how it might be holding you back from the purposes of God in life. _____

Disagreeable – This could be toward God and His ways, or toward others, or even toward yourself. It is a miserable place to live, and it will distract you from God’s purposes. Is that happening for you? How? _____

Causing Misfortune – Many times we don’t realize how our thoughts and actions can cause misfortune. Ask God to reveal if you are doing this in any way. _____

If it is present in you, how is it holding you back from the purposes of God in your life? _____

Just so you know, I had trouble even writing this section of our lesson. There is absolutely nothing enjoyable about taking a good long look at ourselves. I can imagine that after doing so you may feel afflicted, poor, brokenhearted, and imprisoned. Here is the good news. Read Isaiah 61:1-3, which is a prophecy of the mission of Christ in your life and mine. Do not despair. Now that you know of the evil within you, He will help you to turn from it.

***I know you are tired, but don’t stop until you have reviewed your memorization for this week.
You will be glad you did!***

Turning Away From Evil

Study Day Two The Deadly Three

The book of I John is such a tender book. I love the tone with which John writes. He obviously has a heart for the ones he is writing to. He wants them to know the Truth. He knows it will set them free. In fact, he quoted Jesus with that very message in another book, the Gospel of John. Read John 8:31-32. What does it say? _____

We have been talking about how Satan can confuse us. How he can redefine evil for us so that we get left out of the picture and assign evil to everyone but ourselves. How he can trap us and keep us from the life that God wants for us by painting our evil desires as valuable.

Jesus, however, knows that when we understand the truth, it will free us to be able to turn from evil. I love the truth that is taught in I John which gives us understanding about evil. This truth will catapult us all over the Word to see that Satan is so dull. He began with three tools and he uses the same tools over and over again. If we can wise up to his ways, it will help us to confront evil head on and turn our heel and walk the other way. So let’s dig into this truth.

Read I John 2:12-14. Do you get the picture? No one is left out. This is for all of us. Okay, keep reading. Read I John 2:15-17. The message is loud and clear: “Stay away from evil, from anything that distracts you from God’s purposes, because it won’t benefit you in any way!”

Now go back and focus on verse 16. Into what three categories does John put everything in the world?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Different versions state these in a variety of ways. An easy way to remember them is the way they are presented in the NAS version. They are:

1. The lust of the flesh
2. The lust of the eyes
3. The boastful pride of life

And what we will find is that all manner of evil fits into one of these areas. Throughout history, Satan will zoom in on one or all of them and attack, luring us away from the purposes of God. Let’s take a look by going back to the beginning.

I know you have already done so before and are familiar with the account, but go to Genesis 2 and read verses 7-17. What two trees were in the center of the garden? _____

And what were God’s instructions about these trees? _____

So from the beginning, God established His purpose for Adam and Eve. He also established what would destroy His purpose in their lives. Now read Genesis 3 and give careful attention to verse six and what trapped Eve into not being able to turn away from evil.

Do you see any similarity between what lured Eve and our list from I John 1:16? Make a comparison.

I John 2:16	Genesis 3:6
Lust of the flesh	
Lust of the eyes	
Boastful pride of life	

She talked herself right into it. I imagine she was telling herself, “It will taste so good, I want some to eat, and it is so pretty, and my goodness, I want to be wise and it will make me that way.” After that kind of thinking she fell right into it, evil mastered her, and well, you know the rest of the story.

If we can get a hold of this Truth, we can better recognize Satan at his onset, and it will certainly help us to turn away from evil. We will be digging into this some more in the coming two days, so I look forward to meeting you back here tomorrow to go exploring.

Don’t close the book though until you review your memorization verses.

Turning Away From Evil

Study Day Three

Luring Us In

Do you remember this Beth Moore quote from your study notes? “Satan cannot force us to go where he leads, but he certainly can choose a scenic route for the lure.”

That is the truth of 1 John 2:16 in a nutshell. Satan can’t make you do anything, but he sure will try to entice you along the way with things that lure you in. Yesterday in that verse we saw three ways he will do that:

1. the lust of the flesh
2. the lust of the eyes
3. the boastful pride of life

Before we go any further, let’s make sure that we understand what these are.

The lust of the flesh – When we hear the word lust, we usually think of something of a sexual nature. It certainly can be that, but it is more. Lust is the Greek word *epiqumia* and it means “a desire, craving or longing for what is forbidden.” It can be a desire or a need for anything that is prohibited—a lust for power, a lust for acceptance, a lust for food, a lust for sex. When we say “the lust of the flesh,” we can mean a strong overwhelming desire or need motivated by our physical being for something that is forbidden.

The lust of the eyes – Here is the word “lust” again. The meaning is still the same—the desire for something forbidden. This time, however, it begins with what we see. Our eyes take in the forbidden and we desire it.

The boastful pride of life – This one is different. It is the Greek word *ajlazoneiva* and it means “an insolent and empty assurance, which trusts in its own power and resources and shamefully despises and violates divine laws and human rights; an impious and empty presumption which trusts in the stability of earthy things.” Put simply, it is the self-focused desire to succeed in a specific way without regard to the ways of God.

Satan cannot
force us to go
where he leads
but he
certainly can
choose a
scenic route
for the lure.
—Beth Moore

Throughout the Word of God, over and over, you will see Satan lure people in with one, two, or all three of these things. Let’s go digging to take a look. Read about the following people in the scriptures listed beside their names. Write a simple description of their sin and which of these lures Satan used to motivate them toward evil.

Sarah – Genesis 16:1-6 _____

Esau – Genesis 25:29-34 _____

Jacob’s sons – Genesis 37:1-20 _____

Judah – Genesis 38:13-16 _____

Children of Israel – Exodus 32:1-10 _____

Saul – 1 Samuel 13:1-14 _____

David – II Samuel 11:1-5 _____

Hezekiah – Isaiah 39:1-6 _____

Chief Priests and Pharisees – Matthew 26:1-5 _____

Judas – Matthew 26:14-15 _____

Rich Young Ruler – Luke 18:18-27 _____

So what about you? Which of these three lures does Satan most often use to tempt you with evil? (Remember the definition of evil.)

If nothing else, being in God's Word today should not leave you feeling lonely. This exercise should have shown you many people have been lured away. I am sure that after our exercise the other day, it would be easy to think we are eaten up by evil and sometimes we don't even know it. We are easily and often distracted from God's great purposes for us. Isn't God wonderful to reach into our pit and offer us a way out so we can turn from these destructive things and enter into loving our life?

So what about you? What lure does Satan often use to tempt you with evil? Be certain of this, he won't leave you alone. The lure is always there. The question is, will we allow ourselves to be lured, or will we turn from evil? Meet me here tomorrow and we will discuss the power we have to turn away.

You know what? God's Word is an effective tool for that, so why not work on memorizing it right now? Here are your verses so you won't have to turn back to your notes.

Memorization

I Peter 3:11a "And let him turn away from evil..."

I John 2:15-17 "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever."

Turning Away From Evil

Study Day Four The Power to Turn Away

Okay, let's be up-front from the get-go for this last day of study. Because of our sinful nature, we each have evil in our hearts, and Satan would like nothing better than to use it to mess up our life. And honestly, because we listen to him, he does so quite often. But it is also a fact that if we are Christians, we are new creations in Christ. Read II Corinthians 5:17. What does it say?

Christ lives within you! Christ lives within you! Christ lives within you! Christ lives within you!
Oh, if we could really grab hold of that Truth. So often, just because there are two natures within us warring for our attention and allegiance we believe we have no choice, that we just have to live this dual life of serving our sinful nature and also trying to serve Christ. And, may I add, we end up miserable because we know that God has told us to turn away from evil, from anything that would distract us from His purposes in our lives. Turn in your Bible to Romans 6:1-8. What is the message shared? _____

The message that I see plain and clear is that I don't have to be a slave to the evil that calls my name. I can turn away from it. I have that power living in me, His name is Jesus.

Sometimes my life gets so busy and when I finally get a moment to slow down and take a look at my house, a real look, I can quickly get overwhelmed. There is so much that needs to be done that I don't even know where to begin. Life can be like that, too! We are so busy moving from one thing to the next that we don't stop to really look at ourselves. When we do, we see all manner of things that need to be dealt with, and we can get overwhelmed. This week we have been taking a look at ourselves. You may have seen so much evil (things that are drawing you away from Christ) that you don't even know where to begin to deal with them. Today I want us to go back to that basic yet profound truth: Christ lives in you. And I want us to take a good look at how He turned away from evil.

So let's jump in. Read Matthew 4:1-11. Describe the three things that Satan used to lure Jesus, to tempt Jesus, into evil.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We cannot forget that Jesus was fully God, fully man. It is a hard concept to grasp, yet it is true. The Bible says that He was tempted in all manner of ways but that He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Earlier in our study time on Day Three, we established that Satan really doesn't have any new tricks; they all fall into three categories. What are they?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Satan doesn't have any
new tricks!

As we look at these temptations of Jesus, do you see any parallels? Let's take a closer look.

Read Matthew 4:1-4. How long had Jesus been fasting before Satan came to Him? _____
Have you ever gone without food for one day? Describe how that feels. _____

Now describe how Jesus, being fully man, probably felt after fasting for forty days. _____

Look back at the definitions of Satan's three tools on Day Three. Do you think Satan was using one of these tools for this first temptation? You bet he was. Which one was it? _____

Now read Matthew 4:5-7. In this passage it appears that Satan is mocking and challenging Jesus' rightful position of God. Do not doubt, Satan knew exactly who Jesus was, but he also knew of the place of service that Jesus had accepted for Himself. So in a time of presumed weakness, a time where He was physically hungry and a time where it was not yet fitting for His identity to be established, Satan challenges Jesus to exalt Himself. Go back to Day Three and read the definitions of Satan's tools again. Which tool was he using this time? _____

That takes us to the third temptation that Satan presents. Read Matthew 4:8-11. Describe how Satan tempts Jesus. _____

Why do you think this would have been a temptation for Jesus? _____

Jesus already was God—He already owned it all—and yet He had willingly put Himself in a position to serve and to give it all up. You probably don't even have to look, which one of Satan's tools was He using as He tempted Jesus this time? _____

Sometimes when I read about these temptations, I have to be honest, two of them really seem ridiculous to me. Jesus already knew He was God and He already owned the world; what is the big deal? The only one that I can really relate to is the first one about being hungry. I don't like to be hungry, and that would have been a temptation to me. So I can certainly relate to how it would be a temptation for Jesus if He hadn't eaten for forty days.

But you know what? There is so much truth here. If we would just stop and really think about the lure to evil that Satan puts in front of us and remember who we are in Christ, what we possess and the power within us, many of our temptations would probably seem ridiculous, too. Can you think of any such temptation in your own life? If so, share about it here. _____

Ridiculous or not, the temptations were there and were obviously very real to Christ as He was fully man and fully God. Just like I can't always understand the lure of your temptations and you cannot always understand the lure of mine, these temptations were very real to Christ. The focus shifts now to how He overcame. How did He turn away from the evil that presented itself to Him? Look back at Matthew 4:1-11. How did He do it? _____

That is such a powerful understanding. Not one time. Not two times. But every single time Christ dealt with the lure of evil by using the powerful word of God. That is how He turned away. In the midst of the confusion and lies that Satan presented, He reminded Himself and Satan of the Truth and as a result He was able to turn away. Is there a lesson there for us or what? What is it? _____

For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

I love the passage of Hebrews 4:12. What is the message of this verse? _____

Jesus, the God who lives in us, was tempted in every way that Satan deals: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, and He overcame with the Word of God. He was not distracted from God's purposes for His life by the lure of evil. He is the same God who lives in you.

