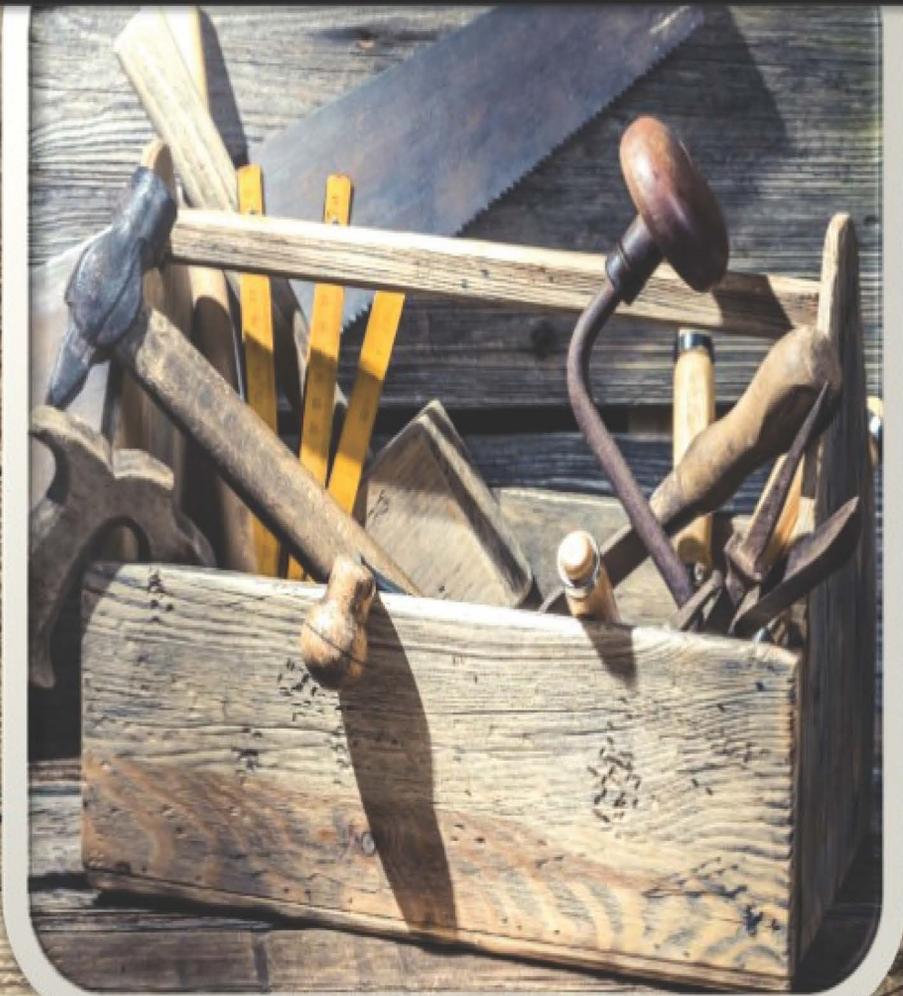


BIBLE STUDY SERIES - VOLUME 3

The Christian's Toolbox

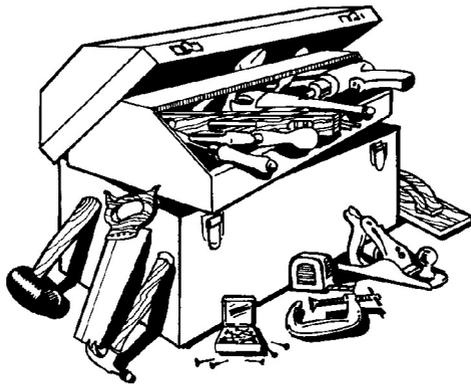


Sheri Strelecky

BIBLE STUDY SERIES – VOLUME 3

The Christian's Toolbox

Sheri Strelecky



The Church of God, God's Acres
2020

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CHAPTER ONE

BIBLE READING

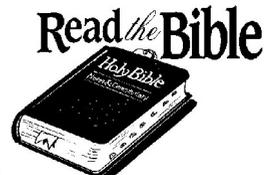
DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** You should read the Bible for guidance (Psalm 119:104-105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Reading the Bible helps you to avoid sin (Psalm 119:10-11; Matthew 4:1-10).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Bible reading is as important as your daily food (Luke 4:3-4; 1 Peter 2:2).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God will help you to understand your Bible reading (Acts 8:26-35).
- ❑ **Friday:** It is important that you seek God early (Psalm 63:1; Ecclesiastes 12:1).
- ❑ **Saturday:** It is important to obey what you read in the Bible (Psalm 119:9; Luke 11:28; Matthew 7:24).

Why Should I Read the Bible?

When you acknowledge, believe, confess, and forsake your sins, God forgives you, and you become a Christian. You start a new spiritual journey, but that is just the beginning! To continue your walk with Christ, there are some basics you must include in your daily life. Just as food, water, and air are necessary for our physical bodies to live, so there are requirements that must be met for spiritual life. One of these is Bible reading. Why is this so vital to the Christian? Bible reading will give you the instructions for how to live your Christian life. Have you ever tried to put something together without reading the directions? Perhaps you mostly figured it out, but more often than not, the instructions were vital. How much more important that you understand God's instructions for your life! However, if you never read those instructions, you are sure to make a mess of your life.

In the Old Testament, King Solomon realized his great need of guidance from God. He told God, "I know not how to go out or come in" (1 Kings 3:7). God promised to give Solomon wisdom and understanding, and He



instructed Solomon to "walk in my ways" and "to keep my statutes and my commandments" (1 Kings 3:14). How could Solomon keep God's commandments? First, he had to read them! God's commandments and instructions are found in His Word (the Bible). Psalm 119:105 tells us that God's Word acts as a light and a lamp, showing us how to live.

When you read the Bible, you are storing up God's Word in your heart. Why is this important? Psalm 119:11 tells us, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Reading and obeying God's Word will keep you from sinning. It will also teach you how to resist the temptations of the devil. As you become familiar with God's Word, you will see through the lies of the devil. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He resisted temptation by telling Satan, "It is written." Where was it "written"? In the Bible!

What If I Do Not Understand the Bible?

A common complaint about reading the Bible is that it is hard to understand, and sadly, some have called it boring. A good way to think about Bible reading is to consider it as a personal letter from God to you. The God who created the universe wants to talk to you. He carefully put His plan into place so you could have this very special Book which contains His thoughts, His will, and His plans for your life. When you realize the great privilege of reading what God has to say to you, Bible reading will not be boring.

Are there Scriptures in the Bible that are hard to understand? Yes, there are. Many verses in the Bible have been greatly misunderstood, and religious doctrines have often been formed from those misunderstandings. How can you understand what you are reading? The Ethiopian eunuch had this problem in Acts, Chapter 8. God sent Philip to give understanding to this man. Where could you find someone to give you understanding concerning a difficult Scripture reading?

It is part of God's plan that you attend church services (Hebrews 10:25). In Sunday school, prayer meetings, and main services, you can hear teachers and ministers explain and teach from God's Word. The best way to understand your Bible is to talk to the Author. If someone wrote you a letter or sent you a message and you did not understand what it said, what should you do? The author of that letter or message would be the best person to ask for help. So it is with the Bible. Although more than forty men wrote the sixty-six

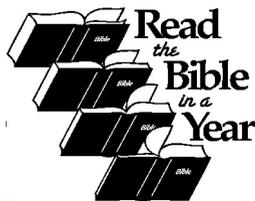


books that make up the Bible, this Book only has one Author (God).

Just as all students in school do not learn exactly alike, there are different approaches to Bible reading. If you are a *visual* learner, it might be helpful to highlight favorite passages, keep a notebook that lists the daily readings and your thoughts about those verses, follow a printed Bible reading plan, and make notes in the margin of your Bible. If your learning style is *auditory*, you might find it helpful to listen to the Bible being read aloud while you follow along in your Bible. Or you might try reading the verses out loud yourself. If you are a *hands-on* type of learner, you might benefit from drawing pictures of what you have read, writing notes about your daily reading in different colors of ink, or tracing the words with your finger as you read. Understanding your learning style can be a great help with reading the Bible and retaining what you have read.

What Should I Read?

There are several ways to approach Bible reading. Some people like to follow a daily reading plan that goes through the entire Bible in a certain amount of time. Others like to read the Bible chronologically (in the order events occurred). Yet others like to follow a topical study by choosing a topic and then reading all the Scriptures about that subject. You might try one Bible reading plan for a while, and if that does not work, try another plan.



Find the plan that works for you, a plan that you will continue to use. If you have never read the Bible, a great place to start would be the Gospels. These four books explain the plan of salvation and the price God's Son paid for our sins. Also, beginning with the more difficult books, such as Leviticus or Numbers, might discourage you. Again, talk to the Author of this awesome Book before you read. Only He knows exactly the Bible reading that will help you today.

How Often and When Should I Read the Bible?

There are many people who claim to be Christians, yet they rarely read their Bibles, perhaps only when attending church services. Is that enough? Would a physical meal once or twice a week keep you from starving? How little of God's Word can you read before you die spiritually? It would be better to ask yourself, How often do I need spiritual direction for my life and encouragement? The Christian needs God's help every day to live a life pleasing to God. This comes

through *daily* Bible reading. When is the best time to read the Bible? David wrote in Psalm 63:1 that he sought God "early." If God's Word is providing strength, encouragement, and direction for your day, doesn't it make sense to read it "early" in your day? (It is also wise to seek God's will "early" in your life; Ecclesiastes 12:1.)

Have you considered reading your Bible more often than once per day? Try to think of other times you could read a verse or two during the day. With today's technology, access to the Bible is often quick and easy. There are many Bible apps that you can download to your electronic device. Also, it might be helpful to have several Bibles stored in different places, such as your purse or your car or even in several rooms in your house. Put a Bible on the table beside your bed or on the kitchen table to read after meals with the family. There will be times in your life when you are waiting (in a doctor's office, in traffic, in an airport). During those times, why not consider opening God's Word and reading a few verses?



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **Why is Bible reading vital for the Christian?**
- ◆ **How will storing God's Word in your heart help you?**
- ◆ **How often should you read your Bible?**
- ◆ **When is the best time of the day to read your Bible?**
- ◆ **How could you add new opportunities to read the Bible throughout your day?**

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLE STUDY

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Bible study brings understanding (Proverbs 2:1-6; 2 Timothy 3:14-17).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** A lack of knowledge brings spiritual destruction (Hosea 4:6; Isaiah 5:13).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Ask God what you should study (Matthew 7:7-8; James 1:5).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God wants us to study His Word (Isaiah 34:16; Ezra 7:10; Acts 17:11).
- ❑ **Friday:** Study so that you will know what you believe (2 Timothy 1:12; John 20:30-31).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Study so that you will be ready to give an answer (1 Peter 3:15).

Is Studying the Bible Different From Reading the Bible?

In the previous lesson, we learned that daily Bible reading is vital for the Christian. Is Bible study the same as daily Bible reading or is it something different? Some people have made this comparison: Bible reading is like looking for gold on the ground or perhaps in a stream. You will find some gold, but the "mother lode" (abundance of gold) is found by digging deep. Daily

Bible reading will give you spiritual strength and guidance, but the deep truths that God wants to share with you are found through Bible study. Both are necessary if you want to continue to grow spiritually.

