

# *LifeWay Women*

PRESENTS

NEW STUDIES FOR  
YOUR NEW YEAR

JANUARY 2017



# *This sampler includes*



*Finding I AM*  
Lysa TerKeurst



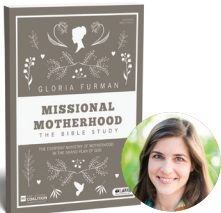
*All Things New*  
Kelly Minter



*Entrusted*  
Beth Moore



*Redeemed*  
Angela Thomas-Pharr



*Missional Motherhood*  
Gloria Furman

Click on any of the links or covers throughout this sampler to learn more.

SAMPLE

# Finding I AM

HOW JESUS FULLY SATISFIES  
THE CRY OF YOUR HEART

Lysa TerKeurst



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## MEET THE AUTHOR

Lysa TerKeurst is passionate about God's Word. She has studied extensively in the Holy Land and loves to make connections between the Old and New Testaments. Her deepest desire is to help others experience Jesus by unpacking Scripture in new and fresh ways everyone can understand!

Lysa is the president of Proverbs 31 Ministries and the #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Uninvited*, *The Best Yes*, and 20 other books. But to those who know her best she's just a simple girl who speaks about hope in the midst of her own struggles. Lysa lives with her family in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Connect with her at [www.LysaTerKeurst.com](http://www.LysaTerKeurst.com) or on social media @LysaTerKeurst.

## LOOK AROUND . . .

Explore this sample taken from the first week of *Finding I AM*.

Here's how you can use this Bible study in your church or small group:

- \* To further biblical literacy among long-time believers
- \* To help believers find freedom in difficult circumstances by shifting from "slave mentality" to "set free mentality" in recovery groups
- \* To help new believers learn to trade feelings of emptiness for the fullness of knowing who Jesus is
- \* To enrich the study of the Gospel of John with footage from the Holy Land in each interactive teaching session

Visit [LifeWay.com/FindingIAM](http://LifeWay.com/FindingIAM) for more information or to order.



## INTRODUCTION

What is that relationship, that insecurity, that hurt, that desire, that prayer you've brought to God countless times? It's what makes you trust God the most, and in the not-so-spiritually-certain moments, it's what makes you most suspicious of Him. If God is good, why isn't He being good to you in answering this cry of your heart?

I've been there.

There is a desperate cry within my heart that I've longed with every fiber of my being to see come to pass. Minutes have turned into days and weeks and years of learning to make some sort of spiritual peace. On my good days I stand assured, "It's just not God's timing yet."

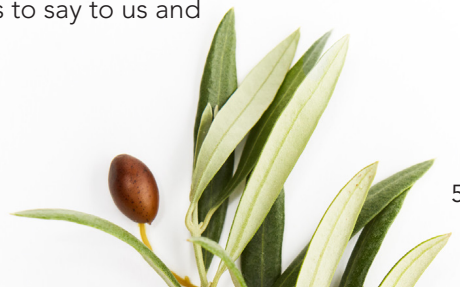
But on my less stellar days I crumble, afraid and hurt, "God, why? You know how much this ache in my heart steals a piece of too many of my smiles. Quite honestly, I'm tired of wondering if you're withholding because I'm not good enough, capable enough, spiritual enough, trusting enough, or mature enough. I guess I'm really tired of hoping."

This study is deeply personal to me. It's not a kumbaya, let's get together and just talk about the Bible enough to feel good about ourselves. This study is a lifeline, a way to get oxygen into the places of our hearts that have been starving to breathe and fully live.

And I'm so glad you are here to study with me. To search God's Word and seek Him as the source of our satisfaction.

In this study we are going to dive into the seven I AM statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. We are going to go to places in the Holy Land where Jesus may have been when He uttered the words. I want the Word of God to come alive to you in this study—to reach the recesses of your heart because I truly believe that God's Word to us is life.

So, lean in with me, and let's see what Jesus wants to say to us and how He wants to satisfy our hearts.





## ABOUT THIS STUDY

I fell in love with the Holy Land on my first trip to Israel a few years ago. In just two years, I've been there seven times studying and preparing to bring what I've learned to you. The Bible has come alive to me in a new way and one of my hopes in this study is that this will happen for you as well. This study was actually birthed out of one of my trips to Israel when the small group I was with specifically studied the Gospel of John. We heard our guide teach some of these I AM statements, and I left that trip knowing that I had to dive into this topic more fully.

In the study we will spend time on each of the I AM statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. A few things you will want to know:

- The first video session is an introduction to the series.
- Then each week in your personal study time you will study one, or sometimes two, I AM statements.
- And then in the video following your week of study, I'll unpack the I AM statement(s) you just studied that week.




This was an intentional format because I want you to study the I AM statement for yourself, dig into Scripture on your own about each one, before I give you my thoughts on the subject.

You will have four days of personal study each week with an optional fifth day. That optional fifth day is just that, optional—don't feel like you have to do it. It's only if you want to take the study to the next level.

During the study we will be looking at many passages in the Gospel of John, but we won't be studying the whole book. What the optional fifth day of personal study will do is walk you through the entire Gospel of John a few chapters at a time. You may have already read some of the passages in that week of study, but in doing it this way you will read every word in the Gospel and be able to see the I AM statements in a fresh way because of it.