We have talked about a great deal in these last few lessons. It is a lot to take in. No one ever said loving your life wasn't going to take some hard work. Let me recap the high points for you:

- **God tells us to “turn away from evil”**
- **Evil is anything that distracts us from the purposes of God in our life**
- **We all have a sinful nature within us that is inclined toward evil**
- **Satan uses three tools to lure us to participate in evil instead of turn from it**
- **Satan has used his tools successfully in many lives over and over again**
- **Christ was tempted with all of Satan's tools, but He never participated in evil**
- **Christ turned away from evil by using the Word of God**
- **Christ lives in us and His power and Word will help us turn if we will yield to it**

Whew! We have covered a lot of ground this week. I am so glad you stuck with it. We certainly want the journey to make a difference, to bring us into greater experience of loving life. So let's finish up then by looking back at our main passage.

“Let him who means to love life and see good days...turn away from evil.”

You certainly should have greater understanding now about this passage. Take a moment now and consider: How does God want you to respond? _____

My prayer is that you will have great victory as you yield yourself to that response. You know when God placed the two trees in the middle of the garden (Genesis 2). He told Adam and Eve to turn away from the one tree, but of the tree of life, they could eat freely. And they could eat of any other tree in the garden, too. I see a similar concept in Matthew 6:33. What does it say? _____

I just have to believe when we turn from evil and put our focus on God and His purposes, not only can we eat from the tree of life, but He will add all these other things to us as well.

***So focus in. Take a moment now and review those verses.
In fact, since it is the end of our study this week,
you may want to review the verses from all three of our weeks so far.***

Week 4

Cultivating Good

Memorization

1 Peter 3:11b “and do good.”

Psalms 37:3 “Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.”

The older we get the more we realize that one thing often represents another. This is certainly true of us as Christians. We are representing the One who lives within us. In fact, that is what giving glory to God is all about: being a true representation of His nature and character. Easier said than done! Throughout time there have been all manner of rules made by various groups here and there about what is “good” behavior and “bad” behavior as a Christian. For instance, some would say, “It just ain’t right” if you wear something like flip flops in church. How does one decide what God deems as good? Well, His Word is certainly the authority, and the more we know what it says, the more we can discern Truth from opinion and preference.

For our passage this week, we see this simple phrase, “and do good.” Pretty basic, really, and yet there is much to consider. Before we really get going, though, let’s establish that this passage is not about salvation. Remember that Peter is writing to people already saved. We are not saved by works but by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). With that understood, let’s clarify the meaning of the words “and do good” in this passage. As Christians, when we think of “doing good,” we often think of doing good deeds for others. It is a common teaching among Christians and one that is biblically based. It would be easy to look at this passage and say, “Ok, if I want to love my life then I need to turn away from evil as we talked about last week and do lots of good things for others.” However, we need to look closer. This word “good” is the Greek word *agathos*. It means “of good constitution or nature, useful, excellent, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, distinguished, upright, honorable.” There are other Greek words for “good” that carry the connotation of doing good for others but this is more encompassing—it is saying in a general manner that everything that you put your hand or mind or mouth to should be excellent.

This passage tells us to “do” good. What does that mean? “Do” is the Greek word *poieo* and it means “to produce, construct, to be the author of, the cause of.” So this little phrase is calling us to produce excellence and because it doesn’t get specific, I believe it means **in all things**.

This is certainly in line with the other words of scripture that say, “You were created for good works” (Ephesians 2:10) and also, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ...” (Colossians 3:17). The Bible speaks of the excellencies of our God. Now that He has come to live in us, He calls us to excellence in all things. We are to be a representation of Him in all things. So He simply says, “...and do good” (1 Peter 3:11b).

However, that isn’t always how we live. I wonder if He looks at our lives sometimes and says, “It just ain’t right!” Probably not, because He wouldn’t use the word “ain’t,” but I’m sure you get my point!

God knows our sinful nature; He knows the battles we fight. The Bible says He fought the same ones and yet He was the only one who never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He knows we won't be perfect this side of heaven, but He still tells us to do good—in other words, “construct excellence in your life.”

We won't study this scripture, be radically transformed, and all of the sudden do everything with excellence, but that is what we should reach for because the One who is excellent now lives in us. I like how the Message Bible presents it. It says, “cultivate good.” Let's consider that word. When you cultivate the ground, you take a look at it and if it isn't right, you dig it up, add some stuff, give it nourishment, and watch for growth. Can you tell I am not a gardener? I am sure you can, but I do understand the principle here.

We all have many areas where we aren't living with goodness, with excellence, but we can embrace the cultivating of it in every area of our lives. We can recognize it, dig it up, replant it, give it nourishment, and watch for growth.

We all are at different places and do different things with our lives. However, there are some common roles we have as Christians. Let's take a moment and consider some of these things. If you are a Christian, you are a believer. **Are you cultivating excellence in your belief?** Isaiah 55:1-3 is an interesting scripture. The prophet is basically saying, why are you spending your money on that which is nothing? He uses a physical example to represent the spiritual. He says, come and get what God has to offer for free. In other words, why are you going broke for stuff that is going to get you nowhere when God has so much and it is yours for the asking? I believe this can apply to the way we believe. As Christians we spend so much time doing stuff that doesn't really matter, and yet we so often neglect to take hold of the Truths that He offers in excellent manner. These Truths are our real wealth, and He offers them for free. We need to be wealthy with belief. The Bible talks about loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We want to love God with our heart, but it is easy to leave the mind out. It takes mental energy to be an excellent believer in God's Truth, but we can do it. The spirit of God lives in us!

There will be times of trial when we are questioning and want to believe but struggle to do so. We can pray as the man in Mark 9 did when he said, “Help my unbelief!” But what about during our everyday life? Are we cultivating excellent belief in God's Truths? Do you know what you believe? Can you explain it? Can you articulate it according to God's Word? Are you cultivating excellence in your belief? If not, we can look at this area of our life and dig it up and replant it. Being in Bible study is definitely a part of cultivating excellence in your belief.

The Bible says, “Be excellent in what is good, be innocent of evil” (Romans 16:19 paraphrase). In other words, give yourselves over to cultivating excellence and turn away from evil. Sound familiar? We have to give ourselves over to cultivating excellence in our belief. It won't just happen; you have to get involved in it. I have a mediocre yard. It isn't ugly, but it certainly isn't all that it could be. Why is that so? I don't cultivate it. That being the case, what can I expect? The same is true for any area of my life, including belief.

So how will excellence in belief help you love your life? Simply put, when you know the Truth, it will set you free (John 8:32). You will be free in all manner of ways including: you will know who you are, you will rarely struggle with wishy-washy living as a Christian, you won't be uncomfortable when questioned, it will bless your prayer life, you will stop trying to fit in to every manner of thinking that comes your way, and you will have peace. When you live by conviction according to God's Word on

a day-to-day basis, then you won't be tossed about all the time (James 1). You will be wealthy with the Word in your mind and heart. That makes for a pretty good life.

Another commonality we all have is that we are worshippers. If we are believers, then worship is not an option, you just do it. As you worship, **are you an excellent worshipper?** The Bible says, "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Matthew 4:10). In Psalm 92:1-2, God tells us an excellent way to live as a worshipper. In a sense it is like a gardening list for cultivating excellent worship of God in our lives. It says four things need to happen:

- Give thanks to the Lord
- Sing praise to His name
- Declare His loving kindness in the morning,
- Declare His faithfulness by night.

How will this kind of worship help us to love life? In simple terms, we were created to worship God. Have you ever heard anyone say, "I was made for this!" In regards to worship, we were made for this. We will love it when we give ourselves over, offering God everything in worship, offering Him all of us at our best. True worship sets us free to see life from God's perspective. There is nothing better than that because He is the One who knows the best way for us to live.

A third identity we all share is work. We all have tasks to accomplish, big and small. We have different jobs, but in whatever way we approach a task, may it be that it appears to have the hand of God in it. **Are you an excellent worker?** If so, then it will be a reflection of Him.

When we think of this, we have to remember that excellence is not just important in what we produce but how we produce it. And our efforts should not be for a raise, for favor from man, for a new position, or honor. God is the author of those things. (See 1 Chronicles 29:12). We work with excellence because it is right, and we were created for good works—God prepared them in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). I believe that means He made a way for us to do them through Christ in us, giving us direction, motivation, examples, and strength. You were created to do excellent work; shoddy work, half-hearted work, just ain't right.

So how will being an excellent worker help us to love our life? We will have the satisfaction of jobs well done, the knowledge that we have represented Christ well, the knowledge that we have invested ourselves, and the truth that what we sow, we shall reap! As we work with excellence in even the small areas of life, God will move us on to greater things, and we will develop our talents and gifts to use in greater ways. Hard work can be a joy when it is done for our faithful Master, God. Don't confuse this, though. Any manner of work that doesn't violate God's divinely appointed laws can be done for Him and done with excellence. Cultivate excellence in whatever your hand is set to do. It honors and reflects God, and it will bless you.

As we enter into our time of study this week, that will be our focus: how doing good, living with excellence, brings benefit and blessing into our lives. Psalm 37:3, one of our memory passages this week, is a great way to conclude our thoughts. It says,

"Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness."

As we discipline our flesh to do good, even when we don't feel like it, we are trusting God and demonstrating our faith in the One who lives within us. That kind of living will only bring us blessings. "...and do good." Three little words that can have profound impact on our lives.

Cultivating Good

Study Day One The Benefits of a Beautiful Garden

As we stated in our notes, there is no way to move from mediocrity to excellence overnight, unless of course, God transports us to heaven in our sleep. We used the word cultivate, and its imagery is so powerful for this teaching. Suppose you had a garden overgrown with weeds and rocks, and the plants were limp and lifeless. When you first planted this garden you had great plans for it, but life got busy and now you have been alerted to the fact that if you don't do something soon, you won't enjoy its produce this year. You have set aside some time to work on the garden. What would you do first? Why? _____

Now suppose this garden is your life and all of a sudden you have come to the knowledge that there are some areas that need cultivation of excellence. In the busy pace of life or maybe just the laziness of will, some areas have weeds and need attention. What areas do you see that need some cultivating in the area of excellence? Why? _____

If God were to speak directly to you about these areas what would He say?

- _____ It just ain't right.
- _____ You are on your way but need some work.
- _____ You don't have a clue, but I will help you.

God desires for us to "do good." He knows it is in our best interest and that is how He created us. I have been amazed to find out that God cares a great deal about the little things. List some little things that you think He may care about in regards to excellence.

You may have heard the common saying, "the devil is in the details." But as we use this analogy of a garden, look at Song of Solomon 2:15. The basic idea here is that we need to catch the little foxes that can spoil the vine. We all have areas in which we struggle with excellence. Giving attention to the little things is important as we seek to cultivate excellence in our lives. Keep that in mind as you move through your study time.

As we begin this week of study, it is important that we understand **why** "doing good" in everything is so important to God. Let's take a moment and look at some scriptures to guide us to this understanding.