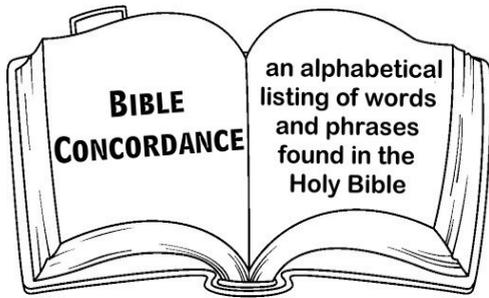
How is Bible study different from Bible reading? By looking at the definition of the word "study," you can see that it is much more than just reading a verse or a chapter. Just as digging in the earth for gold requires much more time and effort than just bending over and picking up gold, so Bible study will require more time and effort than your daily Bible reading. It is important you realize that both are necessary, and one does not replace the other.

Definition of "study":
The pursuit of knowledge, as by reading, observation, or research. To read carefully; to memorize; to give careful thought to; to examine closely.

Preparations for Bible Study

If you were to search for gold, what would you need? Could you dig through the dirt with just your hands or would you need tools? It is the same as studying the Bible. Before beginning a Bible study, consider gathering some tools that will help you. First, you need your Bible. Next, get a notebook and a pencil or pen to write what you are studying. Does your Bible have a concordance? Many Bibles have a concordance in the back. This is a great study tool that will help you look up words and phrases in the Bible. Also, a dictionary is useful for looking up the definitions of words.

After gathering the basic tools, the next question is what to study and how to study. There are many different ways to study the Bible. You might try one approach, and if that does not work, try another. Or change study styles to help you learn in different ways. Most important, do not feel that you have to study the Bible like other Christians. God will help you to find the way that is best for you.



How to Know What to Study

There are hundreds of subjects you could study in the Bible. How do you know which one to choose? Again, it is similar to mining for gold. Do you just begin digging anywhere? Or would it be wise to speak to a geologist (someone who studies what the Earth is made of and how it was formed)? Before beginning a Bible study, wouldn't it be best to speak to the One who knows exactly what the Bible contains (the Author)? Ask Him to guide you in finding the right Bible study for you.

Another tip when searching for gold is to talk to people who have found gold. How did they know where to look? How did they go about digging out the gold? What were their favorite tools? God has placed spiritual people in your life who know how to search out the deep treasures of God's Word. Ask them to share the way they study the Bible, how they know what topics to study, and what their favorite Bible study tools are.

Bible Study Ideas

TOPICAL STUDY: this is a Bible study of the Scriptures on a specific subject. You might look in your concordance to find all the Scriptures listed about a topic, such as *hope* or *faith*. Write the Scriptures out in your notebook. What do these Scriptures mean to you? Write your thoughts about these verses. Ask God to show you how to apply these verses to your own life. This is called *application*. There are some study Bibles that have an alphabetical list of topics that you might find helpful.

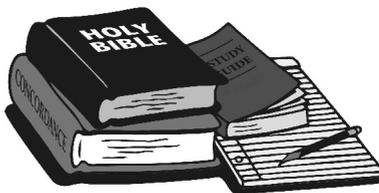
BIBLE CHARACTER STUDY: this is a Bible study of one specific person in the Bible. Once you have decided which Bible character to study, look for all the Scriptures that mention your Bible character. (An unabridged Bible concordance can be helpful. Also, some study Bibles have a list of character studies.) What can you learn from this person's life? What were the attitudes and actions concerning God and His will for his or her life? How did he or she help others to know about God (or hinder others)? Write out the Scriptures about this Bible character, and also write anything you have learned from this study.

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY: this is a study of one book of the Bible. It will help your understanding of the verses written in a book if you know who wrote the book, when it was written, and the circumstances occurring when the book was written. Look at the beginning of the book you have chosen. Some Bibles will tell you who possibly wrote that book. Look up other verses in the Bible about that author. Some study Bibles have an analysis of each book of the Bible. (An *analysis* is an explanation of the nature and meaning of something.) Some Bibles have notes in the margin or above each chapter to help you understand what the verses are about. You might find other ways to study the background of why and when that book was written. Then, as you read the chapters and verses of that book, you will have a new appreciation for it. Write out the Scriptures you are reading and what you have learned.

QUESTIONS: this is a study of your questions. It might be helpful to write the questions that come to you during the preaching or during Sunday school or while doing another Bible study. Are there things about God, the church, or even yourself that you do not understand? Questions such as, Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Does God really care about me? Use one of these questions as your next Bible study. Look up one or two keywords in your concordance. For instance, you might look up the words *care* or *value* and find that God "careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7) so much that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30). Write out the Scriptures and what you have learned in your notebook.

The Importance of Bible Study

There will be times in your life when you will need to know what God's Word says and what it means. Others might question you concerning what you believe. Do you *know* what you believe? Knowledge comes from studying your Bible. Understanding comes from letting God talk to you about what you have read. Then, when someone asks you what you believe or why you believe it, you will "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ Is Bible study the same as Bible reading? Why or why not?
- ◆ What are some of the tools you might need for Bible study?
- ◆ What are some topics you could study?

CHAPTER THREE

PRAYER

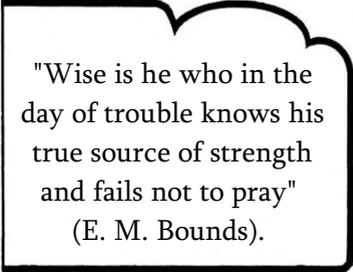
DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Continual prayer is necessary (James 5:16; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Ask for wisdom and direction from God (Jeremiah 10:23; Psalm 25:4-5; James 1:5-8).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God will hear you when you pray (Psalm 17:6; Psalm 77:1; Isaiah 38:5).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Sin is a barrier to God hearing your prayers (Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 59:2).
- ❑ **Friday:** A story of two different prayers (Luke 18:9-14).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Believe when you pray (Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:14-15).

Prayer Is the Breath of the Soul

Take a deep breath and then let it out. How does that feel? How long can you hold your breath? How do you feel afterwards? Although there are divers who have held their breath for many minutes, the average person can only hold his or her breath for about 30 seconds. Consider how vital breath is to your body and how often you need it. It has been said that prayer is the breath of the soul. Just as you need *breath* to stay alive physically, you also need *prayer* to stay alive spiritually. Just as a breath once in a while is not enough for the physical body, a prayer once in a while will not keep you alive spiritually either.

What Is Prayer?



"Wise is he who in the day of trouble knows his true source of strength and fails not to pray"
(E. M. Bounds).

Do you know what the key is to every good relationship? It is communication. When there is little or no communication, relationships will suffer. For instance, would it be a problem if your mother or father or spouse never talked to you? If they had expectations concerning you but never told you what they

were? What if you had a job where your employer never communicated with you? Would it be stressful not knowing what was expected out of you? Many books are written about the subject of communication—how important it is and how to communicate better with others. Communication is giving information about something to someone else. Good communication is sharing thoughts, ideas, and problems important to you with someone you believe will understand and be able to help you.

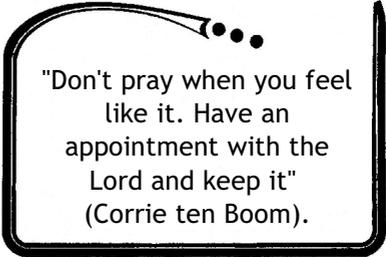
Prayer is communication with God. It is telling Him about the problems, burdens, and thoughts that are very important to you. It is also letting Him know how thankful you are for what He has done for you. Just as a relationship with your spouse, parents, friends, employers, etc. requires good communication, communication with God is necessary. Prayer is the communication cable that connects you and God.

Why Should I Pray?

One excuse too many people give for not praying is that they do not have enough time. Martin Luther once said: "I have a busy day and much to do tomorrow. I must get up three hours earlier and spend it in prayer." He did not let the busyness of his day prevent him from prayer, but it made him *more* aware of his need to talk to God first. Every day brings challenges, problems, decisions, or trials. It does not matter whether you are rich or poor, sick or healthy, young or old, according to Job 14:1, life is "full of trouble." You will need help, guidance, and direction. Jeremiah 10:23 tells us that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." If you cannot determine which way to go and which decisions to make, you must talk to the One who is "mighty in strength and wisdom" (Job 36:5). Only He has all the right answers.

When Should I Pray?

Too many Christians consider prayer as something on their daily "to-do" list. They believe it is necessary, but it becomes more of a chore than a privilege. Often they remember it right before falling asleep at night, and so a quick prayer is offered up to make the conscience feel better. Is that the best time to talk to God? How strong do



"Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it" (Corrie ten Boom).

you think a marriage would be if the only communication was a few words before the husband and wife fell asleep? God deserves our very best. When are you at your best? Some people wake up slowly. Perhaps immediately after getting out of bed is not the best time for anything other than a short prayer. Likewise, some people are too sleepy right before going to bed to pray a lengthy prayer. Ask God to help you know when is the best time of the day for you to talk to Him.

Are you limited to praying only once a day? What kind of relationship would you have with God if you spoke to Him *more* than once per day? Daniel could go through a terrible trial of being thrown into a den of lions. His habit of prayer three times every day (which he established long before this) gave him the spiritual strength he needed. Think of how many times you talk to God every day. Do you pray before every meal? Do you say a prayer before you leave home, asking for protection and help? Do you talk to God before going to bed at night? Do you have a time of more lengthy prayer, a time when you are alone and can tell God all the burdens and concerns you have? Do you ever say quick prayers of thanksgiving? Think of ways you can add extra prayer time in your day. Just as your relationships with family and friends improve with regular communication, so will your relationship with God deepen and improve as you talk to Him more often.

First Thessalonians 5:17 says to "Pray without ceasing." Is that possible? Does that mean you should always be on your knees, praying out loud to God? No. God knows you have many other responsibilities. To "Pray without ceasing" is to live in a way that you are constantly aware of His presence. Prayer should be your first response to every difficult situation.

How Should I Pray?



Have you ever heard someone pray a beautiful prayer and thought, "I cannot pray like that; I shouldn't even try"? Jesus told a story about two different prayers in Luke 18:9-14. The first prayer was much lengthier than the second (which was only seven words). Yet, it was the second prayer that touched God's heart. Why? The first man had pride in his heart, but the second man was humble. Do not be concerned when you cannot pray the same way as someone else. God wants to hear from you. Your unique personality will make your prayer your own. Speak to God from your heart—honestly, humbly, and sincerely—and He will

hear you.

