



THE **TIMOTHY** NETWORK

DISCIPLES-N-APPRENTICESHIP

2017
Second Edition

DISCIPLES-N-APPRENTICESHIP

DNA

LIFE-ON-LIFE RELATIONSHIPS

TRANSPARENCY

INTENTIONALITY

HEART-DEEP TEACHING

GRACE-DRIVEN OBEDIENCE

TRANSFORMATION

EQUIPPED

MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES

Disciple Making is in Our DNA

THE **TIMOTHY** NETWORK

CONVERSATION GUIDE ONE

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The Timothy Network

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The Quest to Make Intentional Disciples of Jesus

II Timothy 2:2



The Timothy Network is a grassroots effort to make multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ. The project was launched in August 2005 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Our strategy is focused but simple. The purpose is to 1) apprentice men and women in the practice of following Jesus Christ and 2) equip them to disciple others.

Unlike one-size-fits-all programs designed for reaching large numbers of people all at once, we follow a slower relational approach. Jesus disciplined only a few at a time in a life-on-life context. He longed to see his essence reproduced in the lives of his followers. This kind of spiritual formation takes time and it can be messy, as you will see if you take a closer look at the four gospel narratives.

Our namesake derives from Paul's commission to his young apprentice Timothy in Second Timothy 2:2. Paul wrote, *The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.* Paul wanted Timothy to pass on the good news, and his instructions give us a model for disciple making multiplication. Notice four generations: Paul → Timothy → reliable men → others. This process exemplifies *paying it forward* and is the driving passion of the Timothy Network!

Welcome to the journey. It's our deepest hope that you grow as a disciple of Jesus as we travel together. We also pray that God empowers and equips you to be a multiplying disciple maker!

Persevere,

MIKE STROUD

Mike Stroud
The Timothy Network
January 2017

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CONVERSATION GUIDE

A Track to Run On



Disciple

The term *disciple* refers to apprentices, followers, or students of a certain teacher or philosopher.

In Christian circles, a disciple is one who believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the one and only Son of God. Jesus' disciples subscribe to and attempt to follow his teachings. They believe in his virgin birth, his miraculous works, and his bodily resurrection from the dead. His followers believe in his ultimate return to judge the world and deliver his church into the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

The daily practice of applying the teachings of Jesus is often referred to as *discipleship*.

Because Jesus' first twelve disciples were later appointed as *the apostles*, some have seen *disciple* as a special ranking applying only to those men; that's not the case, however. The term disciple is taken from the Greek *mathetes*, and simply means *a learner*. All people who believe that Jesus is the Son of God and undertake the intentional daily practice of following his teachings are his disciples.

The Timothy Network

In ancient times, there were few higher learning institutions. Instead, those who wanted to learn a skill or a philosophy attached themselves to a journeyman or a teacher and spent significant time with that person to learn the trade. In the trade fields, apprentices would devote years to assisting the master of a particular trade before they went out on their own. In the case of those apprenticing with a Jewish rabbi, students would follow their teacher for years, traveling wherever they would go, and the teacher would expound as they walked, teaching the intricacies of the faith. The disciples [apprentices] of Jesus did just that. Wherever Jesus went the disciples followed, and Jesus taught them as they moved from place to place.

The twelve disciples, as they were named in Matthew's gospel (John's gospel simply calls them *the twelve*) were specially chosen from the rest of the disciples to be specifically mentored as Jesus' closest associates. These twelve disciples would later be sent [as *apostles*] by Jesus to become the first church planters of the Christian church.

Source: *House Church Network Association [edited]*

Disciples-iN-Apprenticeship

Becoming people formed in the image of Christ

Just as DNA is the substance responsible for our physical makeup and identity, the practice of apprenticing disciples of Jesus is the *substance* that gives identity to The Timothy Network. Disciple making is the one and only reason this project was birthed in 2005, and it is our driving force.

Use of DNA terminology also identifies the *method* we use to bring people closer to Jesus. We call it Disciples-(i)N-Apprenticeship.

Timothy Network's apprenticeship has a defined beginning and end. The process typically runs for about 18-24 months. People grow at different paces, so your time with us will proceed accordingly. The mission is urgent, but the process takes time. *Hurry and one-size-fits-all* programming is not in our vocabulary!

Effective disciple making requires more than transferring facts and information from one person to another. Infusion of the *Good News* at a heart-mind-soul level is critical to the growth of disciples of Jesus. The unique niche required for this kind of maturity is where our work tries to bring focus. Authentic discipleship and reproducible disciple making require it. Why? Because only when God's radical love *infects* our entire nature does the Holy Spirit produce transformed living.

Helping believers grasp and *live out* their new identity in Christ seems to work best using a combination of focused teaching from scripture, conversation / discussion related to the material, intimate community / fellowship with other believers, confessional living, and accountable relationships.



Becoming a Multiplying Disciple Maker

God created man with the capacity to physically reproduce. God, in fact, commanded multiplication saying, *Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.* (Genesis 1:28) Followers of Christ have, in effect, also been commanded to subdue the earth by spreading the Kingdom of God. This happens when we reproduce by making more disciples. Jesus instructed his followers to practice discipling multiplication just before his ascension back into Heaven. His command is known as *The Great Commission*. See Matthew 28:18-20.

Making multiplying disciple makers is the main goal and central purpose of The Timothy Network. It's our deepest hope and prayer that the process of becoming a mature disciple of Jesus will result in your personal conviction to carry the mission forward by making more disciples. Help us extend the *ripple effect* by encouraging those you disciple to also become multiplying disciple makers and so on down the line.

Making Disciples Conversationally

You'll notice a core theme repeated as you journey with us in discipleship. It focuses on the importance of being *intentionally relational* for the cause of Christ.

Although God wired each of us differently on the personality spectrum, we're all uniquely capable of developing relationships. Associations with people open doors for ever deepening levels of conversation. Jesus modeled this way of connecting with people throughout his ministry, both in relationships with his closest followers and with people he met as he went from place to place.

Timothy Network has handcrafted a discipling environment based in conversational learning. This conversation guide will take you through a series of relational discussion sessions. Meetings and discussions are designed to bring understanding, draw you closer to Jesus, learn to apply his teachings, and promote caring and supportive relationships with other Christ-followers.

Your discipler will teach and lead gatherings when you meet, but group sessions will be conversational as opposed to a *classroom* orientation. Application, discussion, and transparency are optimized through our use of gender-specific discipling circles of only 3 - 5 members.

Jesus trained a handful of ordinary people to follow Him as He established God's kingdom on earth. His primary training method was intimate, personal conversations on a friend-to-friend basis. As they walked along in the daily routines of life, Jesus taught his disciples the practical principles of the Kingdom. He then commissioned them to go and make disciples of all nations by teaching others what they had learned. He still calls believers today to accept this 'great commission,' but at times it seems that the work of discipleship is more about public proclamation than personal relationships and conversation.

Making disciples is more than witnessing to nonbelievers. It is about building authentic relationships with our Christian friends and helping each other follow Jesus one discussion, one conversation, one heart-to-heart talk at a time.

Purposeful conversation can be redemptive, turning our meaningless chatter into a means of grace. We can help our friends become all God intends them to be, enriching their lives and ours in the process. Practicing the disciplines of attentive listening, appropriate questioning, Scripture application, and praying with our friends will allow us to not only fulfill Christ's request to make disciples, but also follow His commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

Source: *Making Disciples One Conversation at a Time* by D. Michael Henderson.

Using This Conversation Guide

1) Gaining Perspective

The Greek historian Plutarch said, *A mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be ignited.*

Plutarch's metaphor can be used to highlight an important principle for those undertaking the study and practice of following Jesus. For the present purpose we'll call this *Maxim Number One*. The Bible is not a book of factual data simply to be memorized; it is the Holy Word of God meant to bring transformed living!

All Scripture is God breathed, (2 Timothy 3:16) and the living Word of God must penetrate our hearts in order to transform our lives. The detailed information and instructions for holy living contained in Holy Scripture is obviously of prime importance. We must give ourselves to absorbing it. Renovation of the heart is the ultimate goal, however. When it comes to discipleship, information that doesn't lead to transformation is a dead-end street.

The religionists of Jesus' day are a sad case study in the human tendency of failing to see *the forest for the trees*. They largely missed God's intent in Scripture, forcing Jesus to rebuke their hard-hearted blindness! The Pharisees, for example, were a devout sect in Judaism during Jesus' time on earth. They stressed strict adherence to the letter of the law and an outward form of righteousness. The Pharisees could quote the Old Testament word for word, yet many of them seemed to practice a loophole form of religion. Consequently, Jesus sternly accused them saying, *You study Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39)* He also warned them saying, *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (Matthew 23:24)*

It's convenient to point to the outward form of religion practiced by the Pharisees because Jesus often expressed frustration in dealing with their stubborn hearts. It's important to remember, however, that well-intentioned people throughout the ages have veered off on the same religious path. Because of this tendency, it's important to gain a right perspective as we approach Bible study and discipleship. It takes discipline, prayer, humility, focused fellowship with other believers, and daily time in the Word of God. Timothy Network strives to encourage and foster these practices for all those desiring to grow as disciples of Jesus.

2) Implementing A Bible Study Method: Discovery Bible Study, The Inductive Method

The following section explains use of a practical and tried tool called the *Inductive Bible Study*. The method has been simplified in recent years by development of a three column approach known as the *Discovery Bible Study*. Many, but not all, study assignments in this conversation guide require using this tool. STUDY OUTLINES WILL BE MARKED DBS WHEN THE THREE COLUMN INDUCTIVE STUDY IS REQUIRED.

Discovery Bible Study
Using the Three Column Inductive Bible Study Method
by Paul Watson

Scripture	My Words	I Will

When I study the Bible, I use a three column process. I turn a piece of paper on its side, or landscape. Then I divide the paper into three columns. I label the first 'Scripture.' I label the second 'My Words' and the third 'I Will.'

Scripture: Observation (Discover What It Says!)

I started practicing Inductive Bible Study with the book of James. James is a short book with short sections. The length of the passage you choose affects how much time the study takes. Longer passages take longer to study. This isn't a bad thing, but you need to keep it in mind. Generally, I try to keep my passages between 10 and 15 verses. I break larger passages into several sections, spread out over several days.

In the 'Scripture' column, I write the passage: word-for-word. This takes time but like I said before, you control how much time by choosing smaller chunks of Scripture. What is most important, however, is this—when you copy a passage word-for-word you actually read it through several (about five to seven) times. It is a form of forced meditation for those of us who can't sit and think about a passage without losing focus. This process also keeps me from skimming familiar passages. When I write it out I have to think about every word.

Interpretation: My Own Words (Discover What It Means!)

When I finish copying the passage, I use the second column to write the passage in my own words. I write it like I'm telling a friend about it over a cup of coffee. I don't move on until I can write the passage in my own words. You see, you don't really understand it if you can't tell it to someone in your own words. And you can't obey Scripture unless you understand it. It's that simple. Sometimes I have to stop on a passage, read it again, and think about it quite a bit before I can put it in my own words. When I started this process, I found that there were several familiar passages that I couldn't write in my own words! I couldn't believe how much I 'knew' and how little I understood.

Application: I Will... (Discover How It Works!)

In the third column I transition from knowing God's Word to obeying God's Word. In the 'I Will' column I look at each part of the passage. I ask God to reveal things I need to add to my life, take away from my life, or change in my life for me to obey this passage. I am very specific. The passage may say that God created the Earth, but I have to decide what that means in my life. How does my life change because I believe that God created the Earth? What do I need to do differently? What can I do in the next 24 to 48 hours to obey this passage? I believe every time we open God's Word, He invites us into relationship. We call His invitation 'grace,' because we can't

do anything to deserve it. Obedience is how we accept His invitation. God lives with those who obey His Word. (John 14:23-24) When we study God's Word we have a choice: we choose to obey Him or we choose to disobey Him. It is really that simple. I see this third column as my response to God's invitation.