Let's look at some of the benefits of God for us as we "do good." Look up the following scriptures and describe their message. I have recorded some notes here for you as well.

Psalm 37:27 _____

One benefit of "doing good" is certainly the awareness of His continual presence. As we turn from sin to the grace of Jesus, we have life forever, but I believe that as we do good, we enjoy the benefit of knowing He is right there with us. We are working alongside Him because He is doing good as well!

Psalm 125:4 _____

As we live with excellence, it opens the door for God to pour blessings in our life. In fact, read Jeremiah 32:41 as well. God loves to pour out blessings on us, to plant us in an abundant garden.

Luke 6:27-35 _____

This kind of good towards others is such a direct reflection of God Himself. In verse 35 I believe the message is that you show yourselves to be connected to God when you treat your enemies well because then you are a direct reflection of His nature.

Hebrews 13:16 _____

Many times it is sacrifice to do good, to take the extra minutes and give the extra effort, but with such sacrifices God is pleased. I tell you, I love those moments of life when I know that God is pleased with me. He always accepts me, but when I know He is pleased with me—what a blessing.

The message of God's Word is clear. We are accepted into His family by grace, not by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). As his daughters and sons, God desires to bless us, to work in and through us and bring so many benefits into our lives. Doing good, living with excellence, opens the door for those blessings to flow, which causes us to love our life in Him. That is why it says, "Let him who means to love life and see good days...do good" (1 Peter 3:10-11).

Why don't you take a moment to review that and your other verse for this week right now.

Cultivating Good

Study Day Two Cultivating Excellence in Belief

Understanding the message of yesterday's lesson just makes me want to get on my gardening gloves and get to work. I want to get my garden "right." Life can get busy and I can get distracted just doing enough to get by, or sometimes I am just too lazy to make the extra effort. If I can just remember "doing good" connects me to God's nature and His blessings, too! This includes excellence in thinking, in actions, in working, in worshipping, in responding, in self care, in belief, in stewardship, in serving. It is about "doing good" in life.

As we discussed in our notes, we all have different activities and life happenings, but we share some commonalities. For the next several days we will look at some of those and consider cultivating excellence in those areas. I hope it will also prompt us on to "doing good" in other areas that are more individualized as well.

When you first came to know Christ, you started at the point of belief. So we are all believers. The question is, are you cultivating excellence in your belief? When we say belief, we aren't just talking about **what** we know but also **trusting** in what we know. Read Hebrews 5:12-14. Describe its message.

I think God is clear that He wants us to grow up in our faith. Babies can't discern much and therefore can't accomplish much. Spiritually, if we remain young in our belief, the same will be true for us. Take some time to make a list of your Christian beliefs and give scripture reference for them. You may want to begin your list and come back to add to it throughout the week as you ponder this. You may also need to add another sheet of paper if your list is longer than what is provided here.

Belief	Scripture Reference

Mature belief takes lots of mental energy. Have you ever heard a child moan and groan as he did his homework, wondering how in the world this would ever benefit him later in life? I certainly have heard it, and I must admit I also did my fair share of moaning and groaning when I was a student. The Bible says for us to love God with our minds. That can be understood in two ways. One, we must submit our mind to thinking as God thinks. We must also know what He thinks before we can think that way. What does Romans 12:1-2 say? _____

When we consider the Israelites whom God rescued from the land of Egypt, we can learn a great deal. After being delivered from the hand of Pharaoh, God allowed them to enter the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. Early in the journey, God made the effort to teach them about Himself, to transform their minds for His purposes so that they might believe and trust Him. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, and He gave a specific plan for worship. In many ways the Israelites were babies in their beliefs. Over and over again they didn't take time to embrace the truths about God

We too are in the wilderness as we await our Promised Land, heaven. God has offered us so much Truth in His Word. As we embrace believing in it with excellence, knowing it and trusting in it, we become rich in God.

Becoming a mature believer is all about transforming the mind for this journey. It is part of cultivating good in our lives. It does take work and energy, and sometimes it may *feel* like homework, but I can guarantee you it will definitely pay off later in life. We can't always trust our feelings, but we can always trust His Truth. As we finish out our study today, take some time to read through Psalm 119. This is actually the longest chapter in the Bible and its focus is all about loving and valuing the Word of God. As you read through this chapter, jot down some of the benefits of excellence in your belief of God's Word.

How does
God want you
to respond to
today's lesson?
Be specific.

[illegible]

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Cultivating Good
Study Day Three
Cultivating Excellence in Worship

41

In our study notes we considered Psalm 92:1-2 as a gardening list for cultivating excellence in our worship. Read that verse and note the four things on the list:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

This certainly isn't a comprehensive list about worship, but it is a great place to start as we survey our gardens. So let's look at the list. It says it is good to:

1. **Give thanks to the Lord.** How is thankfulness a part of worship? _____

Look at your garden. Are there any weeds of ungratefulness there? Why? _____

If so, what do you need to do to remove them? _____

2. **Sing praises to Thy Name Most High.** Many times the Bible tells us to sing to the Lord. Because I am a vocalist, I love to do this. This is one area where weeds rarely grow in my garden. Personally I am glad that it doesn't command something that I don't naturally enjoy. I can do anything within God's divine law as unto Him and it is an act of worship, but for some reason, God who knows more than I do commands that we sing to Him. Why do you think that is so? _____

Now even though weeds don't naturally grow in my garden in the actual doing of this, there are times they grow in the way I sing to the Lord. I have to constantly guard my garden from weeds of half-hearted singing, unfocused singing, self-focused singing, and the list goes on. God wants us to sing to Him. I know that He enjoys it, and I believe it does something for us as well. Look at your garden. How is it looking? _____

Do you need to do any cultivating? _____

3. **Declare Thy lovingkindness in the morning.** I think this is so interesting. I know it blesses Him when we declare His lovingkindness, but He turns our worship to Him into a blessing for us. Isn't that just so God? First of all, let's define lovingkindness. This word is the Hebrew word *cheched* and it means goodness, kindness and faithfulness. What blessings might we receive when we make declaration of this first thing in the morning? _____

Look at your garden. How are your thoughts first thing in the morning? Cultivating is not just about taking things out, it also includes adding things in. Sometimes we have to add fertilizer and other nutrients to the soil. Perhaps you have never considered declaring His lovingkindness in the morning. How can you add that to your garden? _____

4. **Declare His faithfulness by night.** Do things ever happen in your day, causing you to wonder where God was? I know they do in mine. I have to guard the garden of my life at night because Satan

would like nothing better than to sow seeds of doubt and mistrust at the end of a hard day. When I give myself over to “doing good” in worship by declaring His faithfulness by night, once again it is a blessing to God, but it guards my life as well. Look at your garden. How can you sow this into your life at the end of the day? _____

One of the reasons I think I am not a gardener in the natural sense is that I get frustrated when things die and I have to start over again year after year. Oh, I know there is such a thing as a perennial, too, I have planted them as well, I just don’t seem to have a green thumb. Lucky for me, God didn’t say, “Garden beautiful flowers to Thy Name O Most High.” I know, I know, He did tell us to rule over the earth, and I make effort to do my part and I am very thankful for people with green thumbs. I love the beauty of a well-cared-for garden!

Seriously though, I am not a gardener in the natural, but I want to be one in the spiritual. I love the fact that the things I plant in my life will live forever if I just watch over them “doing good.”

In case you forgot your shovel, here are your verses to review.

Memorization

1 Peter 3:11b “and do good.”

Psalms 37:3 “Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.”

Worship Gardening List

1. Give Thanks
2. Sing Praise
3. Declare His lovingkindness in the morning
4. Declare His faithfulness at night



Cultivating Good

Study Day Four

Cultivating Excellence in Our Work

As we consider cultivating excellence in our work, it is fundamental that we understand who we are working for. I am convinced that if we really believed we were working for God, we would all be excellent workers in every area. It is easy to categorize our work as job, Christian, household, parenting, etc. The Bible doesn’t do that, but if we aren’t careful, we will easily think that way and in so doing we will settle for less than our best in certain areas. We need to pull those weeds! Today we are going to search out some verses about work and try to get God’s perspective. Look up the following verses and seek out God’s message in each one.

Before you begin today, pray and ask the Lord to speak to you concerning the work He has you doing at this time. As women we wear many hats, so make sure you are thinking from a broad perspective.

So pray and then plant these strong truths from God’s Word in your garden.

Ecclesiastes 9:10a _____

Philippians 2:13-15 _____

Colossians 1:9-10 _____

Colossians 3:23 _____

Proverbs 18:9 _____

II Timothy 2:19-21 _____

Ephesians 6:5-9 _____

I Timothy 6:18 _____

II Thessalonians 3:13 _____

God definitely has thoughts about what we put our hands to on this earth. What is God speaking to you through these verses? _____

We have done lots of digging and planting this week. I hope your garden is looking great. I told you those three little words would have lots of impact. When Paul closed out the book of Hebrews, he prayed a prayer that I would like to also share with you.

*“And now may the God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
equip you with all you need for doing His will.
May He who became the Great Shepherd of the sheep...
produce in you through the power of Christ
all that is pleasing to Him.”*

Hebrews 13:20-21 (TLB)

Amen!

Now water your garden by reviewing your verses.

Week 5

Seeking and Pursuing

Memorization

1 Peter 3:11b “let him seek peace and pursue it”

Philippians 4:6-7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

OR

Isaiah 26:3 “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because He trusts in You.”

Can I just share with you that I love my life? I am so blessed. It seems more and more I just seem to experience the fullness of Christ, even after I just think I am so full, so satisfied. I love it, I truly do. That hasn't always been the case, and sometimes I can't believe that God has so redeemed me and brought me to this place of abundance in Him. I want to hold on to the life He has given me—I want to protect it!

Have you ever been robbed? Let me tell you about a time that I was robbed in a most unusual way. It was the fall of my sixth grade year in school. It seemed that fall that every time we turned around, something was missing in our home. Little things and then bigger things were gone. Finally, we realized someone was coming in our home and robbing us. To make a long story short, one Sunday morning my father stayed home from church undercover (sounds like the movies, doesn't it?) hoping to catch the thief. You will never guess who he caught. He caught my very good friend who lived next door, caught her right in the act of stealing from our family. Some friend! To make matters worse, it was my birthday. You may wonder how she was getting in. Well, I had told her our family secret so she knew where we hid the outside key. I had been cautioned by my parents not to tell anyone, but I had disobeyed, and as a result, here was this big mess. I can't even begin to tell you the peace that was lost and the awkward dynamics that resulted between us as friends and neighbors. It wasn't a pretty sight.

This week we are actually going to finish verse 11 of this passage. Whew, doing a few words a week takes a while to get through it, but oh, the Word has been rich! In this passage we are instructed to “seek peace and pursue it.” Satan knows where the key is to your heart, and he will come in often to steal your peace if you are not intent on seeking and pursuing it.

As we begin, we need to look carefully as we usually do at the meaning of the words spoken in this passage. The word peace is the Greek word *eirene*, and it encompasses many kinds of peace: national, emotional, relationship, personal, physical, salvational, and eternal. That covers a lot in our lives. Oh to have peace in every area, all the time, in every way!