In Sunday school, teachers often tell the children to bow their heads, fold their hands, and close their eyes. Why is this important? It teaches children the importance of reverence during prayer. Our attitude before and during prayer will determine whether God hears our prayers. Before praying, were you thinking, saying, or looking at something God would not approve of? Too often people have allowed ungodly things into their lives and then think they can pray over top of all of that. If you have allowed sin into your life, Isaiah 59:2 warns that "your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

What is your attitude during prayer? Do you realize you are in the presence of the One who created the universe, the One who knows everything and can do anything? As you learn more about who God truly is and what He can do, your prayers should be more reverent, more serious, and more thankful. Also, as you begin to understand who God is, your faith will increase, and you will pray with "confidence [knowing] . . . if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

A Few Prayer Tools

- 1. KEEP A PRAYER JOURNAL**
 - write down prayer burdens
 - write down answers to prayers
- 2. PRAY WITH THANKSGIVING**
 - begin prayers with thanks
 - sets the tone of your prayers
- 3. READ ENCOURAGING BOOKS ABOUT PRAYER**
 - read books about answered prayers
- 4. SEARCH FOR ANSWERED PRAYERS IN THE BIBLE**
 - this will build your personal faith
- 5. TALK TO GOD ANYTIME**
 - do not limit your conversation to prayer time only
 - make prayer as easy and necessary as breathing
- 6. BE SURE YOU ARE PRAYING IN GOD'S WILL**
 - Bible study and prayer work together
 - Read 1 John 5:14



CHAPTER FOUR

MEDITATION

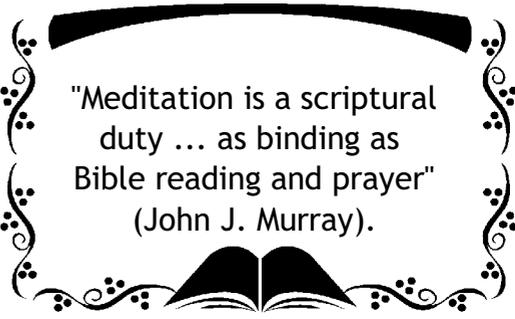
DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Meditation is commanded in the Bible (Joshua 1:8-9; 1 Timothy 4:12-16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The Bible gives examples of people who meditated (Genesis 24:63; Psalm 143:4-6).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Meditation takes place in the heart (Psalm 19:14; Psalm 49:3).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Stillness is necessary for meditation (Psalm 4:4; Psalm 46:10).
- ❑ **Friday:** The Bible tells us what we should meditate on (Psalm 1:2; Psalm 63:6; Psalm 77:12; Psalm 119:15).
- ❑ **Saturday:** What you meditate on determines your words and actions (Luke 6:45; Acts 4:13).

What Does the Bible Say About Meditation?

After Bible reading, Bible study, and prayer, there is another tool every Christian should have in his or her toolbox—it is called *meditation*. Although very important, most Christians rarely use this tool. Before you can use this tool, it is important to learn more about it. What is meditation? Does God's Word tell us to meditate? How does one meditate? These questions can be answered by looking into the Bible.

If you were to ask people what meditation is, you might get a variety of answers. To the Buddhist (one who follows the teachings of Buddha), meditation is a means of transforming the mind. Other definitions of meditation are: (1) a ceasing of the thought process; (2) an emptying of the mind; and (3) an awareness of your surroundings. Are these what God had in mind when He commanded Joshua to "meditate . . . day and night" (Joshua 1:8)? By looking at Scriptures that speak about meditating and meditation, it will become clear exactly what God



"Meditation is a scriptural
duty ... as binding as
Bible reading and prayer"
(John J. Murray).

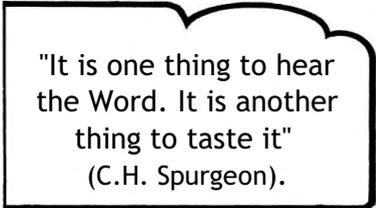
wants you to do. Do not allow the opinions and definitions of people and other religions confuse you!

If you were to search the Bible for Scriptures containing the word *meditate*, you would learn that Isaac went to "meditate in the field" while waiting to meet his bride Rebekah (Genesis 24:63). You would find the instructions God gave to Joshua after Moses' death included the command to "meditate [on the book of the law] day and night" (Joshua 1:8). In Psalm 63:6 you can read that David found it important to meditate about God in the middle of the night (perhaps when he could not sleep). We find another example, in the New Testament, in Paul's letter to the young pastor Timothy. The entire chapter is full of good advice, and Paul said in the next-to-last verse, "Meditate upon these things" (1 Timothy 4:15). By reading these different examples, it becomes apparent that meditation is important!

What Is Meditation and What Should I Meditate On?

The best source to understand the definition of *meditation* is not a dictionary or even an encyclopedia. Although these are often good resources, the best place to start is with your Bible. Psalm 19:14 and Psalm 49:3 both tell us that meditation takes place in your heart. This is not your literal heart, which pumps blood throughout your body. If you were to look up the word *heart* in a Bible concordance, you would find that this is the place where thoughts, emotions, memories, desires, and reflection take place. The heart is where we keep our secrets (Psalm 44:21), and Proverbs 4:23 warns us to guard our heart and keep it pure.

Since, according to the Bible, meditation takes place in your heart (or thoughts), what does God want you to be thinking on? Again, we must let God's Word be our guide. By looking up Scripture references containing the word *meditate*, you will find what people in the Bible meditated on: *the book of the law, thy precepts, thy works, thy word, thee, and thy statues*. (The words *law, precepts, and statues* all speak of God's commandments, which are found in God's Word.)



"It is one thing to hear the Word. It is another thing to taste it"
(C.H. Spurgeon).

What did people in the Bible meditate on (or think about)? God's words or commandments (Scriptures), God's works (the things that God has done), and on God Himself (who God is). These are our examples of what we should meditate on.

How Should I Meditate?

Meditation has often been compared to a cow chewing her cud. For proper digestion, a cow must chew her food twice. Almost one-third of every day is spent chewing her cud. This ensures that the cow gets all the nutrients from the food she has eaten. When you first hear or read Scriptures, you cannot fully take in all the help and encouragement those Scriptures can give. By bringing them to your memory and reflecting on them later, you will have a deeper understanding of what those verses are about. However, it is difficult to remember something that you read or heard sometime ago. Therefore, memorizing Bible verses is important! When you have memorized a Scripture, you can more easily reflect or think on it later.

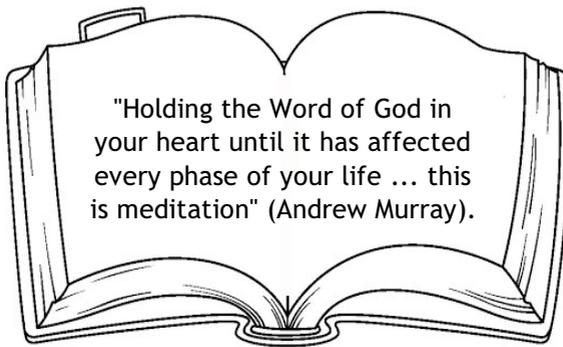
How does one memorize Bible verses? How did you memorize multiplication facts or history dates for tests in school? Depending on your learning style, different methods might work better than others. Some ways to memorize Scripture include: write it down, say it aloud over and over, highlight important words within the verse, write it down from memory, set the verse to music, create word associations, and think of the story behind the verse. Many people keep a notebook where they write down the verses they are working to memorize. Find a method that works for you. It is important that you store up God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).

When Should I Meditate?

Finding quiet time can seem impossible in the busyness of our culture. There is continually something to see, listen to, or watch. You will never *find* time to meditate; you must *make* time. But when is the best time? David wrote that he meditated at night while lying on his bed. This might have been when he was fleeing from King Saul, and his only quiet time was at night before falling asleep. When God was instructing Joshua, He told him to meditate "day and night" (continually, or as often as possible). Proverbs 23:7 tells us we are what we think. The amount of time you give to meditating on God and His Word will become obvious to others. What is in your heart (mind) will come out through your words and actions (Luke 6:45). Your friends and family can tell when you have spent time meditating on the good things of God (Acts 4:13).

Meditation will require unplugging from things that interfere, things such as, music, electronics, books, and technology. Psalm 46:10 and Psalm 37:7 (Amplified Bible) talks about the importance of becoming "still." What does that mean?

Do you literally need to stand still? No. You can meditate while driving, while taking a walk, while riding in a car or on the school bus, or even while doing chores. The stillness required is within one's soul (or mind). Psalm 4:4 says to "commune [think] with your own heart . . . and be still." To be still is to be quiet, to stop all the noise of everyday life in your mind (thoughts about what you need to do or of something that bothers you). It is removing everything from your mind that is not about God, making room for the meditations that are "acceptable" in God's sight (Psalm 19:14).



The Five W's

Memorize a Scripture, and then ask yourself five questions about the content.

EXAMPLE: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Who was He weeping over?

Why did He weep?

What happened before He wept and after?

Where was He when He wept?

When did this happen?

Emphasize Each Word

Memorize a Scripture, and then emphasize each word separately. Does that give new meaning to the verse?

EXAMPLE: "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

"**FOR** God so loved the world."

"For **GOD** so loved the world."

"For God **SO** loved the world."

"For God so **LOVED** the world."

"For God so loved **THE** world."

"For God so loved the **WORLD**."

Make It Personal

Replace pronouns in the promises of the Bible with your own name. Does this make the verse more real to you?

EXAMPLES:

"Yea, though _____ walk through the valley of the shadow of death, _____ will fear no evil: for thou art with _____; thy rod and thy staff they comfort _____" (Psalm 23:4).

"But _____ [is] poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon _____: thou art _____ help and _____ deliverer" (Psalm 40:17).

CHAPTER FIVE

FASTING

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Old Testament stories about fasting (Jonah 3:1-5; Esther 4:1-3, 15-16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** New Testament stories about fasting (Matthew 4:1-11; Acts 10:30-35, 48).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Do not fast as the hypocrites and the Pharisees (Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:9-14).
- ❑ **Thursday:** People who fasted with the wrong motives and attitudes (Isaiah 58:1-5; Jeremiah 14:10-12).
- ❑ **Friday:** Results of fasting in the Old Testament (Jonah 3:10; Esther 8:9-17).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Fasting is necessary (Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 5:35; Matthew 6:16-18).

The tool of fasting should be in the Christian's toolbox. Many Christians do not realize what Biblical fasting is, the purpose of fasting, and the results of fasting. When you hear the word *fasting*, you might think of a doctor's orders before an important medical test or you might have heard of someone fasting to make a political statement (sometimes called a "hunger strike"). You might have heard about fasting being frequently practiced by other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. With so many examples of fasting, it might be confusing what the Christian's tool of fasting should look like. That is why you must consult the Christian's guidebook—the Bible.

What Is Fasting According to the Bible?

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are many stories of how God's people fasted, why they fasted, and how their prayers were answered because of their fasting. Here are some examples: Moses before receiving the Ten Commandments, Elijah while fleeing Queen Jezebel, Esther when faced with the extermination of her people, and Jesus before being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. By reading these stories, you will learn that fasting was: (1) not eating any food; (2) only eating certain foods; or (3) not eating and drinking for a set period of time.

There are Scripture verses that describe fasting as to "afflict your souls" (Leviticus 16:29). Fasting is a time of self denial. By thinking of yourself less, you will be able to concentrate on spiritual things. What should you be doing while you are fasting? If you look at the Bible examples, you will see that fasting was always done with prayer. There also must be a purpose (reason) for your fast. Is there a need in your life? Do you have friends or relatives who need to be saved? Are there spiritual burdens in your family or congregation? Are you praying for someone who is sick? Most important, what is the burden God wants you to fast and pray about ("the fast that I have chosen"; Isaiah 58:6)?



**Fastings and vigils without
a special object in view
are time run to waste
(David Livingstone).**

What Is the Purpose of Fasting?

Have you ever been without food for several hours? How did that feel? It is not long until your body reminds you it is time to eat. Eating is a normal part of your day. When you miss a meal or two, something does not feel right. Since the body needs food to survive, why should you fast? Why would God ask His people to do something that makes their bodies feel weak and hungry? Does God want us to suffer?

In Luke 8:14 Jesus warned the "pleasures of this life" would prevent God's Word from lodging in people's hearts. What are some "pleasures" that might hinder someone from living for God as one should? Jesus described some of these "pleasures" when He spoke about the time before the Flood. Things like "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Matthew 24:38) caused people to fail to realize the seriousness of what was about to happen. Does that mean that those things are sinful? Of course not! But your natural desires (for the "pleasures of life") can work against your spiritual desires (for the things of God), according to Galatians 5:17. Continually having fun and enjoying the good things of life can hinder the Christian's spiritual growth. That is why Ecclesiastes 7:2 tells us, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting"

**"Fasting is an (admirable) practice
and we have reason to lament
that it is generally neglected
among Christians"
(Matthew Henry).**

There needs to be times of soberness, times of denying yourself the things that make you feel good, things that cause you to forget your spiritual needs (and the spiritual needs of others). Fasting helps you to deny yourself and focus on God.