Use the S.P.E.C.K. Acronym for Application:

Is there a **SIN** for me to avoid?

Is there a **PROMISE** from God for me to claim?

Is there an **EXAMPLE** for me to follow?

Is there a **COMMANDMENT** for me to obey?

How can this passage increase my **KNOWLEDGE** about God or about Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit?

Summary:

To summarize the process—

- 1) Write the passage word-for-word in column 1.
- 2) Write the passage in your own words in column 2.
- 3) List the actions you must take to obey this passage in column 3.
- 4) Share what you learned with other believers for accountability.
- 5) Create discussion opportunities with not-yet-believers. Share with people who are interested.

Inductive Bible Study

1 OBSERVATION
Lord, help me see it.

2 INTERPRETATION
Lord, help me understand it.

3 APPLICATION
Lord, help me live it.

Practice Conversation

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Romans 12:9-16

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p>SIN TO AVOID:</p> <p>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p>COMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Every journey begins with first steps.

Let's get started.



Four Conversations — Breaking the Ice

- 1) God and Man
- 2) The Proto-Gospel
- 3) The God-Shaped Hole
- 4) First Things First: God's Eternal Plan to Rescue His Creation



What is man that you [God] are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. Psalm 8:4-8

Surely the psalmist's question resonates with each of us. Peering out into a vast and unfathomable universe, we ponder the meaning of life. Why, indeed, does God care about us?

The answer seems contained in the opening lines of the Bible. Genesis relays that God spoke creation—the earth, the universe, and the animal kingdom—into existence saying, *Let there be light, sky, land, fish, birds, etc.* Man's creation is different and distinct, however. Genesis 1:27 puts it this way, *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female he created them.* Genesis 2:7 fills in the blanks with greater detail saying, *And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.*

Let it sink in: mankind is unique among all created things! He was formed by the very fingers of God, then God breathed life into him. Unlike fish, birds, or animals, man was also given a *living soul*. Mankind is special to God. The creation story even suggests that God regularly visited Adam and Eve in their garden home (See Genesis 3: 8-9). God, Adam, and Eve lived in beautiful relationship in the early days of Eden. In the beginning, God's will was done on earth as it was in Heaven.

Knowing our fallen nature, man's special position and value to God can cause an identity crisis. We were created in the image of God and meant to live in eternal intimate relationship with Him. Man ruined his position with God in the garden, however, and we've lived and died with the consequences ever since! Like the psalmist, we feel separated from the Father and wonder why He still cares. God does care, though, and His love forms the rest of the story.

The first few bites of forbidden fruit brought a sickening realization to the young garden dwellers. Instead of overwhelming joy, God's visit that day brought a fearful, guilty awareness to Adam that Adam and his wife had never experienced. Shame uncovered their nakedness. They hid from God. Guilt does that.

Paradise seemed forever lost, but God's eternal purpose was not defeated by man's disobedience. Human existence would never be the same and death would eventually follow for all living things, but Adam, Eve, and all of creation since were given future hope. God pronounced

judgment against both mankind and Satan that day, but he also spoke of man's redemption. We learn this in Genesis 3: 14-15 when God pronounced judgment on the serpent saying,

Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

There it is: *good news before the Good News!*

Salvation was set in motion before the creation of the world (Romans 8:28-30). In cursing Satan, God made it known that darkness would not win the fight! R.C. Sproul labels Genesis 3:14-15 *the proto-gospel*, saying *the news of the Gospel is as old as the Garden of Eden.*

God wiped the arrogance off the enemy's face before it had time to form a good smile. Man would ultimately be given opportunity to return to the garden and commune with God forever!

As a main point of orientation to the gospel of God, we'll begin in Genesis with the principle just described. Understanding God's grand scheme of salvation is established by knowing where it all started.

Conversation No. 1

- 1) Read the first two chapters of Genesis. What things do you find most striking?

- 2) Discuss this statement from the introduction: *In the beginning, God's will was done on earth as in Heaven.* Do you agree? Why or why not?

- 3) Read Genesis chapter 3. How did the *serpent*, Satan, seem to suddenly appear in Adam's and Eve's perfect, problem-free life in the garden?

- 4) If its fruit was forbidden, why do you think God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden?

5) To what was Satan appealing when he tempted Eve and Adam? Discuss his lies. Was there a grain of truth in his tempting statements? Describe. Does Satan still use the same tricks on us? Discuss this, too.

6) Why is mankind so important to God?

7) What is the core message of Romans 8:28-30?

The Proto-Gospel

By R.C. Sproul

If we consult Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, we will discover a fascinating study of the word *evangelion*. This is the Greek term that is translated *Gospel*. In rudimentary form the word means simply *good news, message* or *announcement*. The word was employed in antiquity for almost any kind of good tidings such as the good report of the outcome of a battle delivered by a marathon runner. Hence the allusion of Paul in Romans 10 to Isaiah's words in Isaiah 52:7, *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, Your God reigns!*

The reference to beautiful feet reflects the joyous anticipation of the watchman who is posted as a look-out for an approaching messenger. Without the benefit of CNN ancient people relied on the reception of reports by runners. The experienced watchman could discern the outcome of the message by the distant sight of the movement of the messenger's feet. If the runner appeared to be sluggish or plodding it indicated the footsteps of despair—bad news. If the messenger's feet were flying, with an obvious excitement and eagerness to complete the run, it signaled good news. Hence, the sight of the feet of the runner who brought good news was deemed *beautiful*.

In the New Testament there is a progressive movement of the meaning of the term *Gospel*. The Gospel is first proclaimed in the New Testament by angels. The term *angel* itself means *messenger*. It comes from the same root as the word *evangelism*. Luke 2:10 says, *But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* Later with the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus the accent was on the proclamation of the *Gospel of the Kingdom*. John the Baptist was the herald of this announcement. Much of Jesus' teaching, especially in His parables, focused on the announcement of the advent of the Kingdom of God.

In the writings of Paul the focus changes from the kingdom (which he does not repudiate) to the person and work of Christ. Paul speaks of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This does not mean simply the Gospel that Jesus Himself announced but rather the good news *about* Jesus Christ.

This progressive change in emphasis does not indicate a disparity between the Gospel Jesus proclaimed and that proclaimed by Paul and the other Apostles. The Gospel was and is always about Christ. It finds its core significance in Him and in what He has accomplished in our behalf.

The Gospel is not an innovation of the New Testament. That it is called *good news* may be a bit misleading. We see the link between the words *news* and *new*. We read the newspaper to find out what's new. But though there are new aspects revealed about the specific details for the Gospel found in the New Testament, there is a sense in which the good news of the Gospel is in fact *old news*. It is found in a multitude of places in the Old Testament as the New Testament writers are fond of pointing out.

The news of the Gospel is as old as the Garden of Eden. The Gospel was first preached to Adam and Eve. The Preacher who delivered the message was God Himself. This message is known in the church as the *Proto-Evangelion* or the *First Gospel*. Technically, the Gospel was not preached to Adam and Eve directly. Presumably they were eavesdroppers or bystanders who overheard it. To the original audience it was not even a Gospel, it was bad news delivered in the form of a curse. The original recipient was an audience of one, the serpent who beguiled Adam and Eve. This malediction—turned Gospel—is found in Genesis 3:14-15. *So the LORD God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*

There is irony here. We usually understand the Gospel in terms of reconciliation. Yet the first Gospel is couched in terms of enmity and alienation. Christ proclaimed a Gospel of peace, but in Genesis the message is about conflict. As part of the curse God placed upon the serpent, He decreed that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent's seed and the woman's Seed.

The thinly veiled good news in this decree is found in the divine promise that the mortal enemy of the human race will ultimately be vanquished. It is good news to Adam and Eve and to us that the evil one who led in temptation and fall will not be the friend of fallen people in need of redemption. The enemy of the serpent will emerge as our ally, indeed as our champion in cosmic conflict.

The promise of the Proto-Gospel is the promise of victory—it is the promise of One who will come from the Seed of the woman who will be *Christus Victor*.

There is an ominous note contained in the Proto-Gospel. The good news is that the head of the serpent will be crushed, fatally bruised by the heel of the Seed of the woman. The image is of a strong man grinding his heel into the head of a snake. It is not merely that the snake will be kicked or merely injured by the confrontation. Nor will the Seed of the woman merely step on the snake's tail, leaving him to wriggle away to safety. No, the good news is that the conflict will not end in a draw or in mild chastisement. The conflict will end by a mortal blow delivered to the serpent.

But the victory will have a price tag. It will not be accomplished without pain to the Seed of the woman. In crushing the head of the serpent, His own heel will be bruised. He must feel the fury of His enemy, the pain of bared fangs that inject venom. But His is not an Achilles' Heel by which He will Himself be destroyed by being bruised in a vulnerable point. Yes, He will die in the battle, but death will lack the power or authority to hold Him. The wound will be fatal, but not final. His triumph will be complete. The Suffering Servant of Israel will emerge as her risen, glorious King. This is The Gospel in a nutshell.

Conversation No. 2

1) Define *gospel*. What is the gospel at its core?

2) Summarize how the story of Genesis took a dramatic turn for the worse in chapter 3. What happened between God and man at this point?

3) What does the term *Proto-Gospel* mean? How does it apply to Genesis 3?

4) Speaking of Genesis 3:15, Sproul refers to a 'price tag.' What does he mean?

5) Using imagery from the Genesis 3 account, Paul's closing comments in his letter to the church at Rome reminded the believers of God's deliverance (Romans 16:20). There's a key difference (not a contradiction) in what Paul says, however. What do you think he intended for them (and us) to understand?

6) What did you learn in this study?



The God Shaped

Hole



The 'God-shaped hole' concept states that every person has a void in his soul / spirit / life that can only be filled by God. The 'God-shaped hole' is the innate longing of the human heart for something outside itself, something transcendent, something 'other.' Ecclesiastes 3:11 refers to God's placing of *eternity in man's heart*. God made humanity for His eternal purpose, and only God can fulfill our desire for eternity. All religion is based on the innate desire to 'connect' with God. This desire can only be fulfilled by God, and therefore can be likened to a 'God-shaped hole'

The problem, though, is that humanity ignores this hole or attempts to fill it with things other than God. Jeremiah 17:9 describes the condition of our hearts: *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?* Solomon reiterates the same concept: *The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live....* (Ecclesiastes 9:3). The New Testament concurs: *The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so* (Romans 8:7). Romans 1:18-22 describes humanity ignoring what can be known about God, including presumably the 'God-shaped hole,' and instead worshipping anything and everything other than God.

Sadly, too many spend their lives looking for something other than God to fill their longing for meaning—business, family, sports, etc. But in pursuing these things that are not eternal, they remain unfulfilled and wonder why their lives never seem satisfactory. There is no doubt that many people pursuing things other than God achieve a measure of 'happiness' for a time. But when we consider Solomon, who had all the riches, success, esteem, and power in the world—in short, all that men seek after in this life—we see that none of it fulfilled the longing for eternity. He declared it all 'vanity,' meaning that he sought after these things in vain because they did not satisfy. In the end he said, *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Just as a square peg cannot fill a round hole, neither can the 'God-shaped hole' inside each of us be filled by anyone or anything other than God. Only through a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ can the 'God-shaped hole' be filled and the desire for eternity fulfilled.