God tells us to do two things regarding this kind of peace. He says to “seek and pursue it.” So let's look at those two words as well. Although similar in meaning, one draws out the significance of the other. It is very common in Biblical writing to say the same thing two times with the second a bit more intense. It helps us grasp the importance of the matter. The word for seek is *zeteo*, and it means to seek in order to find, to seek [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to

inquire into, aim at, strive after, require, demand, to crave. Whew, those are some pretty strong words. What about pursue? It is even stronger. It is the Greek word *dioko*, and it means to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to press on: figuratively of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal, to pursue (in an intense manner), to acquire. I hope you get the picture that God isn't playing when He tells us to seek and pursue peace. It will require lots of effort on our part. The peace is available for us, but God also knows that we live in a sinful, sick, anxiety-ridden world. So we have to seek and pursue.

Why would God tell us to do that? Well, He is all about peace—talk about pursuing it—He made the ultimate pursuit. He set the example of it. The Bible says that He himself is our peace (Ephesians 2:14) who made the dividing wall one. God is not asking us to do something that he has not done Himself. He also knows what peace will do for us. In James 3:18, we are told that righteousness is born in an atmosphere of peace. If we want righteousness to grow in our lives, then we must cultivate an atmosphere of peace in our lives. Let's look briefly at some of these kinds of peace.

In reality, we all have been robbed. Satan is a thief and he robbed us of our life with God. As a result of sin, there was a wall put up between us and God. You may have grown up knowing Christ so you may have never really sensed that wall, and yet some have been very aware of it. We need to get a sense of the division that existed between us and Christ. What Christ did was to take down the wall. He came to us. He was the innocent one and we the guilty, but He made peace. He is our peace. We are in a war on this earth, but there is no reason to be in a war with God. We remember what He did for us, we rest in that, and it fits us for life. Ephesians 6 tells us how to fight the war. It gives us the weapons we need. One that it mentions is having our feet fitted with the gospel of peace (verse 15). If we wear these shoes, then no matter where we go, we take it with us—we are at peace with God. Listen to what Beth Moore says: “Our balance out on the battlefield comes from knowing that—although we are at war with Satan, who is admittedly powerful—we are at peace with God, who is gloriously omnipotent and fights our battles for us. Our feet are fitted for battle by resting snugly in the gospel of peace.” II Corinthians 4:8-10 also is a great description of how we do this.

When we have the “gospel of peace” shoes on, we can run after any other kind of peace (with ourselves, with others) because we remember we carry His gospel with us wherever we go and that Christ pursued peace with us even though He was the innocent one. One thing I have learned for sure about pursuing peace—keep your shoes on.

Emotional, personal, and physical peace are very important to me. As I have pursued peace, I have come to believe they are all connected together. If I am not at peace emotionally, then it affects me physically and personally. I know that there are a million opinions and studies out there on this one. I don't have all the answers, but I do have a testimony. If you don't mind, I would just like to share from my heart.

In my life, I came to a point where I needed to either believe God's Word or not. I chose to believe. I believe God's Word says that He can give us peace, period. We either take God at His Word or we don't. Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou will keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.” He doesn't say He might or He will think about it, He says he does.

There was a time when I didn't believe that. My emotions were here, there, and everywhere. Because of this, I felt like I was always riding a roller coaster and I experienced it in my body as well. I obeyed my emotions, believing that I had no control over them. I spent a lot of days physically sick in my twenties; infections of all kinds, serious reproductive problems, other sickness. I also was a mess

personally. I didn't like myself; I was lacking confidence and yet trying to make myself appear that I was confident. I was always arguing with my husband and irritable with my daughter. I wasn't at peace. The Bible says in Proverbs 12:25, "Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down but a good word makes it glad." Let me tell you, I was weighed down, way down, but God gave me a good word. Praise the Lord!

I would get so mad at my husband when he would try to talk to me about managing my emotions because I didn't think it was possible. I am so glad that God rescued me from myself. After spending a great amount of time in the Word and with the Lord, I have learned that my husband was right. Satan was lying to me, telling me that I couldn't manage my emotions, that I couldn't rule my spirit, and as a result, he entered my house and robbed me of peace and of my physical well-being.

Then I saw that the Word of God said, "He who rules His spirit is more mighty than the one who rules a city" (Proverbs 16:32). I wanted that for my life, so I made a commitment to put God's Word to the test. I determined to do two things:

- ❖ Keep my mind on him and trust in his promise that He will keep me in perfect peace.
- ❖ Try to do the other things that the Word says. For example:
 - Philippians 4:8 – think on these things
 - II Corinthians 10:5 – take my thoughts captive so my thoughts match what God likes

I determined that I would do those things and see if I couldn't have emotional and personal peace. Let me tell you, I have found that what God says, He means. This is one of the most important reasons that I believe so strongly in the Word of God. I believe it can set us free, not just from death, but from the war that wages against our emotions and personal anxieties. I wouldn't be standing here today if that were not true. Now, does that mean that I don't ever get stressed, that anxiety doesn't threaten me or I don't lose my temper? *Noooooooo*. Often though, I recognize now that Satan is banging on the door, trying to undo me. I recognize him as a liar and a thief, and I respond accordingly. And the more I do so, the more quickly I recognize him and kick him out. And I understand that I can rule my spirit with God's Word and what He says. Let me explain.

Recently I have been studying a passage in I Chronicles 29:11-12 that God has been impressing on my heart in all manner of ways. I have been thinking about it for months, meditating on it, testing it out in my heart, praying about it, talking about it. It basically says four things:

- Riches and honor come from God
- God rules over all
- God has all the power and might
- The power lies in His hand to make great and strengthen everyone

The more I meditated on them, the more peace I got. Satan wanted to steal them from me, to take my peace. As a result, we had some really challenging things that happened. Without going into it all, let me just tell you I ended up on my face, quoting God's Word back to Him, letting Him know that I trusted Him and asking for peace. I was pursuing it, seeking it. Guess what? I found it. God's Word is true.

Philippians 4:6-7 is one of our memory passages this week and is a commonly quoted passage about peace. It is awesome! Recently I was challenged to write this verse in the opposite of what God was trying to convey. Here is what I wrote.

“Do not be calm about anything, but in everything, by worrying and throwing fits and with complaining, ignore God and the stress of the world which is common to man will imprison you in your mind, heart and emotions.”

Which is the way you live? As quoted by God, or quoted by me? I am convinced one puts you in a prison of anxiety and stress and one puts you in a place of peace.

So I want to challenge you if you struggle with anxiety or depression. I am not an expert, I am just a friend who has put God's Word to the test and found it to be true. I want to challenge you to do the same. Purpose to put your mind on Him all the time. Purpose to do other things that the Word tells you to do with your mind and see what happens. I know there are other opinions out there, but friend to friend, I just had to share.

I don't know about you, but I absolutely hate conflict with others; it puts my stomach in knots. Some people thrive on conflict, and some live with it all the time not knowing how to get out of it. Whichever way you are, God says pursue peace; seek peace if you want to love your life.

Usually the struggles we have in relationships are more about us than the other people. Read James 4:1-2 and see what I mean. We don't have what we want and so we argue, we fight. We can fight with everyone if we are warring with ourselves: our coworkers, the lady at the checkout, the person who cuts us off on the road, our family, even the dog. The Bible says, “As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18).

The Spirit of God within us gives us the power to do that. We can be the peacemaker and it actually can be fun. I believe we get a glimpse of the heart of God when we initiate the peace. How do we do that? We know someone is in conflict with us, so we purposefully do something nice for them. The lady at the checkout ticks us off, so we bless her with life-giving words. The person in traffic cuts us off on the road, so we pray for them. I think you get the idea, when we respond in these ways, it sets us free! You may think, there are some areas where I can't do that. Peace would never work; I just have to leave that one behind. I can't answer that for you, I just know what the Bible says, “As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18). There isn't a lot of room for exception there, and that is for our good. Satan will try to rob you and tell you that you don't need that relationship, that person doesn't matter, to move on.

He is a liar. You just need to look down at your shoes. We are wearing our gospel of peace shoes. God had no exceptions when he offered peace to us. For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son that whosoever...

Whosoever offends you, seek peace
Whosoever gets on your nerves, seek peace
Whosoever hurts your feelings, seek peace
Whosoever acts like a jerk, seek peace
Whosoever hurts your child, seek peace
Whosoever messes up something, seek peace
Whosoever, whosoever, whosoever...seek peace!

Do you see how peace can bring a joy to life and a harvest of good and right living? You see, we rest in God's care for us, for our heart, for our interests, and we have peace because we know He is in control of our salvation, our well-being and our best interest in everything. I love what Billy Graham said, “I read the last page of the Bible, and it is all going to turn out all right.” Now that is peace!

Seeking and Pursuing

Study Day One

Continued Pursuit, Continued Gift

This week in our study notes, I really shared from the heart about where the Lord has brought me in regards to peace. And I shared from the heart about what He is teaching me now, and I shared from the heart about areas and places I know I still need to grow in regards to peace. Let me follow up with that by saying it has been a journey of seeking peace, peace with God, peace with myself, and peace in relationships. As I have yielded and submitted to God's Word, I have grown in this. Seeking and pursuing are action verbs that generate an idea of continued action and a continued gift that comes as a part of that action. It requires effort on our part. God will give the peace, but we have to make strong pursuit of it in this anxiety-ridden world.

Read Isaiah 26:3 very carefully and put it in your own words. _____

As I have surveyed the Bible about peace in preparation for this lesson, God has made something absolutely clear to me. When I got saved, God didn't just hand me a portion of peace on a platter as a gift and that was that. It is a gift that He offered then and one that He continues to give and that I have to continue to receive. Here is the verse in the New American Standard Version. I am going to pull out my former English teacher hat and ask you to underline the verbs in this verse.

"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because He trusts in You."

The verb "keep" conveys a continued action on God's part. Look at the definition of the word. The word for "keep" in this verse is *natsar*, and it means:

1. to watch, guard, keep
2. to preserve, guard from dangers
3. to keep, observe, guard with fidelity
4. to guard, keep secret
5. to be kept close, be blockaded
6. to be a watchman over

Isn't that amazing? God is saying He will do these things for us in regards to having peace. Remember from our teaching that the word "peace" here is an all-encompassing peace. So as we trust in Him, He will watch over us and preserve us in regards to peace in any area where we need it.

The verb "trusts" is the word *batach*, and it means:

1. to trust, trust in
2. to have confidence, be confident
3. to be bold
4. to be secure in

What is one
area that you
need peace
today?

So what is our part in receiving the peace? _____

One exercise in Bible Study that often yields lots of understanding is surveying the same verse in many different versions. The variations of word expression often allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us in a fresh way. Even if you don't have many different versions at home, you can do this yourself at any time on www.biblegateway.com, and I heartily recommend it. Below I have given you several different versions of Isaiah 26:3. After reading each one carefully and paying special attention to the verbs, make any notes of added understanding that you receive.

"People with their minds set on You, You keep completely whole, steady on their feet, because they keep at it and don't quit" (Message).

"You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You" (Amplified Version).

"You will keep in perfect peace, all who trust in You, all whose thoughts are fixed on You!" (New Living Translation).

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee" (King James Version).

"Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the mind stayed [on Thee], for he confideth in Thee" (Darby).

"You will keep in perfect peace the mind [that is] dependent [on You], for it is trusting in You" (Holman Christian Standard Version).