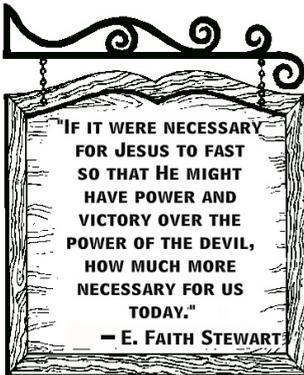
Fasting With the Right Motive and Attitude

When Jesus spoke about fasting, He said not to fast as the hypocrites (Matthew 6:16). They made sure that everyone who saw them knew that they were fasting. Their hair was a mess, they put on old clothes, and they put ashes on their faces. They fasted with the wrong motive. Some people have used spiritual fasting to lose weight or hoping to become more healthy. Other people have fasted so that people might think well of them. Fasting should not be used to make you thinner or to make you feel proud. Again, these are the wrong motives for fasting. Before fasting, ask yourself these questions: Why am I fasting? What is my motive (or reason) for fasting? Do I fast because others expect it of me or to draw closer to God?

The Pharisee in Luke 18:12 boasted that he fasted "twice in the week." He was fasting with an attitude of pride. It was the humble publican who was called "justified," or made righteous (Luke 18:14). Isaiah, Chapter 58, tells of people who fasted with selfish attitudes: (1) they enjoyed fasting because they did not have to work (Leviticus 16:29), and (2) they fasted for "strife and debate" (a time of quarreling). God was not pleased with people who fasted with the wrong attitude. What should your attitude be? Fasting should be done unselfishly, humbly, and seriously. It is also a good time to ask God to search your life for any hindrances to your prayers.

To be a real blessing, fasting must be systematic (regular). If we only fast when we feel like it, it will not happen."

--Emerson A. Wilson



Who Should Fast?

When Jesus talked about fasting in Matthew 6:16, He said, "When you fast . . ." Then, Matthew 17:21 shows us that some things are so serious that we must fast and pray. The Apostle Paul said that he fasted "often" (2 Corinthians 11:27). Before being tempted, Jesus found it necessary to fast (Matthew 4:2). Before sending Saul and Barnabas to do missionary work, the church "fasted and prayed" (Acts 13:3). We can find many more examples of fasting in the Bible. If God's people in Bible times found fasting to be necessary, if God's own Son found it necessary to fast, shouldn't we give serious

consideration to fasting as well?

Before considering fasting, make sure you do not have a physical condition which would prevent you from fasting. Second, ask God to give you direction concerning fasting. What does He want you to pray and fast for? Fasting might seem overwhelming, but could you fast for one meal or even one snack? During this time of fasting, be sure to add extra prayer time. Whenever you feel hunger pangs, let that be a reminder to talk to God concerning the burden you are fasting about. Are there any other "pleasures of life" you could fast from during this time? Is there anything that is unnecessary and distracts you from your purpose of prayer and fasting? Could you put away your electronics, books, games, and videos while you are fasting? "The primary purpose of fasting is to center ourselves on God, to worship Him, and to listen to Him" (John Wesley).

Charles Finney was one of the most effective evangelists in America's history. A tremendous anointing of power and conviction rested on his preaching. He reported leading more than five hundred thousand new converts to the Lord in an eight-week period during the great New York revival of 1857. Finney wrote that when the power of his preaching seemed to diminish, he would spend several days in prayer and fasting until the spirit of prayer returned and his preaching was again anointed with power. He acknowledged that the power on his preaching was connected to regular times of prayer with fasting.



(Growing in Prayer: A Real-Life Guide to Talking With God)

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

Charles Finney and a group of Christians fasted and prayed for over six years before the Second Great Awakening began.



John Knox prayed and fasted until the wicked Mary, Queen of Scots, was driven into exile. She said she feared no weapon like she feared John Knox's prayers.

THE GREAT WELSH REVIVAL

It is said that Evan Roberts and his group of young saints fasted and prayed for five years. God moved His hand over Wales, and the Great Welsh Revival took place.



THE GREAT REFORMATION

Martin Luther fasted for days while translating the Bible. This has been considered the greatest translation of the Bible into the German language.



WORSHIP

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** You were created to worship God (Psalm 147:11; Psalm 148:5; Colossians 1:16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God is looking for true worshipers (Exodus 34:14; Matthew 4:10; John 9:31).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God is worthy of your worship (Revelation 4:11; Revelation 5:9-12).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Worship is not limited to a location (John 4:7-24).
- ❑ **Friday:** True worship must begin in your heart (Psalm 9:1; Psalm 19:14; Isaiah 29:13).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Family worship is in God's plan (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:6-8; Ephesians 6:4).



What are you here for? For what purpose were you created? Just as a piano was created to be played or a plane was designed to fly, you also were made for a specific purpose. Revelation 4:11 says you were created for God's pleasure. Psalm 147:11 (AMP) tells us that God takes pleasure in "those who fear and worship Him." Jesus said in Matthew 4:10, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." God placed within everyone the need to worship. The question is not whether one is a worshiper, but are you a *true* worshiper? George Barna, a researcher studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans, said: "Virtually every church in the nation provides opportunities for worship, yet, we rarely really worship God. Most Christians admit they seldom feel like they have connected with Him." Could it be that most Christians do not understand what worship truly is?

What Is True Worship?

The word *worship* is heard often—worship service, praise and worship music, worship director, house of worship, etc. But what does *worship* actually mean? Is it something that one attends, a position in a local congregation, or a type of music? Or is it more than that? There are many verses in the Bible that

tell us worship is important. God is seeking "true worshippers" (John 4:23), but many Christians believe that they worship God if they attend weekly church services, enjoy the singing, and hear a well-preached message. Is that God's definition of worship? The best place to find the answer to this question is in the Bible.

Worship in the Old Testament usually involved people bowing down, falling down, or lying prostrate (face down) on the ground in an attitude of reverence, honor, and submission. What was done physically in the Old Testament is a good portrayal of what should happen in the Christian's heart and life today. One of the New Testament definitions of *worship* is "to kiss the hand" (as a dog lovingly licks his master's hand or as a subject kisses his king's feet). This is not something you do physically, but it shows the loving, reverent, and humble attitude you have toward God. The word *worship* comes from the old English word "worthship," which means worthy of worship. To truly worship God, you need to understand that He is worthy (deserving) of your worship. This comes through reading and studying your Bible, through hearing Sunday school lessons and preached messages, and by spending time in prayer.

True worship begins with an attitude of the heart. You cannot worship God if you do not believe He is worthy. Once you develop an attitude of great respect and reverence for God, only then can true worship begin. Worship is not something that only takes place in your heart. You will begin to show the fruits (results) of your heart attitude through "acts of worship." (Some examples of "acts of worship" include singing, testifying, and praying.) Just as loving God involves your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27), true worship is revealed through your attitude, words, and actions. This is how you show others that God is "worthy . . . to receive glory and honour" (Revelation 4:11).

Where Do I Worship?

The Samaritan woman at the well told Jesus that although the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem, the Samaritans "worshipped in this mountain [Mount Gerizim]" (John 4:20). Jesus let her know that soon worshipping would not be limited to a location. Yet today, many Christians believe that worship only occurs in a church service. The truth is that you can worship God anywhere and anytime, not just while attending church services. In the Old Testament, worship took place in the tabernacle or the temple. That was where God dwelled. Now, God's Spirit lives within the heart of everyone who has confessed, repented, and forsaken his or her sins. The Christian's body is God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). That is what Jesus meant when He said "the true worshippers shall worship the Father

in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23), not only in a temple or a church building. True worship that begins in your heart should take place privately (personal devotions), with your family (family devotions), and publicly (church services).

How Do I Worship?

Worship includes every part of you. You can worship God as you listen (to the spoken Word, the preached Word, or others praising God through song or testimony). You can worship God when you speak (pray or testify or sing). You also can worship God with your body ("acts of worship," or service to God). All three ways of worship are important! All three can take place in times of private worship, family worship, and public worship.

PRIVATE WORSHIP: to be a true worshiper, you must set aside a time daily to worship God through Bible reading, prayer, and meditation. If you do not worship God in private, you have not developed the attitude of worship. Family worship and public worship are dependent on how often and serious you are about your private devotions. What are other ways to worship God during your private times? It is good to include thanksgiving and praise to God for what He has done for you. You might say it aloud in your prayers or you might write it down in a journal. Singing a song that tells of God's goodness is another way you can worship God.

FAMILY WORSHIP: the Bible says family worship is important (Deuteronomy 6:6-8). Yet, many do not know what it is or why it is important. Family worship is a time of learning (Bible stories, Scriptures, moral lessons), a time of prayer (teaching through example and learning through practice), and a time to tell the family about answers to prayers (praise through testimonies). "In these evil times, hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no family worship, no restraint upon growing sons, and no wholesome instruction or discipline. How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when His own disciples do not teach His Gospel to their own children?" (Source unknown).

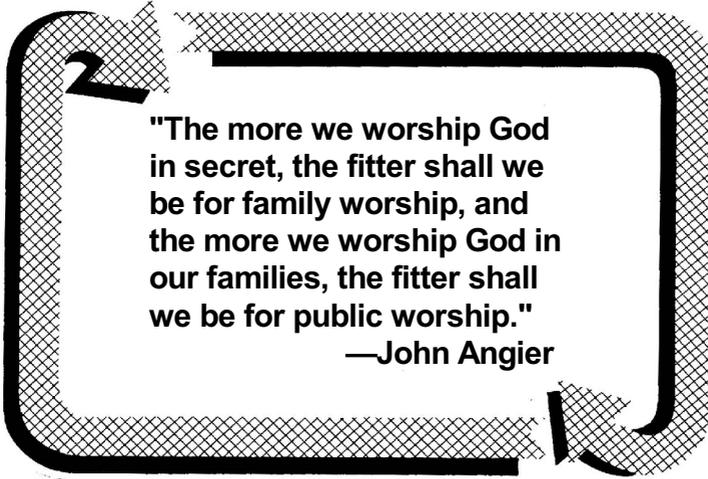
PUBLIC WORSHIP: this is sometimes called "congregational worship" or "corporate worship." Public worship is not entertainment, nor is it a time to focus on yourself or others. It is a time when God's people meet together and worship God through prayer, praise, songs, and the Word. It is a time to learn more about who God is (through preaching and teaching) and to listen to what God has done for others (through songs and testimonies).

It is also a time when you are to praise God from your own heart. This might be



done through a prayer, a song, a testimony, or by raising your hand in praise. You might cry as you think of how good God is. Regardless of how you express praise, the focus is always on God.

Ask yourself these questions: "Do I believe God is worthy of worship? What is my attitude of heart concerning God? Have I have limited my worship to church services only? Does my family have family worship, and if not, how could we start it? Do I worship God during my personal devotions?" Ask God to help you begin to truly worship Him.



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What was bowing down to worship in the Old Testament a portrayal of in the Christian's worship today?
- ◆ Where does true worship begin?
- ◆ How do you come to understand that God is worthy of worship?
- ◆ In Exodus 19:10-11 Israel made preparations for worshipping God. What are some ways that you can prepare your heart for worship (private and public)? (Read Ecclesiastes 5:1; Psalm 122:1; Proverbs 4:23.)