Source: www.gotquestions.org/God-shaped-hole.html

Conversation No. 3

- 1) Doubters say any notion of a 'God shaped hole' is just man's way of making excuses for his insecurities and failures. What about you? Does the concept of an empty place within our souls make sense? If so, what have you experienced that gave evidence of a similar void in your own life?

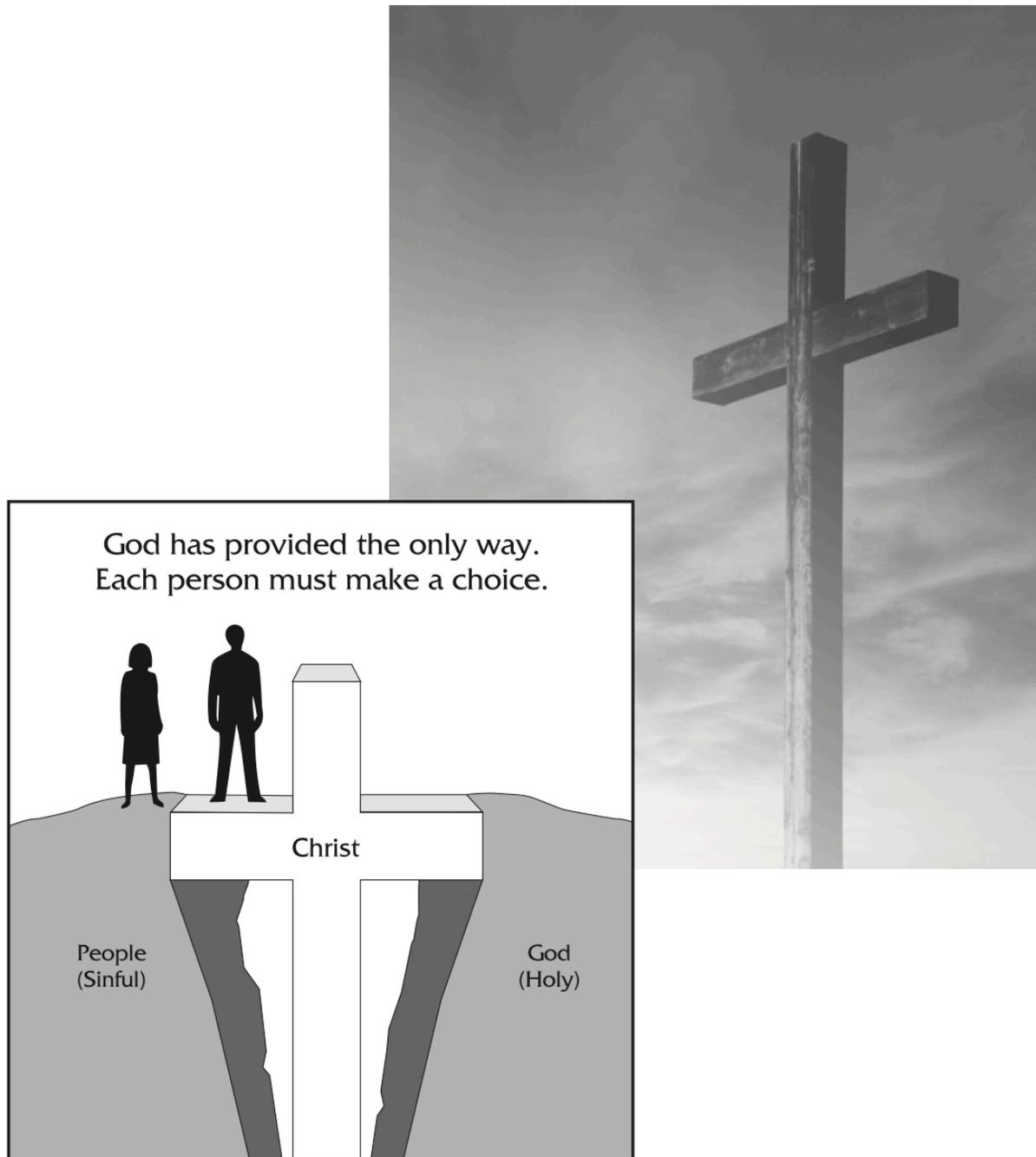
- 2) How do people try to fill the hole? How have you tried to fill it?

- 3) Before the fall Adam and Eve lived in completeness with God. How did Satan convince them they lacked something?

- 4) What does the gospel offer in the way of filling in our *incompleteness*? How does Satan tempt Christ followers to question our fullness in Christ?

FIRST THINGS FIRST

God's Eternal Plan
to Rescue His Creation



RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

He is our righteousness!

For Memorization

Isaiah 53:11 *After he (Christ) has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.*

Romans 1:17 *For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'*

Romans 4:3 *What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'*

Romans 8:1-4 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Galatians 2:16 *A person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.*

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Philippians 3:8-9 (NIV) *What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

1 Peter 2:24 *'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.'*

LIFE ... DEATH ... JUDGMENT → ETERNITY

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. James 4:14

Life is short. Not only are we here briefly, but the way we live and how we respond to our Creator matters. The writer of Hebrews framed the reality this way, *People are destined once to die, then after that to face judgment.* (Hebrews 9:27) After judgment, we'll either spend eternity with God or be forever banished from His presence. (Matthew 25:31-46) The good news is this: God desires relationship with His creation and offers the gift of eternal life to all who will trust in his one of a kind Son, Jesus!

Gospel: The Good News Story

GRACE:

Eternal life is a gift offered to us by God. It cannot be earned, nor do we deserve it. (Ephesians 2:8-9) This is the meaning of the word *grace*.

MAN:

Humans were created in perfection and destined to live eternally in God's presence. (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7) Adam and Eve were given a choice: Obey and live forever; disobey and die. (Genesis 2:15-17)

They chose to believe Satan's lie and willfully violated God's command; banishment from the garden and death resulted. (Genesis 3; 5:5)

Mankind has lived in a state of sin and chaos ever since. (Romans 3:23)

Humans cannot save themselves. (Titus 3:4-5)

GOD:

God is love and doesn't want to punish us. (John 3:16-17, 1 John 4:8)

God is also just and therefore must punish sin. (Romans 11:22, Romans 6:23)

CHRIST:

Who he is: The God-man (John 1:1-4, 14, 18)

What he did: He died to purchase our forgiveness and eternal life, which he offers us as a gift. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

FAITH:

What it is: It is trusting Christ alone for salvation. (John 6:47)

Faith is shown by belief, repentance, and baptism. (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-5)

What it is not: It is not merely 'intellectual assent' to God's existence. (James 2:19)

Summary:

To be able to say, *I know I am saved*, likely means an understanding of the basis of salvation: God provides a gift (grace) that is accepted (faith). Man is a sinner and cannot save himself. God, though He loves everyone and wants all to be saved, is also just and must punish sin. Christ became the sin offering, paying the penalty for sin, thereby taking the place of the sinner. The sinner accepts the gift of grace through repentance and baptism, acknowledging Christ as Savior and Lord.

Those who have accepted His gift and walk in his light can be confident of their salvation!! (1 John 1:7; 5:13)

Have you come to the place in your spiritual life that you have confidence of spending eternity with God?

- "The Good News Story" outline adapted from The Evangelism Explosion, D. James Kennedy, 1970.

Conversation No. 4

1) Based on the Gospel message and the references given above, summarize your understanding of how a person is *made righteous through faith in Christ*.

2) Think about it: What is your response to the good news? How will it change your life?

3) Will you pray for opportunities to share the good news message with others? Will you ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration for the mission? Can you think of others within your sphere of influence who need to hear the message and who might be receptive? Be intentional! Start thinking of how you will share your faith. Form and write a plan of action below.

FULLY GOD

FULLY MAN



Imagine

You've heard of a man who heals the sick, blind, deaf and mute. People have seen him cast out demons. Reliable reports are even circulating that he's raised dead people back to life!

This man, Jesus, came on the scene suddenly and out of nowhere. Word is that he used to be a construction worker in the little village of Nazareth in northern Israel. Besides healing powers, Jesus is creating a real stir with his teaching, too. Friends say his words are unlike anything they've ever heard from other teachers. *He speaks as one having authority* is their claim.

Thousands are traveling long distances to set eyes on this man and to hear him teach. In the hope of being healed, sickly women have been seen wiggling their way through crowds just to touch his garments. Throngs follow him from place to place. One story has it that he fed a crowd of thousands using only a little boy's sack lunch. You've heard that he repeated that miracle at least twice.

Although multitudes are drawn to him, the religious establishment seems oddly dismissive of Jesus. They categorize him as a fraud—and worse! Accusations are being made that he's in league with the devil! Who, after all, could really drive out a demon? It must be a trick of Satan!

The religious experts are especially hot under the collar because Jesus claims authority to forgive sins. *Blasphemer* they call him.

Topping off their disdain, Jesus' critics mock him over the company he keeps. He's regularly seen with cheats, crooks, drunks, and loose women. *A true prophet would know better*, they derisively say. *A friend of sinners*, they sneer. Jesus apparently put the religious scholars in their place, however, telling them, *It is the sick who need a doctor, not people who think they're well and healthy. I've come to call sinners to repentance, not those who have no need of repenting.*

It all sounds like a fairytale but when you learn that Jesus will be speaking in your home town, you make plans to be present. The day arrives, and you hurry to the synagogue for a seat. Sure enough, the place is packed. You start looking for him. Oddly, there's no sign of anyone of the stature and appearance you'd expect based on all you've heard.

Just when you're wondering if Jesus will show up, someone up front stands and begins speaking. It's apparently him, but you're caught off guard. There's nothing at all impressive in his appearance. He's very plain looking, in fact. That impression quickly changes as he begins speaking. You're soon mesmerized. This man is indeed no ordinary teacher!

Jesus spoke for a little more than two hours. You and every other person present hung on every word. Your mind is reeling from the sermon. He spoke with such humble confidence and clarity. His words pierced your heart and soul like a hot knife. You felt convicted of the sin in your life but also experienced a burden-lifting touch of grace, mercy, and love in every word he spoke. It was the most unsettling yet peaceful experience imaginable. Everything he said rang with such *truth*.

Walking away you immediately begin replaying every word from his sermon, turning each phrase again and again in your mind. It all stirred like fire in your bones, especially several metaphors he used:

I am the living water...

I am the light of the world...

I am the gate for the sheep...

I am the good shepherd...

I am the true vine...

I am the resurrection and the life...

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through me.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

The part about people eating his flesh and drinking his blood caused a real stir! The crowd started arguing and asking questions. Many got up and left. After all, the Law given by Moses strictly forbade the Jewish people from eating or drinking the blood of animals. This fellow, however, had the audacity to tell the crowd they'd have to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have any part of him! It sounded offensive—just a little too much! Yes, that teaching separated the 'fans' from his most devoted followers. Many who had followed Jesus apparently left him after this.

You were close enough to see the sadness on Jesus' face as people started pulling away, scoffing at this *hard teaching*. You heard him ask his closest followers, *Will you leave, too?* One, a man named Peter, didn't miss a beat in answering Jesus. *Where would we go, Lord? You alone have the words of life.* Hearing Peter say that really helped you put things in perspective.

Jesus: Who Was He and What Is Your Response to Him?

We're given the choice of dismissing Jesus or accepting him as the Son of God. A careful hearing of his words makes one thing apparent: there's no room for straddling the fence with this man.

Scholars, writers, and preachers are often quoted in regard to deciding about Jesus. One popular argument has become known as the *tri-lemma*.