Here are two other verses I found as well that use the word *natsar*, which is the word translated in Isaiah 26:3 as "keep." Do you see any further insight here about how the Lord may give us a continual supply of peace?

Isaiah 27:3: "I, the Lord, am its keeper; I water it every moment. Lest anyone damage it, I guard it night and day."

Isaiah 42:6: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations."

Now write a summary of these expressions in regards to what you have learned about what God will do when He says He will "keep" us in peace. _____

Write a summary of these expressions in regards to what you have learned about what you need to do in regards to trusting God for peace. _____

Now one more question. Go back to the box that you wrote in on page 5. You can be sure that God is doing His part. Are you doing yours? _____

As we conclude today, I want to share something that God showed me about the word *natsar*. The pronunciation of this word sounds like “North Star.” We live in a world and in situations where peace can seem like something we can never find. I don’t want to come across as patronizing when I say, “Trust God for peace” to situations you are facing where peace seems impossible. I know it can be hard, but I also believe God’s Word—I have put it to the test again and again and found it to be true. As we conclude Day One of this lesson, place your trust in this promise of Isaiah 26:3. Let God be your “North Star” as you journey to the place of peace in relationship to Him, in relationship to yourself and in relationship with others. God is shining the way. May our eyes be upon Him.

Turn your eyes upon Him now as you review your verses for this week.

Seeking and Pursuing

Study Day Two Offerings and Covenants

The star of peace is shining. Can you see it? From the beginning of time, God has been offering peace to His people. We could spend years studying about peace and still have more to grasp in our hearts. Our God is a God of peace. In this passage of 1 Peter 3:11b, God tells us, “Let him who means to love life and see good days... let him seek peace and pursue it.” My prayer has been, “Lord, speak through this lesson what You want us to see, what You want us to grasp. There is so much to look at; what do you want to show us this week as we study?”

Several times in this study we have looked at Genesis 3, and yet God keeps calling us back. Perhaps it is because as we discuss loving life, this is the place where our life as God had intended was destroyed, yet it is also the place where He stepped in and began to unfold His plan to restore life for us. There are two important things to view there for us today.

The first is Genesis 3:15. At first glance you may read it and say, what on Earth is that about? Let me briefly explain. After Adam and Eve ate the fruit, God spoke to the serpent. Verse 15 is part of what He said. He was clear that there will always be hatred between man (plural) and Satan, but in the last two lines his statement moves from plural to singular and this is the first foreshadowing of Christ. Satan would bruise the heel of Christ when He was crucified, but Christ would crush Satan’s head when He rose from the dead. Hallelujah! Romans 16:20 says, “And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” So right after the first sin, God was unveiling his plan of peace. Moments later, He stepped in again and right before the eyes of Adam and Eve, he sacrificed an animal and made garments of skin for them to wear to cover their nakedness (verse 21). There would be plenty more sacrifices to come, including the ultimate one of Jesus, but God was reaching out, making the first seen invitations toward peace.

Early on, God established an offering called a peace offering (see Leviticus 3). Scriptures abound by the hundreds that talk about peace offerings. Peace did not exist between man and God; there was a great sin barrier there. God created a way for man to have fellowship with Him in the midst of the sin, but the cost was great. Men and women in Biblical times were no different than you and me. They had a great need for peace in their hearts. Those who loved God needed to know that He was for them. Animals were sacrificed by the thousands, time and again, for peace. This is not an exhaustive list, but read the following scriptures to see that these offerings were offered for peace in relation to being

Thankful – Leviticus 7:11-13
Dedicating of a vow – Leviticus 7:16
Reconciled – Ezekiel 45:15
Consecrated – Exodus 29:22, 29
Coronated as a king – I Samuel 11:15
Celebrating a victory – Joshua 8:31
Defeated – Judges 20:26
Restored – II Samuel 24:25
Worshipful – II Samuel 6:17

You see, you and I have the knowledge that God is for us. We may not always feel that way, but the Truth proclaims it. We are blessed. Before Christ, man didn't know that, so whatever the situation, they were constantly seeking peace with God. They couldn't do enough. The offerings were never done with. One would need another one shortly after finishing the one being offered, but for a different reason altogether. **Peace offerings were offered for obtaining peace with God.**

But God made a covenant with us, a covenant of peace. Read Ezekiel 37:26. Here I go with the English again! What adjective describes the word covenant? _____

It is an everlasting covenant: Once it is made, it is good forever. Turn to Hebrews 10:1-23. The subtitle in my Bible here is "*One Sacrifice of Christ is Sufficient.*" Now understand that subtitles were written by man, but what a great subtitle. It describes this passage perfectly. Take a moment to read it. What subtitle would you give this passage? _____

A covenant is a binding agreement. Man has certainly been known to break covenant with God, but God will never break covenant with man. God has made an everlasting covenant of peace with us. That means He is for us, He is at peace with us. We may not always feel like it, but it is the Truth. When we understand and grasp that, it will make all the difference in the pursuing of peace and seeking peace in our lives. Our study notes mentioned Ephesians 6:15. What does that verse instruct us to wear?

_____ It is most important that we do that!

Several years ago I injured my foot, and in the process I have learned that I must wear good shoes. I have learned the hard way that I will pay the price if I don't. I wear them everywhere, even when I get up to go the bathroom in the middle of the night. It is amazing to me how a moment here or there without my good shoes on and wham, my feet are killing me. It is the same way with our gospel of peace shoes. We need them at all times, or Satan will rob us quickly of our peace with God.

So what is the message today? When God says, "let him seek peace and pursue it," He is telling us to seek and pursue **not for peace, but because of peace!**

How does
God want you
to respond to
His Word
today?

Remind yourself of who your peace is. Read Ephesians 2:14. Who is our peace?

Now read and meditate on John 16:33.

We already have peace. It is Jesus and through Him we have an everlasting covenant with God. We know that, but may it fall afresh on us today. If He is our peace, how can we live any differently? The offerings are no longer needed but the covenant will stand forever. Praise the Lord that we can love our life!

Remind yourself of that peace you have by reviewing God's Word that He would like you to memorize.

Seeking and Pursuing

Study Day Three Friends of Peace

As we endeavor to make 1 Peter 3:11 a reality, we saw in Day One that we can have peace by keeping our eyes on Him, and we saw in Day Two that Jesus is our peace. I believe God calls us to seek and pursue peace because it is an identifying factor of our life in Him. Not only that, peace is a blessing. Everyone wants it, but the only way to have it, truly have it, is through Christ.

The Bible has so much to say about peace. As you are pursuing Him and pursuing peace, God will give you the Truth you need to be successful. One of the Truths He has put upon my heart to share with you today is that peace has some good friends. You may say, "What in the world are you talking about?" Well, there are just some things that we see in God's Word that always appear to be "hanging out" with peace. Today we are going to take a look at them. Perhaps if we get to know them a bit better, we will also become better acquainted with peace as well.

Peace and Truth

What is Truth? Look up Psalm 119:160. What do you get when you add all of the Words of God together? _____

I love that: a mathematical equation right in the middle of God's Word! Now don't fret, that will be the only mathematical question I will ask you. English is another story, but math and I aren't the greatest of friends.

Truth is something that will never change; it is real to the core and firm to the end. Whatever God says is the real thing, and it will never change. When you add all of the words of God together, the sum is Truth.

In the book of Esther we find a lack of peace for the Jews. Their lives are in danger, and anxiety is at an all-time high. After God moved His mighty hand over the situation, Mordecai and Esther sent a letter of good news to all of them. Read Esther 9:30. What did the letter contain? _____

In Jeremiah 33, God was speaking through Jeremiah to the nation of Judah, and He was promising restoration. What does He say in verse 6? _____

As I have journeyed through the land of anxiety seeking and pursuing peace, I have found that I need an abundance of Truth in order to find peace. I need the Truth of God's Word to invade my heart so that I can have peace. What have you found out about the peace and Truth? Give an example.

Peace and Righteousness

Another good friend of peace would definitely be righteousness. A working definition of righteousness would be, "right living that lines up with God's ways." Let's take a look.

Read Psalm 85:10. What does it say? _____

That is an interesting comment, isn't it? The word for "met" in that verse means "bonded together." The word for kissed, which is the one that describes what has happened between righteousness and peace, is *nashaq*, and it means to touch or have affection or love for one another.

Read Isaiah 32:17. What is the work of righteousness? _____

It could just as easily say the achievement of righteousness is peace.

Read James 3:18. What is the seed that righteousness grows from? _____

After reading these verses, summarize the friendship of righteousness and peace. _____

Righteousness and peace certainly have a strong relationship. It appears that they have great affection for one another, and each begets the other. If I am seeking peace, pursuing peace, I can be sure that righteousness is going to be nearby. Because of that, it should be no wonder to me that when I am making righteous choices in my life, I also seem to have peace. However, if I am living in rebellion toward God in any way, Satan steals my peace right out from under me. Can you relate? If so, describe it here. _____

Peace and Joy

Look at Isaiah 55. In this chapter, God is freely offering mercy, and its effects are described. What does it say in verse 12 about peace and joy? _____

We journey with God, led by peace and rejoicing all the way, knowing God is for us.

Read Romans 14:17. In this section of scripture, great controversy has been going on about the Jewish law and what is now required of Christians in regards to eating certain foods. Paul finally just blurts out the Truth. I love this verse. It puts those of us who get caught up in making rules in our place. It lets us know front and center what the kingdom is about. What does it say? _____

Here they are again. Righteousness, peace, and joy go together.

Read Romans 15:13. This is a prayer of Paul for the church. What does He pray in regards to peace and joy? _____

As we believe, the effects of peace and joy will be right there, too, because they go together.

So what does that mean for us? It is interesting to see that peace has friends, but what does that mean to my journey of seeking and pursuing peace? I think it means a great deal. If I know two people are good friends and I am looking for one, I am quite certain that I will either find them together or one will know where the other one is. So, on my quest for peace, I would be wise to be just as interested in truth, righteousness, and joy. Peace will probably be hanging out with them.

I hope I haven't confused you by personifying peace, truth, righteousness, and joy. Because the Bible puts them together so often, God led me to share them with you in this way. Are you seeking peace as a friend? If so, do you know her best friends truth, righteousness, and joy? I encourage you to hang out with them; they will certainly help you to love life. Describe what you think your life might be like if these four became your best friends. _____

Is there any way that God wants you to respond to His Word today? Has He indicated anything specific to you about your journey toward peace? End your study time in prayer with Him, enjoying His friendship and His wisdom about peace. Blessings!

You may want to pray these scriptures in your prayer time. It is a great way to continue memorizing them. In case you don't know them completely yet, I will put them right here for you so you won't get distracted turning pages in your prayer time.

Memorization

1 Peter 3:11b "let him seek peace and pursue it"

Philippians 4:6-7 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

OR

Isaiah 26:3 "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You."

Seeking and Pursuing

Study Day Four Peace Like a River

Everyone, believer in Christ or not, would like to have peace. The world many times offers peace. Think about this question. What are some qualities of the kind of peace the world offers?

The one that comes to mind most prominently for me is that the peace the world offers is based on circumstances. Think about it: Commercials that offer peace of mind offer it based on the product you purchase from them, insurance, financial consultation, a safe car. I love the statement from Jesus in John 14:27. Take a moment to read it. How does it make you feel? Why?