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERVICE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** A few things public worship service includes (Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 4:16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Public worship services are times of encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Serving God is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Jesus taught how to serve (Philippians 2:4-7; Mark 10:45).
- ❑ **Friday:** God wants you to witness through serving others (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Some examples of serving (Mark 9:41; Matthew 25:35-36; James 1:27).

What is service to God? Often a gathering of God's people for worship is called a "church service" or a "worship service." What does that mean? Is our service to God limited to public worship times only? What service does God expect from a child of God? Before you can work for God, you must have a worshiping heart. "God wants worshipers before workers" (A. W. Tozer). People who have a worshiping heart have spent much time in prayer and Bible reading. They will also meet with other Christians to worship God publicly in a worship service.

Worship Service

Why is the word *service* used when describing a time of public worship? If you have a heart full of love and praise to God, you will want to serve Him (the act of serving is defined as "a service"). Have you ever heard the phrase "I was glad to be of service"? That is how the Christian feels toward God. God gave His only Son to die for the sins of the entire world. Because of this sacrifice, you can have God's Spirit living within your heart. You can talk to God and hear Him talking to you. This is a wonderful privilege! As your understanding and appreciation of God and what He has done



grows, so your desire to serve Him will grow.

God's Word lets us know what a worship service will include: prayer (1 Corinthians 14:15-16), singing (Ephesians 5:19), reading God's Word (Colossians 4:16), preaching or teaching (Acts 20:7), giving (1 Corinthians 16:2), and partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). What is the purpose of these acts of worship? Are they to bring applause to the singers, praise to the preacher, or to increase the congregation's bank account? Although it is good to offer words of thanks to people who serve during a church service and giving is necessary, what is the purpose of God's people (the church) gathering together for a worship service?

When warning God's people of "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," Hebrews 10:25 tells us why worship services are important: "exhorting one another." The word *exhort* means "to encourage and strengthen, to comfort, to instruct and teach." First Thessalonians 5:11 describes it to "edify one another." The word *edify* means "to build up, to give one strength and courage." What are some ways God's people can *exhort* and *edify*? Colossians 3:16 describes it as "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Perhaps you might sing in a choir or in a small group. When you worship God through song, you can also encourage someone who is going through a difficult time. This is giving service to God.

Another way to encourage others is by giving a testimony of praise, telling people what God has done for you. Hebrews 2:12 says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Many times a testimony will encourage God's people to remember and praise God for their own answers to prayer. Exhorting through instructing or teaching happens during teaching lessons or through a preached message. God needs "pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying" of God's people (Ephesians 4:11-12). When ministers and teachers give understanding to others concerning what the Bible says, they are giving service to God. These are just a few examples of the many ways God's people serve Him during the worship service.

Your Reasonable Service

Is service limited to times of public worship only? In the Old Testament, worship included offering sacrifices to God (a *sacrifice* is giving up something highly valued for something else considered having a greater value). Because Jesus became the "one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Hebrews 10:12), God no long-

er requires a sacrifice of animals from His people. However, there is another kind of sacrifice that He desires. The sacrificed animals in the Old Testament were dead, but now God wants "a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). What is this sacrifice? This verse also tells you to "present your *bodies*." God wants all of you—your life, your desires, your worship, your abilities—to be given to Him. A "living sacrifice" that is "acceptable unto God" is understanding that you are God's property. "Ye are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19). You are God's servant. You no longer live your life for yourself (selfishly), doing what you want to do, but when you are a "living sacrifice," you live to please and serve God.

What does a life of service to God look like? Will it be too hard, unenjoyable, boring, restrictive? Paul wrote that God expects "reasonable service." Too many people think God is a hard taskmaster, requiring more than they are able to give. Is that true? The word *reasonable* is defined as "of the word." Reasonable service is serving God according to His Word, the Bible. What does the Bible say about how to serve? Jesus is our example, and He "took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45) to others. He showed us what a life of service (being God's servant) looks like.

Serving Others

Worship without service is meaningless. Many times the Bible uses the words *worship* and *serve* together. Why? "No one can long worship God in spirit and in truth before the obligation to holy service becomes too strong to resist. Fellowship with God leads straight to obedience and good works" (A. W. Tozer). How do you serve or minister to others? What is God asking you to do? In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said to "teach all nations," and Acts 1:8 says to be God's "witnesses." God needs you to teach others about Him by witnessing. This is best done through service. God's people are His hands and feet ("the body of Christ"; 1 Corinthians 12:27) and are to do what Jesus would do if He were still here today.



Some examples of serving others include giving a cup of water in Jesus' name (Mark 9:41) and giving to those who are hungry, in need of clothing, or who are in prison (Matthew 25:35-36). James 1:27 reminds us to take care of the orphans and the widows. What are some ways you could minister or serve? Could you send someone a card? Could you take groceries to someone who is

going through a hard time? Could you call or text someone to let them know you are thinking of and praying for them? Could you visit someone who is sick and cannot come to worship services? Could you rake leaves or mow the yard of someone who is elderly or sick? No act of service is too small or unimportant.

There are many opportunities to witness to others by serving. The Good Samaritan in Luke, Chapter 10, stopped to help someone in need. The Bible does not say that he preached to the injured man or read the Scriptures to him, but he witnessed by serving. Jesus' words concerning this act of service were, "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37). What did the Samaritan do? He saw someone in need, and he helped him. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" A life of service is not looking for praise or recognition. We do it through love: "We love him, because he first loved us," and "he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:19, 21). Service to others comes from a heart of love for God. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **Why is the word *service* used when describing a time of public worship?**
- ◆ **What are some ways to exhort or edify others during a public worship service?**
- ◆ **What does "reasonable service" mean?**
- ◆ **What is a "living sacrifice"?**
- ◆ **What does it mean to "present your bodies"?**
- ◆ **How does a life of service bring glory to God?**

CHAPTER EIGHT

GIVING

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Everything belongs to God (James 1:17; Psalm 50:10-12; Haggai 2:8).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Abraham and Jacob paid tithes (Genesis 14:14-20; Genesis 28:11-22).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God is angry when people rob Him (Malachi 3:8-11).
- ❑ **Thursday:** What kind of giver does God desire? (2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Corinthians 13:3; Matthew 6:1).
- ❑ **Friday:** Examples of giving (Mark 12:41-44; Acts 2:45; 2 Corinthians 8:9).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God will bless you for giving (Luke 6:38; Matthew 10:42; Luke 14:12-14).

In the Bible, you can read about two large lakes in the land of Israel. The water in both lakes comes from the Jordan River. The Sea of Galilee (also called "the lake of Gennesaret") was where Peter, James, and John caught so many fish it broke their nets (Luke 5:1-6). However, in the Dead Sea you will not catch fish, for this sea has almost ten times more salt than the ocean. How can two lakes that receive their water from the same river be so different? The difference is that while water from the River Jordan flows in AND out of the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea has no outlet; thus, all that flows into the Dead Sea stays there.

The Christian's tool of giving should work as does the Sea of Galilee. Everything you have (health, family, money, possessions) comes from God. Everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). When He gives you something, you are not to keep it all to yourself. That would be like the servant who buried his master's money in the ground (Matthew 25:18). God expects you to use all that He has given you for His glory, and that includes your money. Being a good steward (manager) of money is not keeping it all for yourself. Because it is God's money (and not yours), it would be wise to see what the Bible says about giving.

Giving in the Old Testament

In Genesis, Chapter 4, Cain and Abel both made an offering to God. Cain brought "of the fruit of the ground" and Abel brought "the firstlings of his flock." They were giving back to God out of that which God had blessed them. In

Genesis, Chapter 14, Abraham successfully went to war to rescue his nephew Lot, who had been taken captive. Out of the enemies' possessions that were brought back, Abraham paid "tithes" to Melchizedek, the king of Salem. (The word *tithe* means "a tenth part.") In Genesis, Chapter 28, Jacob vowed to give God a "tenth" of all that God gave him. Later, when God gave the Law to Moses, the people were instructed to give tithes to support the Levites (Numbers 18:21), to provide for the temple and feast days (Deuteronomy 14:22-26), and to provide for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). (Commentators believe these combined tithes could have been as much as one-third of the property of the Jews.)

The tithe was not all the Jews gave. It was the minimum standard. Besides tithes, God's people gave "offerings," or sacrifices. Reasons for these offerings included: the desire to express devotion and thanksgiving to God, to confess sin, to show surrender to God, or to make a vow. Some of these offerings were animals (goats, rams, birds, lambs), and others were grains, olive oil, and drink offerings. God made it very clear what He thought of people who did not give Him tithes and offerings. Malachi 3:8 says: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."

Giving in the New Testament

Today Christians no longer bring offerings (animal sacrifices), and there is no longer a Jewish temple to give tithes to provide for. Does that mean that giving tithes and offerings no longer applies to God's people today? When Jesus spoke to His disciples, He said "when" you give, not "if" you give (Matthew 6:2). If the minimum the Old Testament Jews gave was 10 percent, how much should the Christian give today? Today we live under a "better covenant" (Hebrews 8:6). Unlike God's people in the Old Testament, today we can experience salvation, live free from sin, and have God's Spirit dwelling within us. When we have been given so much more, can we give any less than the Old Testament Jews gave? The 10 percent tithe was the minimum standard for giving in the Old Testament, and that is a good place for the Christian to start today.

Just as God had a plan to support His ministry in the Old Testament (Levites), He has a plan for supporting His ministry in the New Testament. In Galatians 6:6 we find that people were told to "communicate [share] . . . all good things" with the ministry who taught the Word to them. First Corinthians 9:14 says that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel [or 'get their maintenance']." God's plan for giving is to also provide for the poor and others in need (Romans 15:26; 1 Timothy 6:17-18).

Giving With the Right Motive and Attitude

To give with the right attitude or motive, it is good to keep three things in mind: (1) everything belongs to God; (2) you have been given "much" of God's riches; and (3) where "much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). God should be first in everything in your life, including your giving. People who have trouble giving back to God

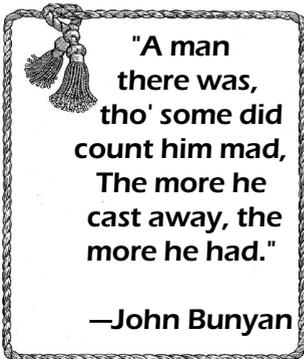
Give
from
the
Heart

often have become selfish. Some people say: "I earned this; it is mine. I should be able to do with it what I want." Who gave them the healthy body and mind to earn that money? A selfish heart is not a giving heart. Giving with the right motive is not giving "grudgingly, or of necessity [because it is expected]" (2 Corinthians 9:7), but it comes from a thankful heart, a heart that wants to serve God.

What kind of giver does God want you to be? "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). When our giving comes from a heart of thankfulness and of love (1 Corinthians 13:3), not because we want praise from others (Matthew 6:1), this is giving that pleases God. If you find it hard to give to God, it might be well to check your heart. If you do not have love and thankfulness for God's blessings, the attitude of your heart will reveal where your true treasure is (Matthew 6:21).

Some Gave All

When Jesus was in the temple, He saw a widow put "two mites" into the treasury (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus told His disciples she had given more than everyone else. How could that be? "Two mites" were the least valuable coins



available during that time. Jesus was not talking about how much money the widow gave, but that she had given ALL she had. When Stephen, Paul, Peter, James, and countless others gave their lives for the cause of Christ, how much did they give? Some people have given ALL. While giving tithes and offerings to God is important and God expects it, it is wrong to think that is enough.