Scots preacher 'Rabbi' John Duncan (1796–1870) put it this way, *Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this tri-lemma. It is inexorable.* (Source: Wikipedia)

Most who are familiar with this position probably remember it being phrased by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. Lewis wrote,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

C. S. Lewis was an Oxford medieval Literature scholar, popular writer, Christian apologist, and former atheist. He used the argument outlined above in a series of BBC radio talks later published as the book *Mere Christianity*. (Source: Wikipedia)

Revelation, the final book of the Bible, closes with Jesus making a last bold claim about himself. He said, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

Jesus said in effect, *I'm everything there is. I'm it, from A-Z. I was there at the creation, I shed my blood for the salvation of mankind, and I've been given the authority to judge the world. I'm the way—period.*

The first Adam chose to reject the rule of God and forfeited his position with the Father. The second Adam, Jesus the Christ, offers restoration of man's relationship with God. Through the sacrifice of God's only son Jesus, Satan's head was crushed (as promised by God in Genesis) and death was defeated. All, then, who place their trust in Christ are freed from the bondage of sin and are given the privilege of becoming children of God. The choice is ours.

Conversation No. 5

1) What is it about Jesus that attracts your attention and faith?

2) What is the most convincing proof, in your eyes, that Jesus was and is the Son of God?

3) If you have doubts about Jesus, what are they?

4) How would you defend your belief in Jesus?

5) What effect has your faith in Jesus had on your life?

Come and See

It's a simple invitation. Check him out.

We hear, *Come and see* when a friend wants to share a new find. Or, the invitation might come when we've expressed curiosity and have asked to be shown more.

Twice in the opening chapter of the gospel of John (John 1:39 and 1:46) people are invited to *come and see*. It first happens when John the Baptist points out Jesus as *the lamb of God*. Stirred by curiosity or wonder, two of John's disciples want to know more. Their initial question is only an ice-breaker, as they sheepishly ask Jesus where he is staying. Jesus welcomes their curiosity and invites them to *come and see*. He recognizes a hunger in them—an inquisitiveness that will lead to much more.

The same invitation appears again later in the chapter, coming after Jesus chooses a new follower named Philip. Convinced that Jesus is the promised Messiah, Philip goes to his friend Nathanael and excitedly invites, *Come and see*. In other words, *Nate, you've got to meet this guy. He's the one we've been waiting for!*

The good news of the Kingdom of God is not about strong-arm conversion tactics. It's not God's way to force Himself on us. True love doesn't operate that way.

God woos and invites, but the decision to accept or reject Him is left to us.

The Word provides a panoramic picture of what Jesus said and did and invites us to consider. The invitation remains open. Consider Jesus and decide if his message resonates in your heart and soul.

Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and he with me.

Jesus, Revelation 3:20

Conversation No. 6

- 1) Read John Chapter 1.

- 2) What motivated the disciples of John the Baptist to follow Jesus?

3) Why did Andrew tell Simon about Jesus?

4) Why did Jesus change Simon's name to 'Peter'? What might Peter have thought?

5) Nathanael was a skeptic. What changed his attitude?

6) How many titles are given to Jesus in this chapter? Which means the most to you?

Jesus, the Christ

Jesus: The Alpha and Omega

- Conversation 7: DBS Discussion / Revelation 1:1-8 (memorize 1:8)
Conversation 8: DBS Discussion / Revelation 22: 12-16 (memorize 22:12-14)

Jesus: The *I Am* passages from the Gospel of John (plus background from Exodus)

Conversation 9: DBS Discussion / Exodus 3:1-14 (focus on 10-14)

- a. What does God's Name, *I AM*, tell us about who He is?
- b. Consider Jesus' statement in John 8:58. Why were the Jewish leaders ready to stone Jesus (v. 59) after Jesus identified himself in verse 59?

Conversation 10:

- a. Memorize the following list of *I AM* statements (and references)
 1. John 6:35, 48 *I AM the bread of life.*
 2. John 8:12, 9:5 *I AM the light of the world.*
 3. John 8:58 *Before Abraham was, I AM.*
 4. John 10:9 *I AM the door (or gate).*
 5. John 10:11 *I AM the good shepherd.*
 6. John 11:25 *I AM the resurrection and the life.*
 7. John 14:6 *I AM the way, the truth, and the life.*
 8. John 15:1 *I AM the true vine.*
- b. Discuss: How do these descriptions of Jesus relate to the *I AM* of Exodus 3:14? How does each description speak to your work with Jesus?

Jesus: Miscellaneous Teachings

- Conversation 11: DBS Discussion / John 1:1-5
Conversation 12: DBS Discussion / John 1:10-18
Conversation 13: DBS Discussion / John 1:29-34
- Conversation 14: DBS Discussion / John 3:1-10
Conversation 15: DBS Discussion / John 3:16-21
- Conversation 16: DBS Discussion / John 4:3-15
Conversation 17: DBS Discussion / John 4:16-26
- Conversation 18: DBS Discussion / John 5:19-24
- Conversation 19: DBS Discussion / John 6:41-51
Conversation 20: DBS Discussion / John 6:52-59
Conversation 21: DBS Discussion / John 6:60-69
- Conversation 22: DBS Discussion / John 10:1-10
- Conversation 23: DBS Discussion / John 15:1-11
Conversation 24: DBS Discussion / John 15:12-17

Conversation 7

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Revelation 1:1-8 (*memorize 1:8*)

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:

PPROMISE TO CLAIM:

EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:

COMMAND TO KEEP:

KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 8

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Revelation 22:12-16 (*memorize 22:12-14*)

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 9

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Exodus 3:1-14 (focus on 10-14)

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		I will...
		I will...
		I will...

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EEXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
CCOMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 10

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Memorize: John 6:35, 48; 8:12, 9:5; 8:58; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

Conversation 11

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 1:1-5

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EEXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
CCOMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 12

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 1:10-18

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:		
<u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:		
<u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:		
<u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:		
<u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:		

Conversation 13

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 1:29-34

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 14

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 3:1-10

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 3:16-21

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Conversation 16

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 4:3-15

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:

PROMISE TO CLAIM:

EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:

COMMAND TO KEEP:

KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 17

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 4:16-26

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 18

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 5:19-24

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 19

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 6:41-51

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>SIN TO AVOID:</u> <u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u> <u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u> <u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u> <u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u></p>		

Conversation 20

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 6:52-59

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 21

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 6:60-69

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 22

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 10:1-10

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>SIN TO AVOID:</u> <u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u> <u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u> <u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u> <u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u></p>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 15:1-11

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:

PPROMISE TO CLAIM:

EEXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:

CCOMMAND TO KEEP:

KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 24

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: John 15:12-17

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:

PPROMISE TO CLAIM:

EEXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:

CCOMMAND TO KEEP:

KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:



Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God

Christian Worldview Journal, Dr. David Naugle

The Old Testament ends on a note of expectation—the return of Elijah the prophet who would soften the hearts of the people to obey the Law of Moses in conformity with Israel's calling as God's holy nation (Mal. 4:4-6). However, four hundred long years pass before Israel hears any word from God. During this time, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans all ruled over Israel in Palestine. The apocryphal books were written and the apocalyptic prophets preached. But no authentic prophet arose to bring a good word from God.

Finally, the deafening silence was shattered by the strong voice of John the Baptist—the promised forerunner of Messiah who was also the new Elijah (Matt. 3:3; 11:14; Mark 1:2-3; 9:13; Luke 3:4-6). John the Baptist made this startling, but exciting announcement: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matt. 3:2)!

At long last, God was at work again! He was about to do something new! Indeed, He was! What He was about to do was to fulfill the redemptive hope of the Old Testament through the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in the person of His own virgin-born Son, Jesus Christ. The time had finally come. The offspring of the woman who would bring redemption to the earth was at hand. The covenants of promise were about to be fulfilled. God's redeeming rule was about to break into the world! This is what the story of Jesus and the New Testament is all about! At the heart of this story is the concept of the Kingdom of God.

Views of the Kingdom

Bible scholars agree that *the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus*.^[1] The Biblical evidence for this is quite clear. For example, the gospel of Mark introduces Jesus and His mission with these words: *And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'* (Mark 1:13-14). Matthew's summary of Jesus' ministry is similar: *And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people* (Matt. 4:23). Luke chimes in on the same note with this comment: *But He [Jesus] said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose'* (Luke 4:43). These three verses are unanimous: the Kingdom was at the heart of Jesus' purpose on earth.

Unfortunately, however, scholarly accord ends here. There is little if any agreement about what the Kingdom is or how it should be defined. There is not much understanding about its identity among the rank and file in our churches either. Some believe that God's Kingdom is the same as heaven. Catholics (and some Protestants) tend to equate it with the institutional church (so the phrase 'Kingdom work' means 'church work'). Pietists locate the Kingdom of God in the heart and connect it with the spiritual life. Liberal Christians associate God's Kingdom with social reform (as in the social gospel). Others believe that the Kingdom is still future and will be established for the Jews during the 1000 year reign of Jesus on the earth.

Obviously there is not much agreement or clarity these days about the Biblical concept of the Kingdom. In order to shed some light on this subject, let's do our best to see how the Bible answers several important questions about the definition, timing, and nature of this crucial theme.

What is the Kingdom of God?

The Hebrew word for kingdom is *malkut* and its Greek counterpart is *basileia*. Both terms primarily mean *rule* or *reign*. Only secondarily do they denote a realm, sphere, or territory over which a rule or reign is exercised. Both terms have a dynamic or active meaning, and refer to the exercise of God's power, dominion, or sovereignty.

This is clear in the Old Testament, particularly in the poetry of the Psalms where parallel lines clarify what the term *kingdom* means. For example, Psalm 22:28 says, *For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over all*. Similarly, Psalm 103:19 states, *The Lord has established His throne [kingdom] in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all*. Psalm 145:11 declares, *They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power*. Here kingdom is associated with the ideas of God's rule, sovereignty, and power.

The New Testament term means the same thing. When we pray, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven* (Matt. 6:10), we are asking God to exert His authority in the world so that His purposes are achieved. In Jesus' parable about *A certain nobleman who went to a distant country to receive a kingdom*, those over whom he was to rule said: *We do not want this man to reign over us* (Luke 19:12, 14). In Colossians 1:13, Paul teaches that redemption amounts to an exchange of rulers over our lives, stating that God has delivered us believers *from the authority of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*. Thus, the New Testament nuance for kingdom in these verses connect it with the exertion of God's will, the act of ruling or reigning, the exercise of authority.

So, then, from this brief study, we see that the expression 'Kingdom of God' does not refer to heaven or the church or the heart or to moral reform or to a future realm. Rather it refers to the active, dynamic exercise of God's rule, authority, dominion, and power in the world!

So when John the Baptist announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand, he meant that God's rule was just about to break into the world through the Messiah. When Jesus preached and proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, He meant that in and by Himself, God was exercising His power and authority in a redemptive way against all the evil in the world!

In short, the Kingdom of God is the rule of God manifested in Christ to bring redemption to the earth. No wonder the Kingdom is the central theme of the New Testament!

The big 'Kingdom' picture

This makes good sense when we step back and take a look at the big picture. As we have seen, God established His Kingdom at creation. He was the ruler over His world and the people He had made. But His Kingdom was attacked and overtaken by the authority of Satan when humanity fell into sin. Ever since, God has been at work to reassert His rightful rule over the earth and to take it and His people back from the powers of sin, death, and Satan. In fulfillment of the covenants of redemption established by God in the Old Testament, the decisive moment in this war of all wars took place when God's Kingdom arrived in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ who entered into conflict with and defeated God's enemies. Those who now submit to Christ's redeeming rule through faith are restored to God and become new creatures in Him. They anticipate the completion of His redemptive work at His second advent when the whole creation will be restored as God's Kingdom and made new.