Now I have had plenty of people in my lifetime tell me to calm down or that things are going to be okay. Sometimes I've just wanted to shout at them, "You don't know what I am going through!" or "How do you know it is going to be okay?" But when Jesus says it, it is a whole different story. He is the only one who can offer peace and really know for sure it is available. The world's peace just doesn't cut it!

As we finish out our study time this week, we certainly haven't covered everything the Bible has to say about peace, but we have looked at some important truths. Perhaps you wish I had given time to really look at some of your personal situations where you are struggling to have peace. You may wish that I had given you a certain scripture for a certain thing. To be honest, that was my original plan, but God answered my prayer and directed differently. He is the one who knows best how to protect us from letting Satan rob us of peace. He is the ultimate protector.

If you were hoping for that, today's lesson will probably really be an encouragement to you. So press on. No, it won't give you a specific answer, but it will allow you to see a picture of peace that is not far off for you. A picture you can hang on to and be refreshed by. A picture of peace, directly out of God's Word.

Turn to Isaiah 66:12a. The book of Isaiah is a book of correction and a book of promise. The correction comes very strongly in the first half of the book and the promise very strongly in the second half. This is near the end so the promise is abundant. In this section, Isaiah is prophesying about the great future God's people can have. Read this verse and then write it out here.

What is the word picture of peace given here? _____

Peace that is like a river. That is the kind of peace that God wants to give us. In order to glean from this the most, let's take a moment and write as many words that describe qualities of a river as you can think of. _____

Some of the words that I thought of were:

Flowing	Deep
Moving over rocks	Wide
Moving into crevices	Fun
Refreshing	Relaxing
Rushing	Preserving

You know, when we think about the circumstances of our life, we can easily lose our peace. That is why I love this analogy of peace like a river. Using some of the words that I wrote, let's draw out some understanding here. God's peace will always be flowing over my life. If there are small rocks (trials) in my life, His peace will cover them quickly. If the rock (trial) is big, the peace can go over it or surround it and cover it. If I have hidden crevices in my life that no one can see and Satan is using them to steal my peace, God's peace can reach into them as well. His peace is like a river that will refresh me as I step into it and let its cool water flow over my tired, achy feet that are stressed from the cares of this life. It will rush in and cover me in ways I can't control and determine. It will preserve the life in me and it is deep enough to cover anything from my past and wide enough to wrap around my busy life. There will be times that it is just fun, and there will be times that it gives me the rest and relaxation I need. Its qualities are vast and like a river God wants to flow over my life in peace.



What about some of the words that you wrote that are different than mine? Using them, can you make analogies that will draw out the understanding of this statement that His peace is like a river? Take a moment to do so now. _____

In our quest to seek and pursue peace, we have spent a lot of time looking at Truth about peace this week. Now let's take a moment of personal reflection. In what part of your life does Satan most often break in and steal your peace? Considering the understanding that we have gained above, is there any way that you can keep the door locked in that area now? How so? _____

As we finish out this week of study, take a moment to pray. Tell God about the areas in your life where you need to seek and pursue peace. He already knows about them, but sharing with Him will bless you. If you will allow me, let me guide you through this prayer.

First of all, praise the Lord for his goodness to you. Describe some specific things.

Ask Him to be real and present to you during this time.

Let Him know that you are yielding to His Word and seeking and pursuing peace.

Ask that His peace might be like a river to you. Using our lists tell Him what you need.

Tell him about the areas where Satan is breaking in and stealing your peace. Is there any place in

- Your relationship with Him where Satan is stealing your peace?
- Your emotions and personal circumstances where Satan is stealing your peace?
- Your relationships with others where Satan is stealing your peace?

If so, confess those to Him and ask Him for wisdom to claim His peace and to continue in it. Ask Him to help you keep your mind on Him so that you can be in perfect peace. Now finish out your prayer time by praying the prayer Paul prayed in I Thessalonians 3:26 which says,

***Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you(me) peace in every circumstance.
In Jesus' name, Amen.***

If I haven't told you so before, I am so glad you are along for this ride. I hope you are glad, too. May I pray a scripture prayer of blessing over you as well? (***1 Peter 1:2b***)

Dear Father, May grace and peace be ours in the fullest measure. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And Lord, help us memorize those verses!

Week 6

Getting God's Attention

Memorization

I Peter 3:12 – “For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

II Chronicles 16:9 – “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...”

I am excited about discussing verse 12 this week because it really puts verses 10-11 in perspective. In fact, it gives the “why” of following the truths presented in those verses. So here we go.

Have you ever really needed to get someone’s attention? Was it a serious situation? Was it something that was important right for the moment or for a big event? If you think about it, we go to great extents sometimes to get others’ attention for a big moment or for life goals. Students work very hard to generate great SAT scores, hoping to get college attention and acceptance where they want to attend. We know that if we work diligently, we may get our boss’ attention and get a promotion. Kids many times will wear silly clothes and hats and costumes to get attention. And which one of us hasn’t felt the pull for the “right” clothes, the “right” hair, or the “right” decor in our home, hoping to get positive attention? These things don’t have to be harmful, but they can be a distraction if we aren’t careful. The real attention that we should be interested in is God’s attention.

If we are going to love our life in Christ, we have to have His attention on our lives. It is essential. In a world this big, how can we be conspicuous to God? I will never forget the thought I had one moment when I was watching the opening ceremonies of the Olympics in Sydney, Australia. As the camera scanned the crowd, I was mesmerized by the amount of people there. I remember Satan whispering a lie to me: “How could God ever know you personally? There are way too many people in the world.” I could have believed him, but God’s Word says differently. We need to trust that. Verse 12 of I Peter 3:10-15 has some profound thoughts about getting God’s attention on your life, and that is where we will focus for this lesson.

This small verse says three things that we need to take a close look at:

1. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous
2. His ears attend to their prayers
3. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil

First of all, “the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous...” Let’s look carefully at that. The Greek word for eyes is *ofqalmo* and it means the eyes of the mind, the faculty of knowing. The Greek word for “upon” is a simple preposition that basically means “right there.” So God’s mind is right there with the person who is righteous.

Well, who would that be? Who is righteous? The person approved by God is the righteous person. Can I be so bold to think that God approves of me? Yes, if I have accepted Him and given my life to Him. If so, then I am covered by the blood of Christ, and if we are covered by His blood, then He sees us as righteous. I can’t be righteous on my own, but in Him I can be. Consider such verses as Philippians 3:9:

“and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

When I place my faith in Him, because Christ was righteous, God sees me that way, too. Look as well at Isaiah 61:10 where the statement is made that through salvation He

“wraps me in a robe of righteousness.”

That is the clothing we need to wear to get God’s attention. So, what about the person who isn’t clothed in righteousness? Can God see Him? The question is not can He, but does He? God is certainly aware of that person, but by His own choice, His mind, His heart, His attention, His care, if you would, is going to be toward the person who is righteous in His sight. Take a look at II Chronicles 16:9. God’s heart is to bless. He is looking for the righteous person that He can turn His eye toward for blessing. In this passage, He won’t bless because Asa the King has wrapped himself in garments of self-care and perspective, not righteousness. Look at what God says to him.

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

It is like God is saying, you have done your own thing and that has been your choice. I will leave you to yourself then. You see God is omniscient; He knows everything (Psalm 139). But His eye of favor, taking notice to bless, will be on the righteous person, the person clothed in His righteousness. I love what Beth Moore says in her study “Breaking Free.” Here she says, “Those who possess a God glorifying attitude have allowed Him to assume a definite position in their personal lives that can’t help becoming conspicuous.” You know what? I want to be conspicuous in God’s sight; I want him to notice me when I walk by. In our world, so often things are conspicuous when they are wrong. In God’s world it is the exact opposite. The person interested in righteousness is conspicuous to God.

Psalm 1 contrasts the life of the righteous and the wicked. Verses 4-6 give further insight in connection to our study this week. It says, “He knows the way of the righteous.” In other words, God has set His attention on what is going on in the life of the righteous one, the details that are needed to come together, His thinking is on them, His work, His hand, His eye. Oh, how we need that. But look what it says of the wicked. It says they are like “chaff blowing in the wind.” That is like dust blowing in the wind. In other words, there is nothing distinguishable about it; it is common, not conspicuous at all. If you think about it, when is the only time you see dust? You see it when the light shines on it. When the light of life, Jesus, shines His righteousness on it, God will “see” it. So where do we want to be? I know I want to be conspicuous to God with His eye upon me at all times, not some dust just blowing in the wind here and there.

Secondly, this verse says, “His ears attend to their prayer.” The same kind of question comes to mind. Can God not hear certain prayers? Once again it isn’t a matter of what He can do because God can do anything; He is aware of everything, omniscient. But this part of verse 12 lets us know what He turns His attention to by choice and it makes it clear that when the voice of the righteous cries out to God, it gets God’s attention and He attends to their prayers.

Have you ever heard someone say, “I don’t feel like my prayers go past the ceiling”? I know I have heard that, and to be honest, I have felt that way a time or two. Perhaps there is some truth to that. This week we will be looking at some scriptures that indicate the prayers that God attends to. You will find these included:

- The humble
- The repentant
- The one crying out to Him
- The one seeking forgiveness
- The one involved in praise
- The one who follows through in obedience

If you think about it, God is our Father. As a parent myself, I am always aware if my child is speaking in my presence, but there are certain kinds of communication from my child that will surely get my attention. You can be certain that God will always be aware of us, but if we want to bend His ear toward us, we need to communicate in ways that get His attention. Obviously we can’t fake these things before our Father who knows all. We need not be so concerned with checking off the boxes of this communication plan but simply have a heart that is interested in what He is interested in, which is righteousness. Verse 12 lets us know that His ears attend to the prayers of the righteous. Not to be repetitive, but simply put, we need to abide under His blood and practice right living before God if we are interested in getting God’s attention.

It is really all about God’s favor. We need His eye upon us and His ear bent toward us. That is how we will truly love our life. I don’t know if you have ever been in a situation where someone was receiving favor from another. We can often think of that in a classroom setting, where a student was a teacher’s pet. When I was a junior in high school, I will never forget a situation such as that. At that time I was in a writing class with the man who is now my husband, only he was a boy of 17 at the time. Our teacher absolutely adored him. It was ridiculous to the rest of us, but he learned how to please her, and he could do nothing wrong in her sight—he was always under her blessing. Can you say ughhhh? He didn’t feel that way, but the rest of us sure did.

What a great picture, though, of the favor of God. When we come under the blessing of Jesus’ salvation and righteousness we don’t deserve it, but it puts us in a position to receive God’s blessings. And the more we practice what we know of living a righteous life, the more we experience more of His attention and favor. You can see examples all over scripture of that. Yes, salvation is free, no one can earn it, but once received, the wise man will develop a pure heart and love for God and the things that God loves, and you can be certain that God’s eyes and ears will be attentive to that person. And that person will love his life!

The final part of verse 12 tells us, “The face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” Wow, that is a scary statement. Have you ever had someone’s face against you, someone who just wouldn’t give you time and attention? I can think of several circumstances in my own life like that, but they couldn’t compare with having the face of God against me. Some people may feel that way when bad things happen, but we need to be careful not to give too much attention to our feelings, as Satan can use them as a lie to us. This verse is clear; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

“Do evil” ... we have looked at these words before. In Week 4 we looked at the word “do” and in Week 3 we looked at the word “evil.” Let’s remind ourselves because these are the same Greek words. “Do” is the word *poieo*, and it means to produce, construct, be the author of, the cause of.