How much should you give? What example should you follow? How much did Jesus (our example in all things) give? Second Corinthians 8:9

says that "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." He gave all, dying on the Cross so you can be saved and live for Him. God wants all of you—your abilities, your desires, your plans for the future, and your strength. The Christian tool of giving is not only putting money in the offering plate at church or taking food to the poor or using your talents and gifts in the work of God. Giving is to include every part of your life. God is the Owner; you are the manager. Do not be afraid to give your entire life to God. He has great plans for your future. You will never out give God (Luke 6:38).

Stories of Giving

Robert LeTourneau, an inventor of earthmoving equipment, produced nearly 70 percent of the army's earth-moving machinery during World War II. He was responsible for 299 inventions. LeTourneau gave 90 percent of his profit to God's work and kept only 10 percent for himself. He said, "I shovel it out, and God shovels it back, but God has a bigger shovel."

The widow of Zarephath put God first by giving Elijah the last of her food ("a little cake"). God blessed her with enough meal and oil to feed Elijah, her son, and herself until the famine was over (1 Kings 17:10-16).

A young boy gave all of his lunch (five loaves and two small fish) to Jesus. From this gift, five thousand were fed, and there were twelve baskets of leftovers (John 6:9-13).

William Borden, heir to the Borden family fortune, decided to be a missionary to Muslims in northern China. Although he died of spinal meningitis at the age of 25 while in training, he left one million dollars to the missions. He had written in his journal, "Say 'no' to self and 'yes' to Jesus every time." His motto was, "No reserves, no retreat, and no regrets."

TESTIMONY

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** An unchanging God wants to be found (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Jeremiah 29:13).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God has revealed Himself (Romans 1:20; Genesis 3:8; Genesis 8:15; Exodus 31:18).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God's testimony reveals His character (Deuteronomy 6:20-25; Psalm 19:7; Psalm 93:5).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Christians are living epistles, witnessing to the world of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:3; Acts 1:8).
- ❑ **Friday:** Personal testimony examples (Acts 26:1-23; Mark 5:1-20).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Do not be ashamed of being a testimony (Psalm 119:46; 2 Timothy 1:8).

Learning Who God Is

Have you ever wondered what makes Christianity different from other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam? Let us look at one significant difference by reading a few descriptions of these religions.

ISLAM: "Allah is ultimately unknowable" (*Who Is Allah in Islam?* by Abd-al-Masih). "We humans can never know Allah, because he is so far from us and so different from us" (*What Is Allah Like?* by George Housney).

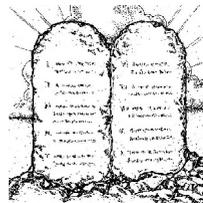
HINDUISM: Hindus worship countless gods, but everything that exists is said to be a representation of the god called Brahman. It has been said, "An attempt to understand Brahman is said to be futile, as it is beyond the reach of the senses or the mind." Others have said, "He cannot be one particular thing; he is an impersonal being" (*ReligionFacts.com*).

BUDDHISM: While Buddhists do not believe in one god, "there are all kinds of godlike creatures called *devas* populating the early scriptures of Buddhism. . . . though, believing in Buddhist deities is pointless. How do you understand them?" (*ReligionFacts.com*).

One common theme from these descriptions is that these gods cannot be understood or known. How do these gods compare to the God of Christianity? God wants you to know Him. He does not change, as do the gods of other reli-

gions. Also, God has promised if you seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him. Why does God want you to know Him? When you learn who God is and how much He loves you, you will love Him and want to live for Him. Yet, how could God explain who He is? God has revealed Himself through creation and by talking to people. Another way God has revealed Himself was by giving "two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18) to Moses. Written on these were the laws (or the testimony) of God. God's testimony, written on stone, was a witness of the nature and will of God.

What Is God's Testimony?



The word *testimony* in the Bible also means "witness," "evidence," or "bare record." If someone is called to court to testify, he or she is called a "witness." This testimony, used as evidence in the trial, is a declaration of what is known by the witness to be true or a fact. Keeping this in mind, what does the Bible mean when it talks about the "testimony of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1)? Psalm 19:7 shows that "the testimony of the LORD" is "the law of the LORD." When God gave His law to the people of Israel, it was a witness (or evidence) of the character and nature of God. It showed them what kind of God He is. For instance, He is a moral God (the Ten Commandments), He is a loving God (1 John 5:3), He is a patient God (Psalm 86:15), and He is a holy God (Leviticus 11:44; Psalm 93:5). God's words (or testimony) tells us how we are to live a life pleasing to God (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

God's law also made people aware of their need of a Savior. Galatians 3:24 says that "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." Old Testament Israel continually disobeyed God's commandments. They began to understand that they needed a Savior to save them from their sins and to help them live a holy life, pleasing to God. How did God reveal who this Savior was to be? Through His Word. Many Scriptures "testify" of Christ (John 5:39), telling us who Jesus is and what He came to do. John, Chapter 1, tells us that Jesus is the "Word" of God who was "made flesh [became a man] and dwelt among us."

A Living Testimony

When Jesus lived here on earth, He told Philip that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus was a living witness of who God is and what He desires of His people. After Jesus died on the Cross, rose from the dead,

and returned to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of everyone who is saved. Because of this, God can now write His testimony (law) on the hearts of His people. No longer was God's testimony on "tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3). James 1:21 describes it as the "engrafted word." It is implanted deep inside of you. When God's Word becomes a part of you, you will show others through your actions, attitudes, and words that God's testimony is true. Your life is a witness to the truth of God's Word.

Just as the disciples could see the Father through the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, you can let others see God in your life. When you live a holy life, when you are patient and loving, and when you live a good moral life, God's nature is being revealed to others through you. There is a song that says, "Your life's the only Bible that some people read." When people read the pages of your life, what do they see?

Your Personal Testimony

When Paul was brought before King Agrippa in Acts, Chapter 26, his personal testimony was so powerful that King Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadedst me to be a Christian" (verse 28). After Jesus cast out the unclean spirits, the Gadarene man wanted to stay with Jesus. However, Jesus told him to "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." When he told others what Jesus had done for him, "all men did marvel" (Mark 5:19-20). After Jesus healed the eyes of a blind man in Luke, Chapter 18, this man followed Jesus, giving glory to God. His testimony caused "all the people" to give "praise unto God" (verse 43).

This is why Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1:8 that "you will be My witnesses [to tell people about Me] . . . even to the ends of the earth" (AMP). The disciples did this, and in "the space of two years . . . all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Unbelievers could see God's testimony, which was written in the hearts of His disciples, through the actions and attitudes of the disciples. When the disciples told how Jesus had changed their lives, they were witnessing through their personal testimonies.

A personal testimony is powerful! There are people who may only learn about Jesus through your testimony. You might have friends and family whom no other Christian can reach. What is your personal testimony? It is the story of how Jesus has changed your life—what He did and is continuing to do for you. Regardless of how long you have been saved, you have a testimony. You are an

eyewitness of the works of Jesus in your life. No one knows your story as you do.

The best way to be prepared to give your testimony is to think about it beforehand. One way to do this is to write it down. Reflect on how God saved you and what He is doing in your life. Then, listen for God's leading when and how you should share your personal testimony. Questions asked by unsaved friends might be a good opportunity. Or you might feel



God impressing you to share your testimony during a church service. Do not be discouraged if it seems like no one is affected by your testimony. It can be like sowing a seed—it takes time to see the benefits.

Guard your personal testimony! It can take years to build up a good reputation, but one act can destroy it. So it is with your testimony. The longer you live for the Lord, the greater your testimony will be. Do not listen to the devil's lie that the best testimony comes from someone who went into deep sin and then was saved. A testimony of one who never became involved in drugs, alcohol, and sinful activities is the best testimony! If God saved you, you have a testimony, and you are adding to it every day. There are people who need to see and hear your testimony. Ask God to help you to let your light shine to a lost world.

WRITE OUT YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY

1. Think about how powerful and important a personal testimony can be: we overcome the enemy "by the word of [our] testimony" (Revelation 12:11).
2. Study an example of a personal testimony, such as Acts 26:1-23 or Acts 22:1-21.
3. Give thought to your testimony.
 - A. BEFORE: What was your life like before you were saved? What were some of your problems?
 - B. HOW: How did you get saved? Where were you? What was happening? Did someone help you?
 - C. AFTER: How has becoming a Christian changed your life? How have your thoughts, attitudes, and emotions changed? What does having a relationship with Jesus mean to you? Are there special Scriptures or songs that add to your testimony?

CHAPTER TEN

FELLOWSHIP

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God's people should assemble together in God's house (Psalm 122:1; Hebrews 10:25).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Walking in God's light brings spiritual life (John 8:12; John 1:4; 1 John 5:12).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Four essential things for spiritual life (Acts 2:41-47).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Different people from different places now have something in common (Acts 2:5-11, 44; Jude 3).
- ❑ **Friday:** Paul compared the body of Christ with a physical body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God's people have a common goal—to share the Gospel (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8).

Attending Church Services

Have you ever wondered why it is important to attend church services often? Do many of your family, friends, or co-workers go to church services often or even at all? According to a study by the Hartford Institute of Religion Resource, only about 20 percent of Americans attend church services weekly. Yet, a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center showed that more than 70 percent of Americans say that they are a Christian. That means 50 percent of Americans who say they are Christians do not believe it is important to regularly attend church services.

What does the Bible say about meeting together with other Christians? Is it important? Hebrews 10:25 warns, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is . . ." In Psalm 122:1 David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." Why is it that so many who claim to be God's people do not have this same attitude? Another recent study showed that one reason people have stopped attending church services is because "they are not finding community" (*Barna Research*). They do



not feel like they have anything in common with others who attend the services. (The word *community* means "a group sharing common interests or characteristics.") A Bible word that means "to share something in common" is *fellowship*.

The Bible Definition of Fellowship

You might have heard the word *fellowship* used to describe a location (a fellowship hall) or a church service (a fellowship meeting) or a group of congregations who believe the same doctrines. Some have even included the word *fellowship* in the name of their local church congregation. With so many usages of this word, it might be confusing when trying to understand what exactly fellowship is. Because it is such an important tool in the Christian's toolbox, it is vital that we use the Bible to see what God says about fellowship.

The first time this word is used in the New Testament is in Acts, Chapter 2. God sent His Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, enabling God's people to have something never before experienced: God's Spirit dwelling within. In the Old Testament, people were unable to live a life free from sin because God's presence could not live within them until Jesus paid the price for full salvation. Because of this sacrifice, God's people can have "life eternal" (John 17:3). Sharing this life with God and Jesus is also described as "fellowship . . . with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). As long as you are saved and doing all that God has shown you to do, you are alive spiritually. You are walking in the light; you have spiritual life. This life comes from God—you share it in common with God.

Is Fellowship With Others Important?

In Acts 2:42 you can read of four things new Christians believed were essential: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." They did not believe these things were just a good idea, but they "devoted themselves, persevered and did not faint" (Strong's definition of "*stedfastly*"). These things were a priority in their lives. How did they have fellowship together? The Feast of Pentecost was one of the "solemn feasts" (Numbers 15:3) when all the adult Jewish males were required to travel to Jerusalem to attend (Deuteronomy 16:16). Some people traveled long distances for this feast. Can you imagine the great number of people in Jerusalem at that time? Look at the many nations spoken of in Acts 2:9-11. All these people came from many places, having different cultures and traditions.