So the scenario is this: God's Kingdom rule was established at creation; it was attacked by Satan at the fall; now it is being restored on earth through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ who defeats Satan, death, and sin! No wonder He taught us to pray in this way: *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven!*

Now let us press on to learn more about the timing of God's Kingdom.

When is the Kingdom of God?

Has God's kingly rule and authority already come into the world? Or is it still future? Or is there some sense in which it is both present and future? The teaching of the New Testament is clear: The Kingdom is both 'already' but 'not yet.' It has come, and yet it is coming. It is both present and future. Let's examine the Biblical evidence for this point of view.

The presence of the Kingdom of God. Several verses in the New Testament teach that God's rule has broken into human history to deliver men and women from the power of sin, death, and Satan. Matthew 12:28-29 is a case in point:

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom [read: redeeming rule] of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

In the context of these verses, Jesus had been accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. Nonsense, Jesus said. Any kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

Contrariwise, the fact that He exorcised demons by the power of God's Spirit was proof positive that God's redeeming rule had come upon them! In Christ, God was acting in kingly power to deliver those possessed by demons. When a person was so delivered, this was a clear sign of the victory of God's rule in the world over Satan and his minions. In fact, as verse 29 above points out, this is what Jesus' ministry was all about: binding the *strong man* Satan through the exercise of His sovereign power (see also 1 John 3:8). Once Satan is bound, Jesus will *carry off his property and plunder his house*, that is, take back the people who rightfully belong to Him. In short, Jesus' exorcisms demonstrate the mighty presence of the Kingdom of God delivering people from the power of evil!

Another passage that indicates the presence of God's kingship is Luke 17: 20-21.

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.

Like many in Israel, the Pharisees were looking forward to the arrival of God's kingly rule in the world. But when would it come, they asked? Jesus makes two very important points in His response to their inquiry. One, and contrary to standard Jewish expectation, God's kingship would not come apocalyptically with great signs and wonders that people could see; instead it must be coming in some secret or hidden way. Two, this invisible Kingdom was not a future thing at all, but was already in their midst. Undoubtedly, Jesus was referring to Himself as the embodiment of God's sovereignty that had come into the world to destroy the malicious works of God's enemies.

As a matter of fact, God's Kingdom power and authority was present in Jesus and demonstrated in His every word and in His every deed. Over against falsehood and error, He taught truth, and His powerful teaching was proof positive of the Kingdom's presence. Over against disease, death and demonic possession, He healed, resurrected, and delivered, and His miracles were also powerful proofs positive of the kingdom's presence. From start to finish, Jesus' entire life and ministry was the expression of God's mighty rule that had broken into history to deliver the creation and its human inhabitants from the curse of sin and death. The rule of God was in Jesus. He was, as ancient church theologians believed, the *Autobasileia*, Himself the Kingdom!

Hence, in the book of Acts, when the apostles preach Jesus, they preach the kingdom and when they preach the kingdom, they preach Jesus! See for yourself:

But when they [the people of Samaria] believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Acts 8:12

And when they [Roman Jews] had set a day for him [Paul], they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. Acts 28:23

And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. Acts 28:31

Thus we conclude that the New Testament teaches that the Kingdom of God has already come! But it also affirms that it is not yet. The Kingdom of God has come and is coming! How can this be? Actually this is pretty easy to substantiate.

The future of the Kingdom of God. New Testament evidence for a future manifestation of the Kingdom is overwhelming. The apocalyptic discourses in the synoptic gospels leave no doubt about Christ's bodily second coming, and the final establishment of God's rule in the world (see Matt. 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21). Consider this passage as an example (Matt. 25:31-34):

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

John's gospel also contains references to Christ's return (John 14:3; 21:22; 1 John 2:28; 3:2), and so does his book of the Revelation (2:26-28; 3:12; 11:15; 19:11-16; 21:1-5; 22:7). Revelation 19:11-16 depicts the King of Kings and Lord of Lords returning to bring judgment upon the nations, and Revelation 21:1-5 conveys the glory of our final estate in very hopeful terms.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.' And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'

Of course, the epistles of Paul and Peter are replete with references to the coming of Christ and future manifestation of God's Kingdom (Rom. 8:18-25; 13:11-12; 1 Cor. 15; 16:22; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Eph. 1:9-10; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Titus 2:13-14; Heb. 11:13-16; 12:22-24; 13:14; James 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:5; 2 Pet. 3:8-13). The last text cited sums up the Christian expectation about the return of Christ and the future of the earth.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

How might we sum up the New Testament teaching about this matter of the timing of the Kingdom of God? Theologian George L. Ladd explains its two stages as clearly as anyone in these words that tie our study together up to this point:

Our central thesis is that the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act [with signs and wonders] at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history [already], and consummation at the end of history [not yet]. Now the Jews certainly believed that whenever the Kingdom came, it would come with some pizzazz. But it didn't. It came in a rather understated way, to say the least.

How did the Kingdom come?

The shorthand answer to this question is this: it came unexpectedly in a hidden, spiritual form. It is the secret presence of God's rule in the world in advance of its powerful apocalyptic manifestation; it is present Kingdom fulfillment without future Kingdom consummation. That the Jews were expecting something really BIG whenever God broke into history seems clear enough from several passages in the gospels (e.g., Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 1:67-75). Their version of Messiah was militaristic and political. They sought a Savior who would destroy evil and evil people. But it didn't happen that way.

Important parables in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke help us to understand this *mystery of the kingdom of God* (Matt. 13:10-11; Mark 4:10-11; Luke 8:9-10). The parables explain how the Kingdom has come in this unexpected, but real manner. They disclose a new, previously unrevealed aspect of the divine Kingdom that is already established without bringing the end. We will summarize the significance of the Kingdom parables in Matthew 13, interpreting them in their historical context as they would have been understood by Jesus' disciples.

The parable of the four soils (Matt. 13:1-9; 18-23). The Kingdom of God had come, but contrary to standard expectation, it would not be spread by power, but by the preaching of the Word. The responses to this proclamation would depend upon the conditions of the listeners' hearts. The Kingdom of God will have only partial success. It will not sweep away all evil automatically, but, like seed, will be received differently by different types of soils or hearts.

The parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). This parable also teaches that the Kingdom is already present in the world, but its coming did not bring about the final separation of the wicked from the righteous. In the midst of this present age, society continues with its intermixture of the good and the evil. The sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one continue side by side. Only at the end of the age will the separation take place at the eschatological judgment.

The parables of the mustard seed and leaven (Matt. 13: 31-33). As a mustard seed, the Kingdom of God has entered the world in an imperceptible, humble form, virtually unnoticed and inauspicious. Yet, one day it will be a great tree and encompass the earth. How the Kingdom could be embodied in a relatively insignificant band of disciples who embrace outcasts, sinners, and tax collectors is answered by this parable. Similarly, the Kingdom of God is hidden as leaven in a lump of dough. It will operate secretly but effectively, and will one day prevail such that no rival kingdom exists.

The parables of the treasure and pearl (Matt. 13:44-46). Because of the Kingdom's inauspicious presence, its importance might be overlooked or despised. Both of these parables, however, teach that the Kingdom of God is of inestimable value and ought to be sought over all other possessions. It is humanity's greatest good. It is worth selling everything in order to own it.

The parable of the drag-net (Matt. 13:47-50). Virtually identical in meaning to the wheat and the tares, this parable teaches that the kingdom has come into the [world] but without effecting the final judgment. Again, contrary to expectations, a mixed spiritual society will remain until Christ returns. The Kingdom that was supposed to come in power and do away with evil came by means of preaching and allowed the wicked to remain alongside the righteous until the end. This is really God's mercy! Had He come in power and judgment, none of us would be here today! Though the Kingdom arrived in a humble way, it is humankind's greatest good. It is worth sacrificing everything to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom's greatest mystery is connected with the cross!

The Kingdom and the cross

Simply put, the Kingdom is the cross! The cross is the Kingdom—in disguise! Yes, there on the cross, God in Christ conquered sin, defeated death, and triumphed over Satan. Sounds like a Kingdom victory to me! Yet it could not have appeared more *unkingly*. Jesus hung there in apparent defeat. There He suffered and died. Satan appears to have won the battle. Yet by this means, Jesus triumphed over God's enemies and ours, and shares that victory with those who believe. Jesus is *Christus Victor*! By means of this victory, we are restored to God and our true purposes as human beings. It is the mystery of the Kingdom that makes us new creatures in Christ.

Conclusion

So while there are many views of the Kingdom floating about these days, the Bible is clear: the Kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God. It is God's sovereignty in action against all the evil in the world! It came into the world in Christ. It is both present and future. Its arrival, however, was startling. It came as a mystery, in an unexpected form through the humble person and work of Jesus as the Suffering Servant who defeated sin, death, and Satan. It has set us free! It is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of redemption and the covenants of God.

Conversation No. 25

- 1) What is the relationship between the Kingdom of God and His covenant? What does this imply for us?

- 2) What is meant by saying that the Kingdom is both *here already* and *yet to come*? Discuss some of the implications of each of these.

3) How do believers participate in the Kingdom of God?

4) What will the Kingdom be like when it has fully come?

5) What did you learn from this article?

The Kingdom of God

<u>Conversation 26:</u>	DBS Discussion / Matthew 18:1-4
<u>Conversation 27:</u>	DBS Discussion / Matthew 18:23-35
<u>Conversation 28:</u>	DBS Discussion / Matthew 19:23-24
<u>Conversation 29:</u>	DBS Discussion / Matthew 20:1-16
<u>Conversation 30:</u>	DBS Discussion / Matthew 22:2-14
<u>Conversation 31:</u>	DBS Discussion / Matthew 25:1-13

Conversation 26

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 18:1-4

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

Conversation 27

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 18:23-35

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:

PPROMISE TO CLAIM:

EEXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:

CCOMMAND TO KEEP:

KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 19:23-24

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>SIN TO AVOID:</u></p> <p><u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u></p> <p><u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u></p> <p><u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u></p> <p><u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u></p>		

Conversation 29

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 20:1-16

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 22:2-14

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>ROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Date: _____