In my research this time, I found another concept linked to this word. It is a prolonged form, meaning “it goes on and on.” The word “evil” here is also the word that we studied before, *kakos*, and it means “of a bad nature, such as it ought not to be in God’s eyes.”

What can we learn from these definitions? When I produce, construct, author, or cause evil over a prolonged period, I can be certain that God’s face will be against me. “Do evil” seems to have the tone of practicing evil just as we have been talking of practicing righteousness.

We also need to consider the idea of God’s face being against us. What does that mean? Not just that I won’t have his attention, but that He will fight me, and personally I think He will fight me to make things right in my life. You see, we can’t look at these verses without looking at the nature of our God. God is love, and He desires all men to come to repentance and embrace salvation and righteousness. In fact, Peter said so in II Peter 3:9.

What if I don’t want to embrace salvation and righteousness, if I go my own way? What does it mean for God’s face to be against me? Perhaps he will be against the choices that I am making and fight against those things. And perhaps God will give us over to our depravity and allow us to suffer the consequences of our sin. (See Romans 1 and 2 and Luke 15:11-32.) Whatever the case, I believe God’s face being set against us is always for the purpose of accomplishing eternal restoration. That is always God’s plan for us, but He gives us a choice between His way or our own way. We think in the temporal, God thinks in the eternal.

Oh, how I want His face turned toward me for eternity! It certainly doesn’t mean that life will be a bed of rosy experiences, but with the attention of God on my life, I am under His sovereign care. I don’t have to figure everything out, I don’t have to understand everything, I don’t have to make my own way in the world. Why? Because I have the attention of God Almighty on my life. It doesn’t get better than that. And I am so thankful He has given such clear direction in this verse of how to get His attention. Righteousness is the key. Become righteous through Christ and then practice righteousness in your daily living. Throughout your life you may get the attention of many people, but when you get the attention of God, you can be certain you will love your life.

Getting God's Attention

Study Day One Now I Get It!

Our focus this week is going to be on getting God’s attention. In our previous weeks, these verses can easily have seemed like a list of rules. In reality they are not that at all. God has been sharing with us the lifestyle that will get His attention. Let’s review. List the lifestyle choices that are encouraged in I Peter 3:10b-11.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now what does it say in verse 12? Put it in your own words.

I see a connection between these verses. It is like God is saying, “If you want to love your life and see good days then live this way, because if you do, My eyes and ears will be attentive to you, but if you don’t, My face will be against you.”

Now before we even get really going here this week, let’s remind ourselves of something. Who is God talking to in this passage?

Satan would like nothing better than to twist this all up and make it seem like God is saying, “If you do bad things I will never listen to you or look at you; in fact I will be against you.” That isn’t it at all. We know from the Word of God that God will open His heart to anyone who cries out to Him for salvation. In this passage He is talking to Christians, people who already have come to know Him. And He is encouraging us to position ourselves in righteousness (as we have in salvation and through lifestyle as well) so that we can always have His attention. He is giving us the secrets to a blessed life in Him. God is so good.

As we get started this week, let’s consider some of the benefits of having God’s attention. Just imagine the blessings of having God’s eyes and ears attentive to you.

We are going to be discussing that for the rest of the week, and you will need to refer to this list you just made.

For the remainder of our time today, though, I would like to go off in a different direction. Let me ask you, how are you doing on your memorization? You know I am becoming more and more convinced that Bible memorization is vital in our lives. And I am becoming more and more convinced that Satan has deceived us into thinking that we can’t do it. Let me tell you, you can do it. I know you can. You are not the exception, the one who is too old or doesn’t have the focus, you can do it. Do you believe that? I do.

This passage we have been studying is so rich and our encouragement has been to memorize it. We have been doing it little by little, literally, sometimes three words total for the week. So I hope you have been able to keep up. But as you probably noticed, this week the pace picks up. I don’t want you to get discouraged and give up. You can do this. I know you can. So if you will stick with me, I would like to take you through a Bible memorization drill for this week to get you started.

I don’t know how you generally memorize, but this simple method works, it just requires discipline. So here we go.

The first statement of our passage this week says,

“For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous”

Say that slowly five times without looking at it. Now check yourself on it again. Read it once and then say it again. Do you have it right? Make sure you do before you move on.

Ok, now go back to the beginning of verse 10. Do one of two things:

1. If you have memorized verses 10 and 11, try to quote them and move on to this first part of verse 12.
2. If you have not memorized verses 10 and 11, read them and then look away as you say the first part of verse 12.

Now the next part of verse 12 says,

“and His ears attend to their prayer”

Say that slowly five times without looking at it. Now check yourself on it again. Read it once and then say it again. Do you have it right? Make sure you do before you move on.

Okay now go back to the beginning of verse 10. Do one of two things:

1. If you have memorized verses 10 and 11, try to quote them and move on to these parts of verse 12.
2. If you have not memorized verses 10 and 11, read them and then look away as you say these parts of verse 12.

Do you see how easy this is? You are just saying it over and over again in little sections. The key is to keep them small and use lots of repetition. Then over the course of several days you keep adding the next small section. After that, take three or four days to review, review, and review without adding anything new. I am telling you, it works. Test it this week and see.

One other thought is to recognize patterns. Verse 12 has a pattern. There are three statements and each talks about a part of the body:

Eyes
Ears
Face

Sometimes a pattern will go in ABC order, and that will help. This one doesn't, but you can visualize it easily. Think of looking at the eyes, then moving backward to the ears, and then encompassing the whole face. Any pattern or mode you can think of will help you keep things straight and all the while pour truth in your heart that will live there for eternity. Discipline, yes. Mental energy, yes. Beneficial, absolutely!

So review it again and tomorrow you will be ready to add the third statement.

Getting God's Attention

Study Day Two

His Eyes Are Upon the Righteous

There is no greater example of righteousness than Jesus Christ Himself, so this week we will consider His example quite often. We are given our righteousness through Christ. There is no way

God will ever view us as righteous apart from Jesus. He gives us our robe of righteousness when we come into a relationship with Him. However, because we still live in this world, there is always a choice before us, whether to respond to our new nature of righteousness or to respond to our old nature of sin. There are so many reasons why righteousness is the good choice, but certainly one presented here is that God's eyes are upon the righteous. Remember that when we say "His eye is upon," we are talking about His presence, His knowing, His work, His favor. Keep that in mind and let's take a moment and consider how God's eye was upon Jesus, the righteous one, throughout His life.

Birth

Read Luke 1-2:38. What are some ways that you know that God's eye were upon Jesus' birth?

Boyhood

Read Luke 2:41-52. How do you see God's eye upon Jesus at this time?

Early Ministry

Read Luke 4:1-22. Is God's eye upon Jesus at this time? How do you know?

Ministry

Read Luke 8:22-40. Do you see God's eye upon Jesus here? Describe it.

The Betrayal, Crucifixion and Resurrection

Read Luke 22:14- 24:12. Is God's eye on Jesus evident here? Explain.

This is such a good lesson for us. There is not anyone more righteous than Jesus, and we can see the eye of God, His presence, His work, His plan, His knowing, through every step of Jesus' life, even the horrific ones. God's eye was upon Him. Jesus had the attention of God. So what is the lesson here?

Just because God's eye is upon us doesn't mean that everything is going to go perfectly from our perspective. God was doing a perfect work of salvation for the world through Jesus, and yet to Jesus' flesh, it must have felt like God had turned His back on Him. That is the joy of knowing we are living in righteousness through Him, living under the blood of Jesus, and living in a lifestyle of pursuing God daily, listening to His voice. When we live that way, we can trust what His Word says, that His eye is upon us. When we see His eye clearly upon us, we rejoice and can love our life. That is always fun and exciting. But when we don't see His eye clearly upon us, we can trust and not feel like we have to figure it all out. God's eye is on us. His Word says so. In those times too we can be at peace and love our life. What a way to live. O Lord, may we live in righteousness, knowing that your eye is upon us.

How does
God want you
to respond to
His Word
today?

***I still believe in you. Add the third phrase to your memorization today.
You can do it.***

Getting God's Attention

Study Day Three His Ears Attend to Their Prayer

Can you think of a time in your life when you were getting all the attention? Perhaps a time when people seemed to be at your beck and call? If you can, you probably don't have many times like that to describe, but you may have a few. I remember the time surrounding when I got married. So many people were helping and interested in what I wanted. It was kind of nice. Or I can think of the few times that we moved to a new area for my husband to start a new ministry. People wanted to take us out to dinner, help us find a new home—they were interested in getting to know us. Those are good memories for the most part. Why? Because I felt special, I felt important. That is what attention does for us. It affirms us, gives us a good feeling, and allows us to know that people are there for us. All that is well and good, but the attention of people will come and go.

The attention of God is something different altogether. As we discussed yesterday, I may not always be able to discern the attention of God on my life by the way I feel. Reviewing what we discussed yesterday and also looking at Isaiah 55:8, why is that so? _____

We don't always have the perspective of God; in fact, we can't because His ways are higher than ours, but He has given us His truth to help us balance our perspective. It is easy to have a conversation with someone who shares the same viewpoint as you do. It is a totally different thing altogether to have conversation with someone who sees things differently, even radically differently.

If we are living in righteousness, 1 Peter 3:12 says that God attends to our prayers. In other words, He enters into the conversation with us and gets involved. Have you ever tried to talk with someone and you could tell their mind was elsewhere? How did that make you feel? _____

Well, if we are living in righteousness, we can know that God is going to get involved in our conversations with Him. His ears will attend to our thoughts. We just need to make sure that we understand He doesn't always think as we think.

Yesterday we looked at Jesus, the perfect example of righteousness. There are many instances of Him praying recorded in the Word. Today we are going to look at some of those and see how God attended to those prayers, how He got involved in the conversation and in the needs and details. Because Jesus was fully man and fully God, we will see times where he may have struggled with his thoughts, but God attended to His prayers and interesting things happened.

John 17:1-26 – In this passage we see Jesus interceding for all people before the Lord. Look at some of the things He prayed. How has God gotten involved in these needs and worked in the details of the answers? _____

Luke 6:12-16 – In verse 12 of this passage we see Jesus going off to pray. We don't know specifically what He prayed about, but I believe we can assume He talked to God about who He would choose to work with him on earth. How do you imagine God attended to His prayer? _____

John 11:41-46 – In this passage Jesus is just getting ready to raise Lazarus from the dead. Read His prayer and see how God attends to it right away. _____

Luke 3:21-22 – In this passage you will find a most interesting way that God attends to Jesus' prayer. No doubt about it, God was attentive. What do you see? _____

Mark 1:35-45 – In the beginning of this passage we see Jesus praying. Imagine what he may have been praying about. _____

Now how do you see God getting involved, being attentive? _____

Matthew 14:13-36 – Earlier in this passage John the Baptist was beheaded. Can you imagine the grief that must have brought to Jesus? When He heard about it, He had to go and pray, and then soon after this prayer time, we see Him do some of His greatest works of healing, feeding multitudes and walking on water. Do you think God's attentiveness during His time of praying through His grief enabled Him for this great ministry work? Why? _____

Time spent with God is never wasted. As we see from Jesus' example, God's attentiveness to His prayers brought a power into His life that was awesome. As we live in righteousness, God attends to our prayers as well.