When Peter preached the Gospel, Acts 2:41 says that "three thousand souls" were saved. Then, those people with many languages (verse 6) from "every nation" (verse 5) met together, prayed together, studied the Bible together, and shared with others. What made the difference? When they gave their hearts to God, they became a part of God's church (the Church of God), and they had a "common salvation" (Jude 3), a salvation shared in Christ. It did not matter who they were or where they came from, they now had something in common with other Christians. This is fellowship.

Maintaining Fellowship

Since fellowship is such an important tool for the Christian, is it possible to lose fellowship with God or to lose fellowship with other Christians? First John 1:6 talks about people who say they have fellowship with God, but they are not telling the truth. Why? Because they are walking in spiritual darkness. God cannot have a relationship with anyone who loves "darkness rather than light, [why?] because their deeds [are] evil" (John 3:19). To prevent darkness from coming on you, you must "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7). To continue to walk in the light, you must do the same things to keep spiritual life that the Christians did in Acts, Chapter 2. You must make these things a priority in your life: Bible reading and study, prayer, and going to church services. If you keep your spiritual life healthy (fellowship with God), you will also have fellowship with God's people.



Paul compared God's people (the body of Christ) to a physical body in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12. Just as a physical body needs certain things to be healthy (food and water), so does the spiritual body (Bible reading and prayer). Just as the physical body needs each member, so does the spiritual body (verses 21-22). Just as the physical body desires a companion, someone to share life with (Genesis 2:18), so does the spiritual body desire to share with other Christians what they have in common (fellowship). If you slam the door on your thumb, how do you react? Do you say, "Thumb, you shouldn't have been in the way"? No! Your other hand comes up to hold the injured thumb, and you might say "Ouch!" You show care and concern for that member. Likewise, in the spiritual body, "the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (verses 25-26).

Another important part of maintaining fellowship is having a burden for people who are lost. You will want others to have what you share in common with Christ (salvation). You and Christ are in a partnership. His goal (salvation for the lost) will become your goal. As you understand the value of fellowship with God and with other Christians, you will want to tell others as well!

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **How does someone have fellowship with God?**
- ◆ **What do you share in common with God?**
- ◆ **What four things did Christians believe to be essential in Acts 2:42?**
- ◆ **How did the Christians show that they had fellowship (something in common) in Acts, Chapter 2?**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WITNESSING

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** We are to be God's representatives (Ephesians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:4).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Witnessing is telling others what you know to be true (Acts 1:8; Acts 22:15).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God's Spirit will help you in witnessing (John 15:26; John 14:26; John 16:13).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Wisdom is necessary when witnessing (Proverbs 11:30; Colossians 4:5).
- ❑ **Friday:** God wants you to witness (Psalm 107:2; Matthew 28:19).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Preparations are needed to be a good witness (Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 1:12).

In December 1776, Benjamin Franklin became America's first ambassador to France (at the time this position was called the Minister of America). The Americans were in the midst of the Revolutionary War with Great Britain. Benjamin Franklin acted as a representative of the United States, successfully persuading France to aid the Americans in their fight for independence. Benjamin Franklin quickly learned the language and was said to have "displayed an uncanny knack at politics and persuasion." For nine years, Franklin lived in France, becoming a "beloved resident." Just as the people of France loved Franklin, he loved them. (Source: PBS.org)



The word *ambassador* means "an authorized messenger or representative." In the United States, ambassadors are appointed to personally represent their country while living in another country for a certain amount of time. It is important that ambassadors have good communication skills (know the language of the country they will live in, know how to talk to people, be able to positively talk about the United States and its positions on important issues, and be a good listener). Many times the ambassador will talk to people who have never visited the United States, and their impression of the American people and country can be greatly influenced by that representative from the United States.

Ambassadors for Christ

In Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus, he wrote, "I am an ambassador" (Ephesians 6:20), and when writing to the church in Corinth, he wrote that "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). When Jesus lived here on earth, He told the people, "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49). God sent Jesus; He was God's representative (or ambassador). What was Jesus sent to do? He was to do "the will of the Father" (John 4:34; John 5:30). (Read John 6:40 to see what God's will is.)

After Jesus returned to Heaven, He entrusted the responsibility of doing the Father's will to all who are saved. He has "entrusted [us] with the gospel" (1 Thessalonians 2:4 AMP). We represent another country (or kingdom; John 18:36). As ambassadors for Christ, our behavior and words represent our King—His character, His laws, His purpose. This can also be called *witnessing*.

"Thou Shalt Be His Witness"

Before returning to Heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). What does it mean to be God's witness? To witness is defined as "to bear in mind, to remember, to testify." One cannot be a witness of an event they know nothing about. The disciples had spent much time with Jesus, seeing the miracles and hearing His sermons. They were "eyewitnesses" (Luke 1:2).

However, being a witness was not limited to this, as the Apostle Paul was told by Ananias to "be [God's] witness unto all men of what thou has seen and heard" (Acts 22:15). How could Paul be a witness when he did not physically see all that Jesus had done? Acts 1:8 tells what is needed before someone can become a witness: "the Holy Ghost."

Before you can witness, you must BE a witness. When you are saved, God's Spirit comes to live in your heart, making you a witness and then giving you the power to witness through your life and through your words. When you allow God's Spirit to work through you, you are showing others their need of a Savior (John 16:8). God's Spirit (also called the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth) will "testify" of Christ (John 15:26), "teach you all things" (John 14:26), and "will guide you" (John 16:13). Without God's Spirit helping you, you cannot truly witness to others.

Why Should I Witness?

There are many arguments for why a Christian cannot witness, or tell others about Christ. Some excuses are: "I don't want to offend anyone" or "Everyone has their own beliefs" or "People just do not care." While "he that winneth souls [must be] wise" (Proverbs 11:30), often Christians let fear prevent them from saying anything about the Lord. Is there something or someone who is very important in your life? Something that made a great impact on you or someone who changed your life? If so, have you ever talked about it, have you ever shared it with others? If you spend time with someone, it will not be long until you will see what is important to him or her. It will become evident from his or her conversation. For Christians, salvation and living for God is the most important thing in their life—it is their life. So, why is it so hard to tell others about it?

Psalms 107:2 says, "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" Jesus commanded all Christians to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19 AMP). In John 14:21 Jesus revealed that true love for God is shown by obeying His commands. The most important reason the Christian should witness to others is because it is the will of the Father (an ambassador does the will of the one who sent him). "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed" (Hudson Taylor). Another reason you should witness is because there are people who want something different. The Bible says, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few" (Luke 10:2). A poll was taken of Americans who used to attend church services. In that survey, 20 percent said they would start going to church again if someone would just talk to them about spiritual matters. A third reason for witnessing is found in Jesus' warning concerning people who are ashamed of Him (Luke 9:26).



How to Witness

Perhaps the greatest hindrance to witnessing for Christ is not understanding how to do it. Some might have tried it once or twice, and it went so badly that they never tried again. It is needful that every Christian give some thought and preparation for witnessing before an opportunity comes along. An ambassador must be a citizen of the country he is representing. Likewise, you must be a citizen of Heaven (Philippians 3:20 AMP), or be a Christian. Just as an ambassador must know what he is representing (the country and its president), you must

have some knowledge of the One you represent. This comes through prayer and Bible study (1 Peter 3:15). You cannot have hidden sin (Philippians 2:15), for if you do, it will hinder your witnessing.

Keep in mind that your actions speak louder than your words. There is an old saying: "What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying" (Ralph Waldo Emerson). Avoid foolish quarrels (2 Timothy 2:23-24). Watch your attitude when people treat you badly. Do not just repeat what you have heard your pastor or spiritual leaders say. Study and ask questions so you know and are persuaded what you believe is true (2 Timothy 1:12). Work to be patient with others and become a good listener. "People do not care what you know until they know that you care" (Theodore Roosevelt). Above all, ask God to teach you and to lead you. "Lead me to some soul today, O teach me, Lord, just what to say. Friends of mine are lost in sin and cannot find their way."



Look for everyday experiences that might be an opportunity for witnessing. How did Jesus do this with the Samaritan woman in John, Chapter 4? Who spoke first? Did it matter?

**Have you ever avoided opportunities to witness?
Would preparation have made a difference?**

Philip's Opportunity

Read Acts 8:26-40. Why did God choose Philip? How did Philip approach the Ethiopian (verse 30)?

PHILIP'S QUALIFICATIONS

- Knowledge of God's Word
- Boldness
- Compassion
- Obedience
- Enthusiasm
- Sensitivity to God's Spirit

Are these qualities working in your life?

If not, how can you develop these qualities?

What are some of the things that hinder you from witnessing?

What are some of the ways you can overcome these?

Conversation Starters

(Things you might do or say to start a conversation with someone about God)

Reading your Bible in a public place

Walking away from gossip

Refusing to cheat, lie, or steal

Listening to Christian music

Have a cheerful, positive attitude

Take time to help someone

Ask questions, like:

"Do you go to church?"

"What gets you through the hard times?"

"Do you believe in God?"

"Do you have a purpose in life?"

"What do you imagine God is like?"

"What are your goals in life?"

"Is God important to you? Why?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

DISCERNMENT

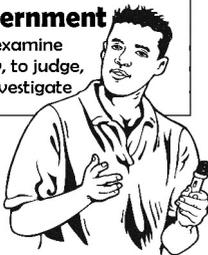
DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Discernment is necessary (Deuteronomy 32:28-29; Matthew 24:24; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Discernment, or wisdom, begins with learning about God (Proverbs 1:1-7; Proverbs 4:1-7).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Discernment requires examining, or testing (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Bible study brings discernment (Philippians 1:9-10; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:15).
- ❑ **Friday:** God's Spirit is needed for discernment (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Ask God for discernment, or understanding (1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 119:125; Proverbs 2:1-6).

In 1869 two men were hired to dig a well. While digging, to their great surprise, they discovered a giant, ten-foot man buried there. The owner of the property soon was charging people 25 cents to come and see this giant. "People came by the wagon load" (Wikipedia.org). In time this giant was sold for \$23,000 to be displayed in New York. This was such a money-making venture that a showman named P. T. Barnum offered to buy the giant for \$50,000. When he was refused, he created his own giant and claimed that it was the original. He, too, made money from people who came to see his giant. While observing the gullible crowds of people paying money, one man was heard to remark, "There's a sucker [fool] born every minute." Can you imagine how foolish people felt when, on February 2, 1870, both giants were determined to be fakes?

Discernment

to examine closely, to judge, to investigate



There is an ancient proverb that says, "A fool and his money are soon parted." Perhaps you have read about email scams and internet hoaxes. Many people have lost their entire life's savings because they were easily fooled. These people did not use good judgment when making decisions. However, more serious and dangerous than these hoaxes are the plans the devil uses, trying to deceive God's people. There is a tool

that should be in your toolbox to help you be wise to those workings of the devil. This tool is called *discernment*.

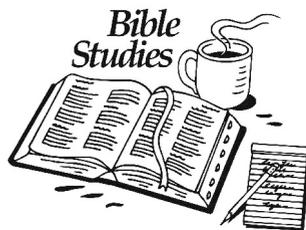
What Is Discernment?

There is a popular saying: "It does not matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something." This is foolish! You might sincerely believe with all your heart that you can fly, but if you jump off a cliff, you will fall. Likewise, there are many other common beliefs in our society today, such as "Just follow your heart" or "All religions have the same God" or "Being happy is all that matters" or "What you don't know can't hurt you." While these statements might sound good at first, are they true? Taking a second look, examining closely, and investigating these statements is how the Christian uses the tool of discernment. John 7:24 warns us, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." It has been said, "Spiritual discernment is the ability to see from the Lord's viewpoint."