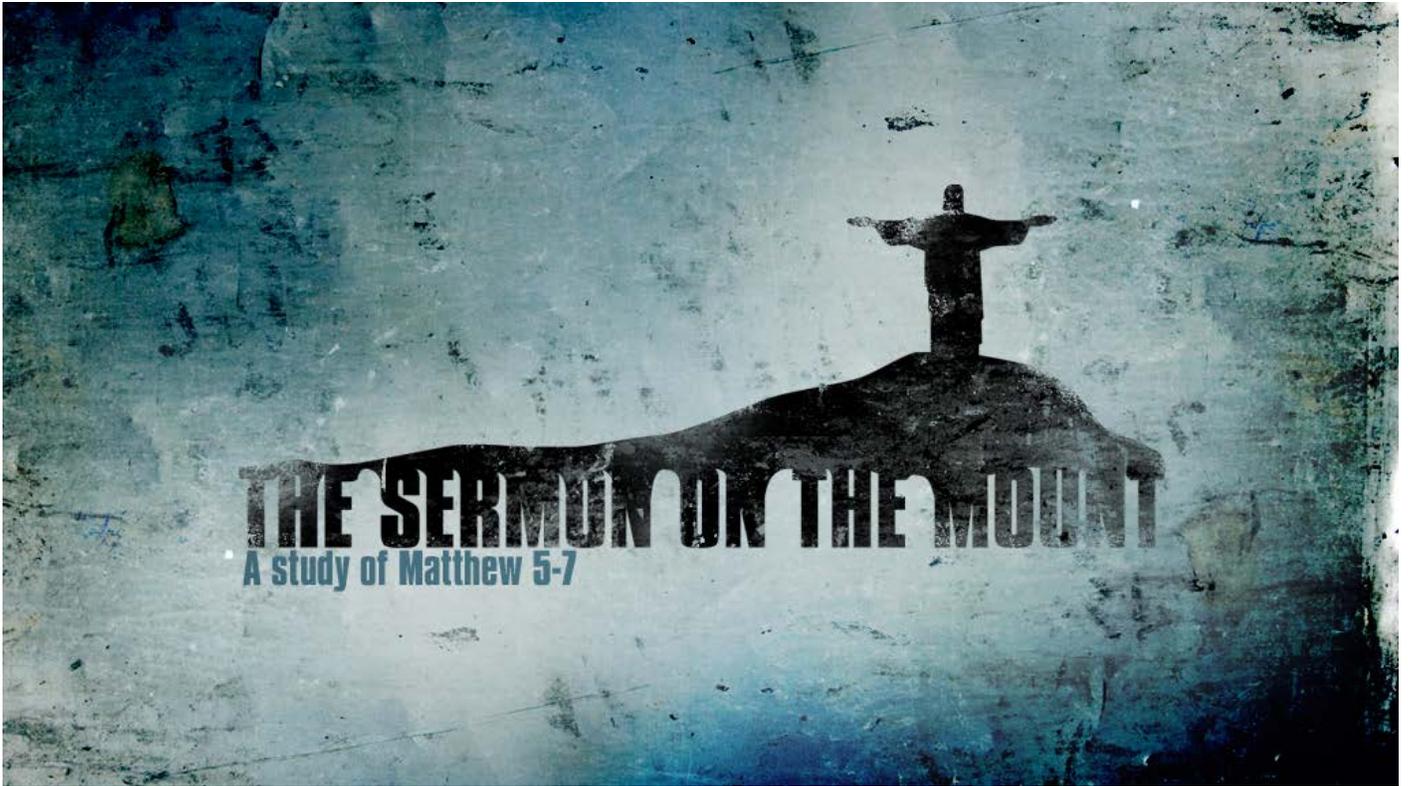
1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 25:1-13

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>ROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		



Wisdom and an Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Christian Worldview Journal, David R. Sinderbox, December 2013

Barron's *The Practical Handbook of Color for Artists* quotes Eugène Delacroix, the French Romantic artist whose work profoundly influenced the Impressionists: *Color is nothing unless it relates to the theme and increases the effect of the painting in the viewer's imagination.* Color, along with line, shape and texture, is one of the key elements in painting. Although color theory states that all of the other colors can be obtained by mixing the three primary colors, magenta, yellow and cyan, Barron states ... *it is not possible to mix the infinity of colors perceived by the eye ... with just the three primary colors...* In practice, cyan blue and magenta are usually replaced with ultramarine blue and cadmium red.

Joseph Albers, in his book *Interaction of Color*, describes how when one hears individual tones, one does not hear music, or when one sees individual letters, one does not read words. Our brains interpret a series of notes as music, and a meaningful sequence of letters as words. Albers states: *A factual identification of colors within a given painting has nothing to do with a sensitive seeing nor with an understanding of the color action within a painting.* It is the interaction of color that makes possible the true seeing of how the artist is using color.

One of the problems in understanding the Sermon on the Mount is that we tend to break the sermon into segments without understanding that the colors of the whole transcend its individual parts; the Sermon is a total and compelling word-painting. It is a complete canvas. It begins with the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are a description of the one who follows Jesus; the Beatitudes are also a description of Jesus Himself. In the Sermon, Jesus moves from this prologue to the Law of God and reveals what God had intended His Law to be from the moment of its revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai: It was to be the spirit of the Law that was to define one's life, not legalistic encrustations of human tradition that it later became. Many of the religious Jews of Jesus' day were much more interested in their elders' interpretations of the Law than they were in its original intent; their traditions painted over the bright, primary colors of the Law and dulled them with non-essential 'dos and don'ts.' God intended that the devout Jew through the Law would live his or her life in light of the almost impossible Hebrew word to translate, His *hesed*, or His loyal love, His faithful love, His sheltering love and His all-embracing love.

Albers points out that unlike notes or words, if we say *red* to fifty different people, each individual will have their own specific mental image of *red*. This is because colors can be deceptive. A special collector's edition of the magazine *Scientific American Mind* explored 187 optical illusions. One article in this collection written by Stephen L. Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde entitled *Colors out of Space* revealed how colors can change with their surroundings and spread beyond the lines. Two figures of the same color can appear absolutely different when featured upon backgrounds of different colors.

The Sermon on the Mount must be placed in its proper background in order to be properly understood. If the Sermon is imposed upon an alien background, its colors will become distorted. This true background for the Sermon consists of this: The Law of God was given out of God's love for us so that the Law could reveal the sinfulness of the heart, drive the heart to grace and through grace conform the heart to the true image of God that originally comprised male and female. When the Law does this, then we enter into a state of blessedness. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-18, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

Jesus and the Law

How, then, has Jesus fulfilled the law? The Law of God consists of moral, civil and liturgical codes. Many of the laws of the civil code applied to Israel and do not necessarily apply today, at least not in their literal sense, although these laws do contain principles that are timeless; the laws pertaining to slavery have application to employer-employee relationships, and the laws of cisterns and ramparts contain principles pertaining to liability, to name a few.

The liturgical code, the laws of sacrifice for sin, all pointed to the future fulfillment of Christ's one-time, perfect sacrifice on the cross (see Hebrews 8-10). Jesus did the impossible and lived the Law perfectly; He did it for us because none of us were capable of doing so. He lived what we could not live so that we might become righteousness in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). As Paul says in Romans 5:19, *For as by the one man's disobedience [Adam's disobedience] the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience [the obedience of Jesus] the many will be made righteous.* So Jesus fulfilled the Law by being the perfect sacrifice on the cross for our sins and by living the Law perfectly for us.

Jesus also fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by His having given us the Holy Spirit in our lives (John 16:7). This fulfills the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:27 which says, *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules,* as well as fulfills the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:33 which says, *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* Paul states in Romans 8:2, *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2 speaks of the law of Christ whereas James in 1:25 states, *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*

Jesus thus fulfills the Law three ways: (1) in His perfect life lived for us because we could not live it; (2) in His work on the cross as the atonement for our sins; (3) in His now enabling the Law to be written in our hearts by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. As Paul says in Romans 10:4, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.* The Greek word that Paul uses in this passage for end means *goal, completion, perfection.* Jesus is thus in all respects the perfection of the Old Testament Law.

Wisdom and the Sermon on the Mount

As mentioned earlier, the background for the Sermon on the Mount is this: The Law of God was given out of God's love for us so that the Law could reveal the sinfulness of the heart, drive the heart to grace and through grace conform the heart to the true image of God that originally comprised male and female. Jesus in this heart-penetrating sermon does not reinterpret the Law nor does He do away with it but reveals that the Law rips away all defenses of the heart and reveals its true motives. The Law was never to be just simply a matter of obedience in and of itself, but to be a matter of obedience expressing one's love and gratitude to a God of mercy and grace.

When God revealed His Law to Moses, He had already blessed Israel by delivering it out of the bondage of slavery and darkness. God has now blessed us in Christ Jesus by delivering us *from the domain of darkness and transferring us to the kingdom of his Beloved Son* (Colossians 1:13). We are now to view the Old Testament Law through new transplanted eyes, eyes that see through the lenses of the law of the Spirit and the law of Christ. When we do so, the principles embedded in these Old Testament Laws, the perfect law of liberty, become God's instruction, or guides, to us; they teach us how we can love God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength and how we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

If we are to become wise, we must heed God's instruction as given in His Law because it is colored red with the blood of Christ. When we learn and apply the principles embedded in the Law, we will be blessed with the blessings Jesus describes in the Beatitudes, as well as the blessing that the Psalmist describes in 1:1–2—provided we do what David says we must do in order to enter into this blessing: *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Conversation No. 32

1) What was the purpose of the Law of Moses?

2) Have you ever thought of the Sermon on the Mount as impossibly difficult to obey, as if Jesus was *raising the bar* when compared to the Law of Moses?

3) Jesus said, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I have not come to abolish them but fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18).* Paul said, *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).* Are Jesus and Paul at odds? How do you harmonize what they are saying?

4) What does it mean that Jesus *fulfilled the Law and the Prophets*?

5) The Sermon on the Mount shows us that God is concerned with more than external righteousness (Matthew 5:20). What, then, does God expect from us? How does the gospel and our faith in Christ merge to help us meet the standard that Jesus expressed in Matthew 5:20?

6) What did you learn from this article?

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5-8

Kingdom Living

Conversation 33	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:1-12, 'The Beatitudes' (memorize all)
Conversation 34:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:13-16
Conversation 35:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:17-20
Conversation 36:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:21-26
Conversation 37:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:27-32
Conversation 38:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:33-37
Conversation 39:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:38-42
Conversation 40:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 5:43-48
Conversation 41:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 6:1-4
Conversation 42:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 6:5-15
Conversation 43:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 6:16-18
Conversation 44:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 6:19-24
Conversation 45:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 6:25-34
Conversation 46:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 7:1-6
Conversation 47:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 7:7-12
Conversation 48:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 7:13-14
Conversation 49:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 7:15-23
Conversation 50:	DBS Discussion / Matthew 7:24-29

Conversation 33

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:1-12, 'The Beatitudes' (memorize all)

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		I will...
		I will...
		I will...
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:13-16

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:17-20

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:21-26

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:27-32

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>ROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Conversation 38

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:33-37

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:38-42

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Conversation 40

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 5:43-48

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:

PPROMISE TO CLAIM:

EEXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:

CCOMMAND TO KEEP:

KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 6:1-4

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Conversation 42

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 6:5-15

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:		
<u>P</u>ROMISE TO CLAIM:		
<u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:		
<u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:		
<u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:		

Conversation 43

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 6:16-18

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

Conversation 44

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 6:19-24

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 6:25-34

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>SIN TO AVOID:</u></p> <p><u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u></p> <p><u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u></p> <p><u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u></p> <p><u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u></p>		

Conversation 46

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 7:1-6

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>

S.P.E.C.K.

SIN TO AVOID:
PPROMISE TO CLAIM:
EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:
COMMAND TO KEEP:
KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:

Conversation 47

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 7:7-12

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

Conversation 48

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 7:13-14

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<u>SIN TO AVOID:</u>		
<u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u>		
<u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u>		
<u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u>		
<u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 7:15-23

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>S</u>IN TO AVOID:</p> <p><u>P</u>ROMISE TO CLAIM:</p> <p><u>E</u>XAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</p> <p><u>C</u>OMMAND TO KEEP:</p> <p><u>K</u>NOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</p>		

Date: _____

1. What are you thankful for this week?

2. What concerns can you share with the group?

3. How did you obey last week's passage?

Passage for this week: Matthew 7:24-29

Passage	Interpretation: What does this passage mean?	Application: What will you do in response to this passage?
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
		<i>I will...</i>
S.P.E.C.K.		
<p><u>SIN TO AVOID:</u></p> <p><u>PROMISE TO CLAIM:</u></p> <p><u>EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW:</u></p> <p><u>COMMAND TO KEEP:</u></p> <p><u>KNOWLEDGE TO ATTAIN:</u></p>		



Food for the Soul

Daily Devotional Time: Food for the Soul

Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus, Matthew 4:4

Imagine training for a marathon without taking in water and nourishment for your body. It's a silly suggestion; you wouldn't last.

Now imagine this: a disciple of Jesus who seldom prays or reads Scripture. It follows that the spiritual health of that person will suffer like the long-distance runner who doesn't feed, water, or otherwise care for his body.