What is a prayer of your heart right now that you hope God is attending to? _____

How have you seen Him attending to it already? If so, how? _____

Has He said something you may not have wanted to hear as He attended to your prayer? Explain.

My encouragement to you today is twofold:

Abide in righteousness through Christ's salvation and through your lifestyle choices of faith in Him. Allow God to be God as He attends to your prayers. His ideas may be different than yours.

What a blessing to have the God of heaven giving us His attention. It is better than anything we can ever find on this earth. May that Truth reside deep in your heart and may you experience it often.

Now how about you giving God's thoughts some attention as you review your verses.

Getting God's Attention

Study Day Four Nurturing Righteousness

We have been talking a great deal about righteousness this week. As we live in righteousness, we are very conspicuous to God. On Day One you made a list of some benefits of having God's attention zoomed in on your life. Go back and look at your list and see if some of those benefits are a reality to you. _____

God wants to give us His attention. I firmly believe that or He wouldn't have told us what interests His eyes and ears. He probably would love to pour out the things that you described in your life. Because of this great understanding that we gain from verse 12, we would be wise to nurture righteousness. What do I mean by that? Really, two things:

- 1. Nurture a strong belief that we are made righteous through Christ and Christ alone
- 2. Nurture the discipline to love what God loves and hate what God hates

Nurturing a strong belief that we are made righteous through Christ alone

How do you do that? Most of us would say we believe that. We know that there is no way we can save ourselves, and we know that through grace God accepts us. However, even knowing that, when we fall into sin we can easily suffer under a load of guilt and shame. We cannot allow that in our lives. We must live with the Truth written on our foreheads. The Truth that says we are made righteous through Christ alone.

I would offer this encouragement. There are some things we just have to be prepared for ahead of time. You can be certain that Satan will try to shame you when you sin. When he does so, we have to have something to fight with. How do you battle the load of guilt and shame? _____

If you are meeting with a group, come prepared to share that during your next discussion time.

Let me also encourage you with the following scriptures. Take time to read and meditate on these verses. Perhaps you may pick one and memorize it for your battle plan.

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Romans 5:19 | I Peter 2:24 | Romans 8:10 |
| Romans 10:4 | Romans 10:9-10 | II Corinthians 5:21 |
| Philippians 1:9-11 | Philippians 3:8-9 | |

Nurturing the discipline to love what God loves and hate what God hates

You are a new creation in Christ, made righteous through Him. Praise the Lord! His spirit is alive in you. But because you still live on this earth, you also have a soul that is bent toward sin. It will constantly be pulling you away from what God loves and drawing you toward what He hates. You must nurture your will to side with God and not your flesh. That takes work and a heart for the Lord. It is called "practicing righteousness." What are you purposefully doing in your life at this time to practice righteousness? _____

What are some things that you admire in others' lives of the way that they practice righteousness?

Considering them, what is a discipline that you would like to add to your life at this time to help you in practicing righteousness? How do you think it would benefit you? _____

Consider the following verses and how you might implement them in your choices and behavior.

I John 3:7-10
I Timothy 6:6-14
Romans 5:11-18
Galatians 5:16-25

What commitment are you going to make to practice righteousness in this coming month?

Go back and review I Peter 3:12. Make no mistake; the attention of God will be on the righteous. He makes us righteous through Christ and then gives us instructions on how to display that righteousness in our life and behavior. O may we listen and heed that we may love our life in Him.

As we finish this week's lesson, write out a heartfelt prayer to God expressing your desire to have His attention on your life. As you pray, keep our passage from I Peter 3 as a backdrop.

Review! Review! Review! I am certain you know what I mean. I am so proud of you.

Memorization

I Peter 3:12 – “Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

II Chronicles 16:9 – “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...”

Week 7

Under the Umbrella of His Care

Memorization

1 Peter 3:13-15 “And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled. But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

Can you believe we have come to the end of this study time together? I pray that God has done a mighty work in your heart as you have spent this time with Him in His Word! As we close this week out, there will not be written homework for you to complete, but my hope is that you will finish memorizing verses 13-15 and then hide this entire rich passage of 1 Peter 3:10-15 in your hearts for the rest of your life. How’s that for “life” homework? I know you can do it, and I pray that you will.

As we look back at this entire passage, it is really all about a life philosophy. God is giving us about the best way to live our life in Him, and He is giving us the opportunity to choose His or our own. Whether you know it or not, you have a life philosophy. In fact, you have many small philosophies that you live by. One that I live by may seem simple, but here it is: “If it is raining I use an umbrella.” Some people don’t want to be bothered with an umbrella, but I don’t like to get wet—I don’t want to be sticky and I don’t want my hair to get frizzy. There you have it. So I use an umbrella in drizzle or pouring rain. There have been times where the wind was blowing so hard that I had to fight to stay under my umbrella. However, for me, I have a philosophy and I stick to it. I can’t understand why people would rather get wet!

As we look at this passage, there is a rich analogy for us here. We live in a world where the winds are howling and we are holding something in our hands that could protect us if we are only willing to go to the trouble of getting under it and using it. We may have to fight to stay under it and keep it up over us, but it is worth it. God has given us some tremendous wise counsel for our life in this passage of 1 Peter 3:10-15. His words are like an umbrella of protection for us. What we do with them is up to us.

The interesting thing as well is that God echoes this same life philosophy that we see in 1 Peter all over His Word. In fact, as I was preparing for this lesson, He took me to Psalm 4 and Proverbs 4 to show me some direct parallels between this passage in 1 Peter and what we find in them. Throughout time and for all eternity, God has been saying and will continue to say, “Get under the umbrella of my protection, my wisdom, my plan for the storms of life.” Read these passages and see if they don’t resound with the same message as 1 Peter 3:10-15:

- Psalm 4:1
- Psalm 4:4-5
- Psalm 4:7-8
- Proverbs 4:4
- Proverbs 4:14-15
- Proverbs 4:20-22
- Proverbs 4:23-24

We remember that the people Peter was writing to were in the midst of a storm. I know that some of you are as well today. Let's review this whole passage:

Verse 10 is a strong statement that basically says, "If you want to love your life, then listen up."

Verses 10b-11 are a set of yielding instructions of basic areas that are very important; review them.

Verse 12 is a why statement that basically says what kind of living will get God's attention.

And now we are going to finish up with...

Verses 13-15 which are philosophy statements that tell us how to look at life as under the umbrella of God's care. So let's take a look at verses 13, 14, and 15 and wrap this up with the philosophy of life that God would like for us embrace.

Verse 13 says

"And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good."

Zeal is an enthusiastic devotion, and when you are zealous, you are filled with zeal you are actively and unreservedly enthusiastic. The Greek word for "zeal" is *zelotes*, and it means:

1. one burning with zeal,
2. used of God as jealous of any rival and sternly vindicating his control

This is the way God wants us to live: zealous for the life He died to give us. Consider Titus 2:11-14. Wow, that is like another mirror of what He says in 1 Peter. As we look at this, we see that if this is the way you choose to live, then who can harm you?

The Greek word for "who" is *ti* and it means "who, which, or what." You see, there is no person, no circumstance from your past, no circumstance in your future that can harm you if you are zealous for the life of God in you. God said it; do you believe it? Are you living under that umbrella of care?

As we discussed last week, when the eye of God Almighty is upon you, it affects everything. Even the things that threaten to undo you, that hurt terribly, God can turn into good in your life if you seek Him.

Testimonies abound of His goodness and His protection as people are zealous for good under God's umbrella of care. I am sure you have heard them and sure you have one to share yourself. So what is the philosophy here in verse 13? "Do things His way no matter what!"

- No matter how you feel
- No matter how things seem
- No matter how people respond
- No matter what the outcome looks like it could be
- No matter what

You are protected under the umbrella of His care as you prove zealous for His ways. And what a life it can bring.

The first part of verse 14 says,

"But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed."

From our perspective, we may be suffering if we choose to do things God's way, but from God's perspective, He says we are blessed. We need to remember that He can see the whole picture.

- So we may miss the promotion because we told the truth
- So we may lose a relationship because we wouldn't participate in sin
- So we may not have as much income because we were honest on our taxes
- So we may not seem to have as much "fun" on a vacation as others

Living in these ways is righteous living, and God's eye is on you. He knows the "what" and the "why" of all eternity, the way our whole life fits together. He calls us to get under His umbrella, always, in front of anyone, in any circumstance. He calls us to be there, so we can be blessed.

Verse 14 goes on to say,

"And do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled"

What intimidates you? What troubles you? God says don't be intimidated or fearful. Don't let that be your life philosophy. Do you know how many people live under that kind of covering, a covering of fear and intimidation? That is not God's good plan for you. So what is the philosophy here? It is that righteousness brings blessing, sometimes blessings that we can't see, but we trust in this promise by faith in God's Word.

The last verse of this passage, verse 15 says,

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

The Greek word for "sanctify" is *agaizo*, and it means to set apart, give utmost respect or acknowledgement to. We have the choice to choose something in the world to be our Lord

- Ourselves
- Another person
- Material possessions
- Man's opinion
- Physical life itself
- Or any other manner of things

But this wisdom says, "Give utmost respect and Lordship to Christ. Decide that you will live under His umbrella of instruction, care, protection and blessing for all of your days." That is wise living.

There will be people, people in your family, people in your workplace, people in your neighborhood who say, "Why are you always carrying around that umbrella? It is in your way, it looks silly, it is only drizzling." With gentleness and a reverence for God, you can simply explain and give an account of all the good, all the wisdom, all the love and all the protection His umbrella brings. It is an umbrella for life that you may love your life that He gave you.

You see, we have been talking about loving our life in Him, and some of us are in seasons where life is great, the sun is shining, there are a few clouds here and there, and a drop of rain and a gust of wind every now and then, but for the most part there isn't a great storm. But I am not naïve. I know that some of us are in seasons where the wind is howling, where we can barely walk because it is blowing so strongly, where the rain is pelting from every direction and we can barely hold onto the umbrella. The joy of these five verses is that no matter where you are, keep holding onto the umbrella; stay under the umbrella of His wisdom and you can still love your life, **even then!**

Loving our life in Him is not about circumstances that come and go; it is about His life within us, a life that will live for all eternity. I encourage you as we finish our time together, put up the umbrella, carry it with you wherever you go, stay under it. As you do you can sing in the sunshine, sing in the rain and love your life in Him!



1 Peter 3:10-15

"Let him who means to love life and see good days
Refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.

And let him turn away from evil and do good;

Let him seek peace and pursue it.

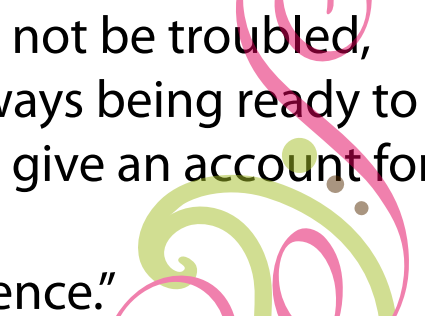
For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
and His ears attend to their prayer,

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

And who is there to harm you if you prove
zealous for what is good?

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness,
you are blessed.

And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,
But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to
make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for
the hope that is in you,
yet with gentleness and reverence."



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