When you accepted the Lord into your heart and were saved, God gave you something very precious (salvation). It is the devil's plan to take that from you, and he often works in a deceiving way. He will use "profane and vain babblings" (1 Timothy 6:20), which are empty talk, foolish arguments, and contradictions, to convince you that you need not to live such a strict life. He might use someone to influence you against the Bible, against God's people, or against your pastor. Discernment will protect you from these persuasive influences.

How to Get Discernment

Have you ever heard the sayings, "You cannot always tell a book by its cover" or "You cannot believe everything you see"? Just as physical things are not always as they appear, so it is spiritually. Discernment is separating what is true from what is false. It is so necessary! Yet, many Christians are making unwise decisions and are being taken in by false doctrines, false beliefs, and false teachers. Other Christians buy into lies that cause them to stop living for the Lord and to go their own way. Why aren't they using the tool of discernment? Hosea 4:6 tells us that "people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." It is highly unlikely the giant man hoax of 1869 would deceive as many people today. Why is that? Today we have better access to



information that can quickly show such stories to be highly suspect. Could it be that spiritual knowledge works in the same manner, shining God's light of truth on the devil's lies?

It is vital that every Christian has a "true and personal knowledge of" God (2 Peter 1:3 AMP). How do you do that? The Bible is where you learn about God—who He is, what He has promised, and what He desires you to do. This is where discernment begins. Some have described the Bible as a yardstick (or a measuring rod). It is the standard by which all other things are measured. When you place the truth of the Bible beside the hoaxes, lies, and tricks of the devil, God's Word enables you to "discern between good and evil" (2 Samuel 19:35).

The second thing you need to discern is God's Spirit. First Corinthians 2:14 says that these things are "spiritually discerned," and a "natural man" (unsaved) cannot "know them." When you repent of your sins and live for the Lord, God sends His Holy Spirit to live in your heart. God's Spirit will help you to see when things are not quite right. You might feel an uneasiness or you might wonder if something is true. It is important that you do not ignore, or "quench" (1 Thessalonians 5:19), these impressions. Ask God for "good judgment and knowledge" (Psalm 119:66). God has promised that if you ask for wisdom, He will give it to you (James 1:5).

The Danger of Lacking Discernment

If you have ever been around very young children for very long, you have learned that they lack the ability to make wise decisions. If left unsupervised, they will put almost everything in their mouths, write on the walls with markers, run out into traffic, climb on top of tables, and so on. However, as children grow up and are properly trained, they gain understanding and make better choices. So it is with the new Christian. At first, there is much he does not understand, and unwise choices could be spiritually deadly. There is a popular saying, "Follow your own heart," but this is unbiblical. Unless you commit your heart to God and His ways (Proverbs 3:5-6), it will deceive you (Jeremiah 17:9). It is vital that every newly-saved Christian build his spiritual library by reading the Bible, attending church services, listening to preached messages, and heeding wise counsel.

Lacking spiritual discernment is often a sign of spiritual immaturity. This is understandable when one is a newborn babe. Just as a baby drinks only milk at first, newborn Christians take in only milk (simple food) at first. But how strong would a teenager or a grown man be if he only drank milk? He would become

susceptible to sickness and disease. Likewise, a Christian must begin to eat "strong meat" (Hebrews 5:14), or the deeper truths of the Bible.

Another reason some people lack discernment is because they are growing cold, spiritually speaking. Backsliding rarely happens overnight; it is a process. When Christians begin to change their beliefs, standards, and ideas from what God's Words says (and what they used to believe) to something easier, more popular, or less restrictive, it is a sign that they are losing their spiritual discernment. This is often caused by failing to pray and read the Bible as they should. Soon they are blinded by the devil's ideas and lies.

Today our world is approving many lifestyles, ideas, and moral standards that were not accepted years ago. Where do you stand on these issues? Do you know what God's opinion is? Can you discern what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is a counterfeit, what is right and what is almost right? It is only through God's Word and His Spirit that you will be kept from making seriously wrong decisions. Do not neglect the tool of discernment.

"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; Whoever is discerning and understanding, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, And the righteous will walk in them, But transgressors will stumble and fall in them" (Hosea 14:9 AMP).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **How does spiritual knowledge give discernment?**
- ◆ **Why is the Holy Spirit necessary for discernment? Why can't you just "follow your heart" to discern things?**
- ◆ **What are some reasons one might lack spiritual discernment?**
- ◆ **What are some of the ways you can become more spiritually discerning?**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FAITH

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Faith is necessary (Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:11; Ephesians 6:16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** A list of heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:4-39).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Faith is believing without seeing (2 Corinthians 5:7; John 20:27-29; Hebrews 11:1).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Jesus is the foundation of faith (Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:14).
- ❑ **Friday:** Read how to build or strengthen your faith (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 2:1; Philippians 4:9).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God is looking for men and women with faith (Proverbs 20:6; Luke 18:8; 1 Corinthians 4:2).

A Man of Faith

George Müller lived in London during the 1800s. He was born in Prussia, but after giving his heart to the Lord, he moved to England. He felt this was where the Lord wanted him to go. He wrote, "My whole life shall be one service for the living God." In time Müller and his wife began what was called "God's Orphanage." Through the years nearly ten thousand orphans were fed, cared for, and educated. Müller strongly believed in trusting God to provide. When there was no money or food, he told only the Lord.

On one such an occasion, there was no food for the orphans nor was there money to purchase food. Müller had the children sit down at the table where plates, cups, and utensils were laid out. While Müller and the children were praying a prayer of thanks for the breakfast, a baker knocked at the door. In the

**Faith
in
Action**

middle of the night, God had woken him up, telling him to bake bread for the orphans. As soon as he left, the milkman's cart broke down right in front of the orphanage. He donated all the milk on his cart to the orphans. It is not surprising that George Müller wrote: "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible."

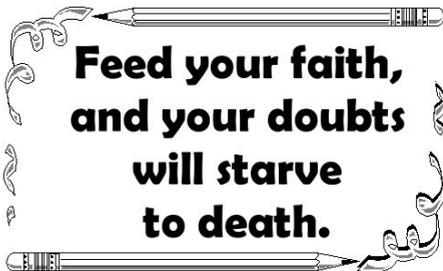
There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends." (Sources: Wikipedia.org, *George Mueller – Man of Faith*, and Muellers.org)

Stories such as this about strong faith are encouraging, but is it possible to have such faith today? Have you ever not had any food in your house? Has there ever been a time when you did not have a place to live? Can you remember going barefoot because you did not have any shoes to wear? Perhaps none of these things have ever happened to you. If so, you are blessed! Yet, faith is a tool every Christian (rich or poor) should have. What exactly is faith, how does one's faith grow, and what are the dangers in having weak faith? These are questions that the Christian should give serious consideration to.

Heroes of the Faith

Hebrews, Chapter 11, is often called the Hall of Faith or a list of Heroes of the Faith. One of the best ways to learn what faith is comes by studying the lives of the men and women in this chapter. These men and women did not live to see all of God's "promises," yet they were "persuaded of them, and embraced them" (verse 13). Because of their faith in the promises of God, they "obtained a good report through faith" (verse 39). Verse 1 of this chapter explains carefully what faith is: "Now faith is the substance [reality] of things hoped for, the evidence [proof] of things not seen." Faith is believing the promises of God, although you cannot see any proof. Second Corinthians 5:7 describes the Christian's way of life as "walk[ing] by faith, not by sight."

One of Jesus' disciples named Thomas was doubtful when he was told that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was only when he could see and touch Jesus that he believed. Jesus told Thomas to "be not faithless, but believing. . . . because thou has seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:27, 29). Faith strengthens your belief that there is a God, that He sent His Son to be the sacrifice for sins, that His Holy Spirit will come and live in the heart of every child of God, and that the Bible is true. Faith does not wait until evidence proves these things to be true; faith stands strong when there is little or no proof. Paul wrote to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed, and am



**Feed your faith,
and your doubts
will starve
to death.**

persuaded" (2 Timothy 1:12). Paul's faith was not based on what he had seen or heard but what he knew in his heart to be true.

Building Your Faith

It was faith that made it possible for you to be saved. To confess your sins and accept Christ as your Savior required believing. Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is." Faith does not come by being determined to believe. To just believe is not enough. Ephesians 2:8 says that it is "not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." The foundation of faith is not an emotional experience or a special answer to prayer. It is a Person. Jesus is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). He is the One who encouraged or motivated you to believe in the beginning (before you were saved), and He will continue to encourage you to strengthen or build up your faith.

What are some ways your faith can increase? One way is through hearing the Word of God preached (Romans 10:17). Hebrews 2:1 tells us that once you have heard God's Word, you must "give the more earnest heed." Pay close attention and apply what you have learned. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and see in me, do" (Philippians 4:9). When you put action to the things you have learned in Sunday school, through the preaching, or during family worship, your faith will grow. You will find that God's promises are true because you have proved them to be so. Talking to God (prayer) and thinking about God and His Word (meditation) are other important ways you can strengthen your faith. When God answers your prayers for healing, direction, safety, or help, your faith that God is real and that He truly cares about you is strengthened.

But what if you feel that your faith is very weak? The Apostles must have felt somewhat like that when they asked Jesus to "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Jesus told them that having "faith as a grain of mustard seed" (verse 6) would see great things accomplished. Too many people have *comfortable* faith or *circumstantial* faith. Their faith is based on whether everything is going well in their lives. As long as God is answering their prayers and everything in their life makes sense, they have a strong faith in God. But that faith is fragile. There will be times when life does not make sense. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Your faith must be built on something stronger than feelings, emotions, and good outcomes. It must be rooted in Jesus Christ. A faith like this can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). A faith like this will not change even if God does not answer your prayers in the way you think He

should (Daniel 3:17-18). This faith is unchanging; it is not based on what you see; it does not readjust according to your circumstances. It is because of Jesus that we can "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23).

Your Faith Will Be Tested

Do not be surprised if you have times when your faith is tested. You might think: "Why would God let this happen? Why isn't God answering my prayers? Does God even care about what I am going through?" Can you find examples of people in the Bible who might have felt the same way? What about Joseph in prison or Israel at the Red Sea or Elijah when fleeing from Jezebel? How was their faith tested? These stories can be helpful when you are going through difficult times. First Peter 4:12 says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the

**"Faith is the radar
that sees through
the fog."**

(Corrie ten Boom)

fiery trial which is to try you . . ." There is an old saying, "Feed your faith and your doubts will starve to death." Continue to read your Bible, pray, meditate, and attend church services. God is looking for men and women of faith. "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8b).

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ **Consider some of the names in the Heroes of the Faith listed in Hebrews, Chapter 11. Why do you think some of them were included?**
- ◆ **What is the *definition* and *foundation* of faith?**
- ◆ **What is *circumstantial faith*?**
- ◆ **Read Daniel 3:17-18 and John 20:24-29. How would you describe the men of faith in these verses?**

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Benjamin Franklin said, "The best investment is in the tools of one's own trade." God has provided a full toolbox that every Christian must have! Each tool is vital, but how and when to use them requires an investment of time and practice.

These thirteen chapters explain several of the tools God equips the Christian with, their importance, and how to use them. His plan is for you to become a "wise masterbuilder" (1 Corinthians 3:10). You are building a spiritual house that needs to withstand the storms of life. You have all the tools you need.



Sheri Strelecky is a Sunday school teacher, book editor, wife, mother, and grandmother. In addition to this Bible Study Series, she has written primary and youth Sunday school lessons. Sheri and her husband Steve are the youth leaders at The Church of God, God's Acres.