It's a sad fact that many Christians try to run the race of following Jesus without replenishing themselves with the *bread and water of life*. The result is spiritual lethargy and ineffectiveness.

Regular time in the Word and on our knees in prayer fuels the soul. There is no substitute or shortcut if we hope to grow into mature disciples of Jesus. No matter how many church services we attend, committees we serve on, or how busy we are with religious activity, we will not grow as a disciple without meditating on the Word of God and seeking Him in prayer—it's impossible. Regularly neglecting the Word also robs those you might otherwise be able to encourage and disciple. It really is true that *you can't pass on what you don't have*.

One of the most powerful things resulting from the personal discipling that Karen and I received three decades ago was being taught the importance of daily devotional time with God. Our discipler, Bob Mize, called it *quiet time*. He modeled it in his own walk with Jesus and taught us how to build and practice this important habit. It was and has been a game changer for our spiritual growth.

Now that you've taken the mantle of following Jesus in a more focused way, we encourage you to begin the daily practice of time with God. The following pages provide a few simple ideas to help you begin this spiritual discipline. Don't worry if you miss a few days here and there; the important thing is to get started and work on making time with God a daily habit.

Persevere! MLS

MY DAILY DEVOTIONAL TIME

Bob Mize

What is a Daily Devotional Time?

One description is:

A time when I surrender my mind, will and body to the supernatural presence and teaching of God, my Heavenly Father; to Christ, my Savior and Lord; and to the Holy Spirit of God, my Comforter and Guide. It is a time when I can rest in God, wait on him, listen to him, and talk with him.

Every Christian has this opportunity on a daily basis, though the habit is never formed without a struggle. It is worth every effort to begin and maintain this discipline. Remember, *Never start the day with the face of your soul unwashed.*

How do I begin?

First, make time. This is the toughest challenge. We find time to do what we really want to do. Give all the time you can—even five minutes—then increase your investment gradually. What is the best time for you? Commit to it until you develop a habit, remembering, *I'm too busy not to pray.*

Also, find a place. A quiet, private place is the best place to *wait on the Lord*. Be away from TV, phone, and other people, if possible. If you have no such place, learn the power of concentration. A specific place becomes a special place. Try outdoors when possible. Where will be your sanctuary, a place to meet God daily in Bible reading and prayer? *At the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky is a place of central calm.*

How Can I Successfully Continue My Daily Devotional Time?

Anticipate Meeting the Lord

Approach your daily devotional time with a spirit of anticipation and expectancy. Open and close the Bible with prayer. Shut out other responsibilities while you concentrate on the power of God, the person of Jesus Christ, and God's Holy Spirit working within you. Allow into your mind the Scripture picture of the Lord, and then see the risen Jesus. Focus on him. Stand ready to receive a blessing from him. For a few minutes *know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified* (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Be Still

Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10). Begin your devotional time in stillness. If you are upset, sleepy or preoccupied, ask God for his peace. Fervently and audibly say, *Lord, by your Spirit please make my heart and soul happy and calm my troubled mind.* Believe that God will prepare your heart (Isaiah 26:3).

Set a Goal

Aim at nothing and you will certainly hit it. First, state a general goal: *The purpose of my daily devotional time is* Then specifically ask, *How will I do this?* Perhaps you can set a time goal: *I will spend 10 minutes a day and add five minutes each of the next six months.* Or, a reading

goal: *I will read through one of the Gospel accounts each month. Or, an achievement goal: Each day I will ask the Lord what he wants me to do today. A self-challenge is exciting. This one thing I do...* (Philippians 3:13).

Use Tools

A good Bible is a must. I recommend the New International Version (NIV) or the New Living Translation (NLT), and for children, the International Children's Version (ICV). What about comparing several versions? Use a Bible in which you do not mind marking. What about a notebook and pen? At the end of the year your diary of Bible reading / study will pleasantly surprise you. Have you tried the Bible on cassette tape? It is handy for drive and waiting times. Your goals will determine which study aids you secure.

Be Imaginative

The first and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord (George Muller).

Create excitement by your approach to Bible study and prayer. Perhaps you should not begin by reading straight through the Bible. If you do, use **THE DAILY BIBLE** (Harvest House Publishers); it provides the story line in chronological order, something most Bible readers have not experienced. Or what about focusing on one of the *popular chapters* each day, such as Psalm 23, Psalm 100, I Corinthians 13, or Romans 12? Some read one chapter each from the Old Testament and New Testament. Proverbs has 31 chapters, a chapter a day for a month.

Remember, Bibles falling apart usually belong to people who aren't.

What Can I Do to Freshen My Daily Devotional Time?

Share with Others

The joy of Bible study is sharing it. Excited about a new truth or insight? Call a friend. What we share we keep. New insights we discover become ours when we pass them along. God's story is multiplied when it is divided with others, like the paltry lunch Jesus used to feed a multitude. Share with someone how God's Word has changed your life. Or, how about including Scripture references in your letters? Have you tried sharing prayer requests? Share.

Use Simple Interpretation Skills

First, discover: *What is the passage saying?* Second, understand: *What does the passage mean?* Pray for understanding. Check word meanings. Ask, *Who, what, why, when and where?* Third, apply: *What does the passage mean to me?*

Try, Try Again

Nobody has mastered the daily devotional time. Few find it natural and easy to be consistent. But persistence brings rewards so don't give up! If you miss or slack off, restart. *Twenty-one times make a habit*, so be persistent for twenty-one days in a row. To be truly helpful, this must be as routine and regular as eating. It may not be harmful to miss an occasional meal, but you do miss it! *Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God.* Make your daily time with God a lifestyle habit as you join your fellow strugglers.

21 Times Make a Habit

This sounds like the morning newspaper: *a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11)*. There IS a famine of hearing God's Word today. But there are also many people hungering and thirsting for righteousness. That is the good news.

For forty years I have heard questions like, *Where do I begin in my spiritual pilgrimage?* or, *How can I remain consistent?*

Here is an idea that will work for you. You can establish the HABIT of a daily devotional time by using this guide for twenty-one days. This simple plan has redirected the spiritual lives of thousands. I send it to you with a prayer for your spiritual growth.

To help you begin, or enrich, your daily devotional time, here are suggestions for twenty-one days. They span the Bible, highlighting some of the familiar Scripture portions. There will be a suggested passage to read, often including a smaller portion if you don't have time to read the entire chapter. The devotional thought will always be followed by the words, 'My Prayer:'. Take the time to write a brief, reflective prayer that relates to the passage. Make it very personal and creative, thinking of ways the Bible thought or prayer can become real in your daily activities.

HAPPY REVOLUTION!

Day One

Genesis 1 (26-27)

I'm Special

And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being (2:7). God has not forgotten the material from which he made you—dust. He knows your make-up, exactly how much you can handle physically and emotionally. Write down everything you often think nobody understands about you. *Guess what? God does!*

My Prayer:

Day Two

Exodus 20 (1-21)

The Ten Commandments and Me

Every command of God is also a revelation of his nature. God is not a celestial killjoy. He does not give us commands just to be harsh or to restrict us. He is, in fact, Our Designer; his commandments are always framed with our good in mind. The Ten Commandments formed the basis of the Israelites' relationship to Jehovah. Study them carefully and see the good things God is doing for you.

My Prayer:

Day Three

Deuteronomy 6 (4-9)

A Life of Milk and Honey

We've all heard it: *With freedom comes responsibility*. It is true that often what is gained by blood, sweat, and tears is lost by apathy. God knows that we need some standard, a track to run on. He is the Giver of all good things, and the reward is worth the effort. As God held out the Promised Land to the Israelites, so he holds out to you an eternal home in heaven. Even closer than that is his reward for you today as you serve him. *With Jesus life is an endless hope; without him a hopeless end.*

My Prayer:

Day Four

Ruth 1 (16-18)

A Deep Love

See how many love statements you can add to this list: *Love is blind. Love is a many-splendored thing. Love makes the world go 'round. Love....* Love is a word that is difficult to define because it is a quality of life more readily *demonstrated* than *described*. Ruth demonstrated the true character of love. How will you demonstrate it in your life today? How can you give of yourself in sacrificial love to those around you? Love never asks, *How much must I do?* but rather, *How much can I do?*

My Prayer:

Day Five

Psalm 1

When I Delight in the Law of the Lord

Few good things in life come to us suddenly. More often we experience them incrementally. Note the progress here: *Walk, Stand, Sit*. Neither do we become like Christ overnight. *We become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more* (2 Corinthians 3:18—NLT). Carry a seed or some seeds in your pocket today to remind you that you are a seed that God has planted, that it will take time for you to grow to maturity.

My Prayer:

Day Six

Psalm 8

God Believes in Me

This Psalm has in it the following three A's: **Admiration**—*You have set your glory above the heavens.* **Appreciation**—*You crown him with glory and honor.* **Adoration**—*Oh, Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* Try to employ admiration, appreciation, and adoration today. The third one will likely be reserved for God. What are some of your reasons to adore him today?

My Prayer:

Day Seven

Psalm 23

The Good Shepherd and Me

Some of the most noted men in the Scripture were shepherds. Can you think of three? David was one. It was natural for David to compare God to a loving, caring shepherd in Psalm 23. Try paraphrasing Psalm 23 in your own words using a metaphor from personal experience. Examples: *The Lord is my Chief Executive...my Teacher...my Supervisor...my Coach.*

My Prayer:

Day Eight

Psalm 51

Mercy That I Need

Sin would have fewer takers if its consequences occurred immediately. Psalm 51 was penned during the darkest hour of David's life. As you reflect on your life, what was your darkest hour? David's success nearly turned to ruin overnight. First adultery and then murder left guilt scars. God was willing and able to forgive David. David had a contrite heart and asked God, *Wash me...cleanse me....* Forgiveness involves the offender and the offended. At this important moment, *right now*, in what specific ways do you need to repent of your sins before God? He is willing and able to forgive you.

My Prayer:

Day Nine

Psalm 100

I Serve the Lord with Gladness

When the President of the United States appears in public, he is often greeted by a rousing rendition of *Hail to the Chief*. After all, he is the Commander-in-Chief of the United States. But what do you play when the Lord Jesus Christ, the Commander-in-Chief of the universe, appears? How do you honor him? What fitting song of tribute can you render him? You might want to start with the 100th Psalm. Try reading it aloud. Refresh your memory by reading it several times throughout the day.

My Prayer:

Day Ten

Psalm 147

I Praise the Lord

A good friend of mine often says, *I give God the credit*. That is exactly what praise is all about. If the exclamation, *Praise the Lord!* seems a little trite, why not try my friend's phrase today? The Book of Psalms is your primer for praise. To praise God is to hold him up, to give him his rightful place in the universe and in your heart. Try adding some of these Bible praise words to your vocabulary: *honor, extol, hallowed, magnify* and *adore*. Like the beginning of the 147th Psalm, our days should begin with a clear call to praise. God is praiseworthy because of his work in my life right now. Search for the action words in this psalm. I count at least 25 of them. God is active *now* in your life. Are you giving him the credit? Study the last several psalms of the Bible, then try writing a praise psalm of your own. Label it Psalm 151 and begin it with, *I Give God the Credit!*

My Prayer:

You are almost halfway there. Soon you will give birth to a good habit. Keep on for twenty-one days in a row! If you are struggling, here is an idea: ask someone to accept the challenge with you. A spiritual partnership may help you and your partner.

Day Eleven

Proverbs 3 (5-8)

Whom Do I Trust?

General Omar Bradley said, *We have too many men of science and too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we do about peace; more about killing than we do about living.* It is so easy to trust in myself, especially when things are going well. Self-reliance is a dangerous time bomb. We must remember that the word *SIN* has *I* in the middle. Take a moment to reflect over your past, and then make a note of the times that you had to be rescued. Was your rescuer a person, a circumstance, or providence. *Many are self-made and are worshipping their creator.*

My Prayer:

Day Twelve

Ecclesiastes 3 (1-17)

Eternity is Within Me

Boyce Pasternak, the late Russian author, once wrote, *I tear my hair at the thought that such a great, appreciable part of my life has been wasted.* It is the matter of time. Everyone has seven days, 168 hours. Of those hours we spend 56 sleeping, 40 working and the remaining 72 are for our choosing. What will you do with these 72 hours? The key might be in verse 11: *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.* What I do with time now determines my eternity. *I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

My Prayer:

Day Thirteen

Isaiah 53 (1-3)

I Understand the Real Beauty of Jesus

The Good News is neither a discussion nor a debate. It is an announcement. This passage contains the single most important announcement of good news you will ever hear.

Incarnation: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came *in the flesh* (53:2,3).

Redemption and intercession: He came to suffer and die to make his life a guilt offering (53:10), and to bear the sins of many and to make intercession for transgressors (53:12). What have you done with the invitation of the suffering servant? How will you share it with others today?

My Prayer:

Day Fourteen

John 1 (1-18)

The Word Became a Human Being

It may be a mark of maturity—especially in spiritual matters— to admit that we cannot comprehend a truth. If we ever could completely understand how deity came to live in bodily form, then we would no longer worship Jesus. He is unique. He continues to call for our worship and praise because he is the perfect combination of the deity and humanity. He is the Bridge-Builder between God and man. He came to show us what God is like (18). He was neither diluted deity nor exalted humanity. He was the perfect combination of both. This is beyond understanding. Jesus himself is our call to worship. Look for ways today to acknowledge him as the only one qualified to direct your life. *The Son of God became the Son of Man so the sons of men might become the sons of God.*

My Prayer:

Day Fifteen

Acts 2

The Great Revolution

Psychology offers the kingdom of relieved mind. Sociology offers the kingdom of better and just relationships. Education offers the kingdom of enlightenment. But conversion offers the kingdom of God. Conversion means change. Spiritually the old house is emptied, allowing new residents to move in. Christianity is more than rearranging the furniture of the status quo, repositioning our past habits. Paul was right, *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (2 Corinthians 5:17) Share with at least one person today a specific change that has taken place in your life because of God's power through Jesus Christ.

My Prayer:

Day Sixteen

Romans 8 (1-8)

Not Condemned in Jesus

As a child, did you ever try to pick up an object that was too heavy for you? You strained but you were able to raise only one side an inch or two off the floor. Then just as you were about to abandon the project, along came an adult, picking up both you and the object. Together you *carried* the object with ease! Do you recall how strong and gigantic that adult seemed? Our relationship with God is the same. We cannot carry our burden alone, but God handles both our burdens and us as if they were nothing. In prayer today, give God the *weights* that make you feel condemned. Remember: *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Share your release with a friend.

My Prayer:

Day Seventeen

Romans 12 (1,2)

I Am a Living Sacrifice

With the understanding that my body is a living sacrifice to God comes a revolution in my life-style. My spiritual sacrifice is not like the animal sacrifice of the Old Testament Jew. I am alive, though I have died with Christ (Galatians 2:20). My daily task of giving my opportunities and abilities to God is not easy. Someone said, *I am a living sacrifice to God but I keep crawling down off the altar.* Spend some time with a list headed by the two words *Conformed* and *Transformed*. Make a list of all the things that tempt you to be *conformed to the pattern of this world*. Then make a list of areas in which God has *transformed* you. Include areas in which you still desire transformation by *the renewing of your mind*.

My Prayer:

Day Eighteen

1 Corinthians 13 (1-7)

The Greatest Is Love

The great love chapter of the Bible is clear about one thing: love is active. It is a behavior. Read verses 4 through 7 and each time the word *love* appears, insert your own name. Then reread it and make it more personal by inserting the word *I*. Decide today that you are going to love! You will discover that it is easy to love those who love you, but tough to love the unlovable. If you know beforehand that someone doesn't have good feelings for you, your actions will be reactions, and likely you will react in kind. So, open this chapter and read it again. Now stay with that decision to love. How will that love behave? If you still have difficulty loving, how about questioning the source of your actions? Are you producing the fruit of your own effort, or are you asking the Spirit of God to bear fruit through you? When this change takes place, nobody will be more surprised than your enemies! May this be the day you learn to love.

My Prayer:

Day Nineteen

1 Corinthians 15 (1-8,20-28,35-58)

Resurrection Power

In Hanover, Germany, there is a tombstone more than 150 years old. It was made of large slabs of stone bound together by bands of iron and capped with a huge stone block weighing 1 ½ tons. On the tomb is this inscription: *This grave is purchased for eternity; it shall never be opened.* Somehow, though, a little poplar seed was enclosed in the tomb's mold. By the power of God it sprang into a slender shoot and found its way through a crevice between two of the great stones. It became a stately tree, breaking the iron bands and moving every stone from its original place. The little poplar seed literally opened that tomb. Victoriously, the tree waves its branches above the tomb of some infidel who dared to declare it would *never be opened*. There will be a resurrection by the power of God. *Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?* (55). To learn how you can be free from the fear of death, read Hebrews 2:14,15.

My Prayer:

Day Twenty

Hebrews 11 (1-3)

The Faith of My Heroes

If you are a Christian, you are not a reservoir of limited resources. You are a channel attached to the unlimited, divine source. The unbeliever thinks he has the sea ladled into his private pond. The believer, through faith, sees the bigger ocean. God's requirements are met only by God's own enabling power. *The believer 'knows.'* *The skeptic is one who won't take 'know' for an answer.* The believer does not worry whether or not the sun will rise; he merely prepares to enjoy it. The believer can see at a glance what the unbeliever cannot see with microscopes and telescopes. The Bible idea of faith is more than mental endorsement. It is a trusting acceptance. Saving faith is accepting Jesus by placing complete trust in him. Are you a believer?

My Prayer:

Day Twenty-One

Revelation 22 (1-6)

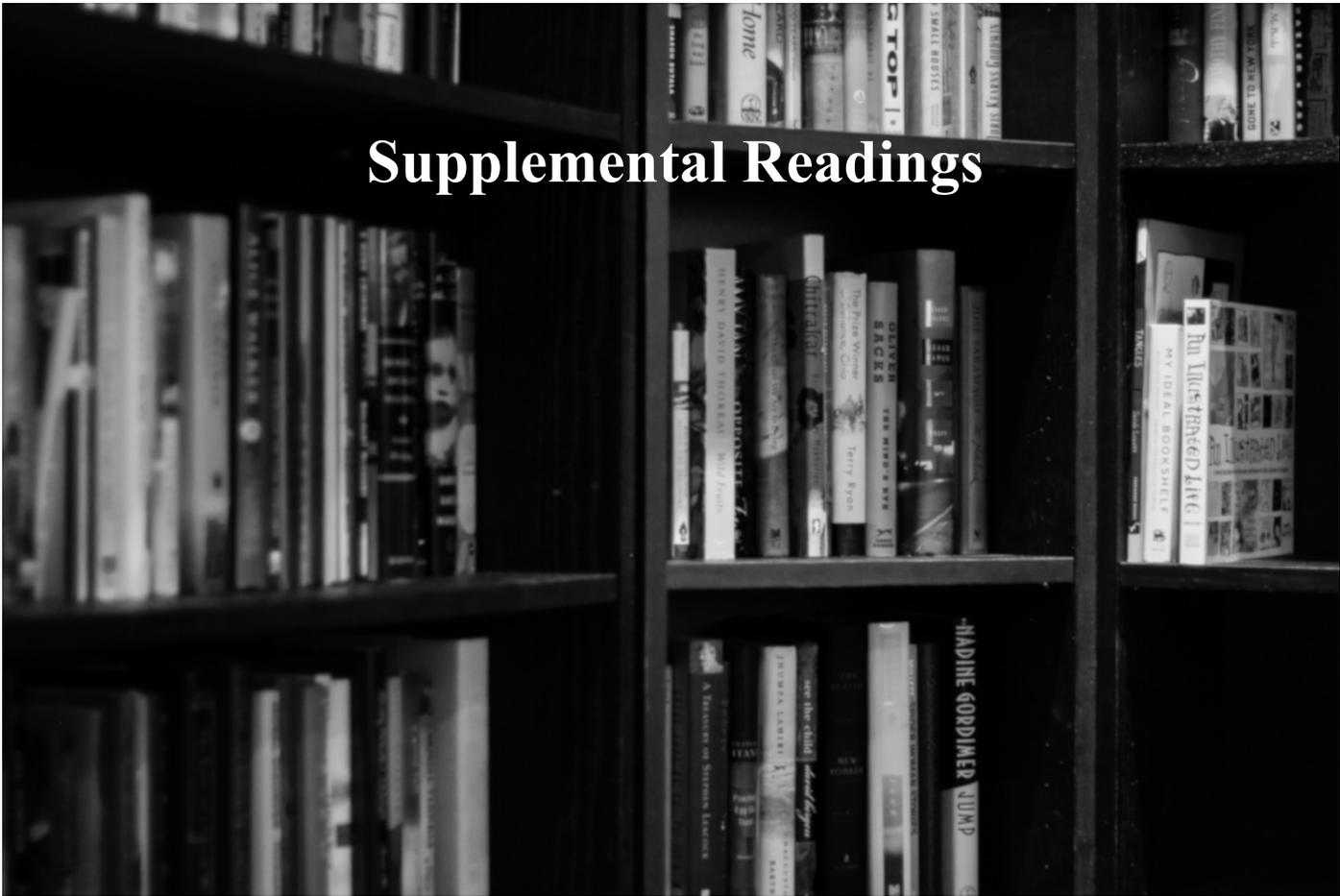
Someone Is Coming

Twenty-four persons, who had waited nearly ten months for Christ to return, were evicted from their small, rural home for not paying their rent. As newsmen looked on, the group of relatives including ten children were led away by federal marshals. The Farmers Home Administration reclaimed the house. In addition, the men lost their jobs and a number of cars were repossessed. You might call their behavior strange or bizarre, but these people were convinced of Jesus' second coming. Are we guilty of the other extreme, not believing that he is coming again? Do we care if he does? The second coming is mentioned over 500 times in your New Testament. How many times do you mention it? How many times do you think about it?

My Prayer:

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Supplemental Readings

Supplemental Readings

BIBLE STUDY

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. Zondervan, 1981.

CULTIVATING THE INNER LIFE

Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster. Harper and Row, 1978.

The Pursuit of God, A.W. Tozer. First Edition 1948.

LIVING AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, Eugene Peterson. Intervarsity Press, 1980.

I Am a Follower, Leonard Sweet. Thomas Nelson, 2012.

Invitation to a Journey, M. Robert Mulholland. InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Living Jesus: Doing What Jesus Says in the Sermon on the Mount, Randy Harris. Leafwood Publishers, 2012.

Righteousness Inside Out: The Sermon on the Mount and the Radical Way of Jesus, Mike Cope. Leafwood Publishers, 2003.

The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. MacMillan Publishing Co., First Ed., 1949.

The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God, Dallas Willard. Harper San Francisco, 1997.

PAYING IT FORWARD: Discipling Others

Making Disciples One Conversation at a Time, D. Michael Henderson. Beacon Hill Press, 2007.

Multiply, Francis Chan and Mark Beuving. David C. Cook, 2012.

The Adventure of Discipling Others, Ron Bennett and John Purvis. Navpress, 2003.

Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time, Greg Ogden. IVP Books, 2003.