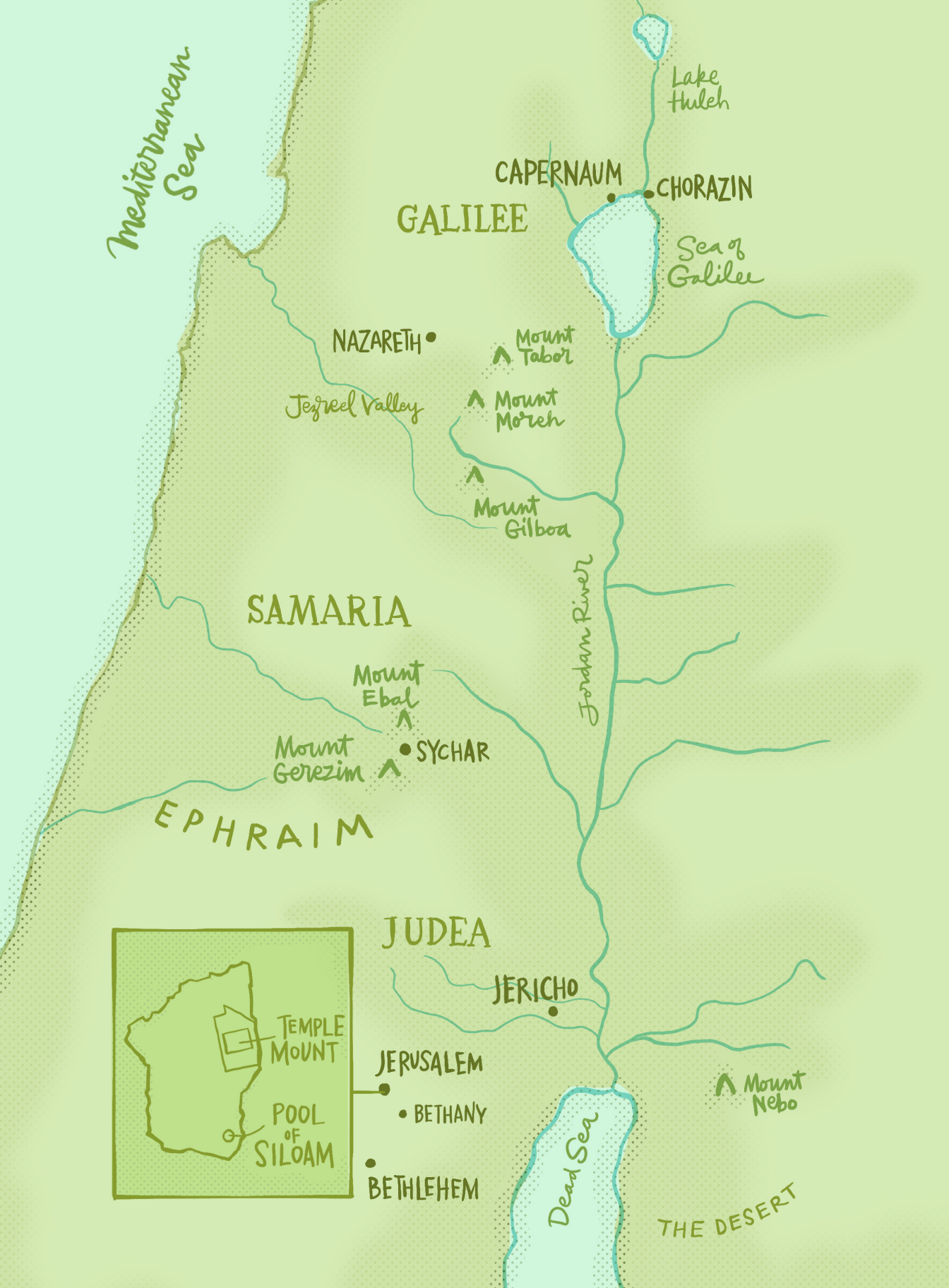
My prayer for you in this study is that you will discover that Jesus is the key to any kind of satisfaction you are looking for. He alone will fill the empty places in your heart, and I hope you find Him anew in this study. I'm so grateful to be taking this journey with you.



*Jesus is  
the key to  
any kind of  
satisfaction  
you are  
looking for.*







Mediterranean Sea

CAPERNAUM  
CHORAZIN  
GALILEE

Lake Huleh

Sea of Galilee

NAZARETH

Mount Tabor

Jezebel Valley

Mount Moreh

Mount Gilboa

Jordan River

SAMARIA

Mount Ebal

Mount Gerizim  
SYCHAR

EPHRAIM

JUDEA

JERICO

JERUSALEM

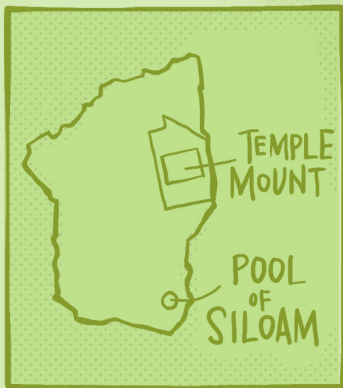
BETHANY

BETHLEHEM

Mount Nebo

Dead Sea

THE DESERT



I AM THE *Bread* OF LIFE.

I AM THE *Light* OF THE WORLD.

I AM THE *Gate*.

I AM THE *Good Shepherd*.

I AM THE *Resurrection* AND THE *Life*.

I AM THE *Way* AND  
THE *Truth* AND THE *Life*.

I AM THE TRUE *Vine*.

#FINDINGIAM





# group guide

## VIDEO GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After watching the video, discuss the following questions in your group.

1. God desires to be all you *need* and all you *want*. Describe the difference between the two from your own perspective.
2. Can you relate to the “sweet sorrow” I discussed in the video?  
Share any part of your story that you feel comfortable sharing that may be helpful to others.
3. How does the statement that life isn’t meant to fully satisfy us, only Jesus can, speak to you today?
4. What are a few things you are hoping and praying for God to show you as you start this study?

Bread



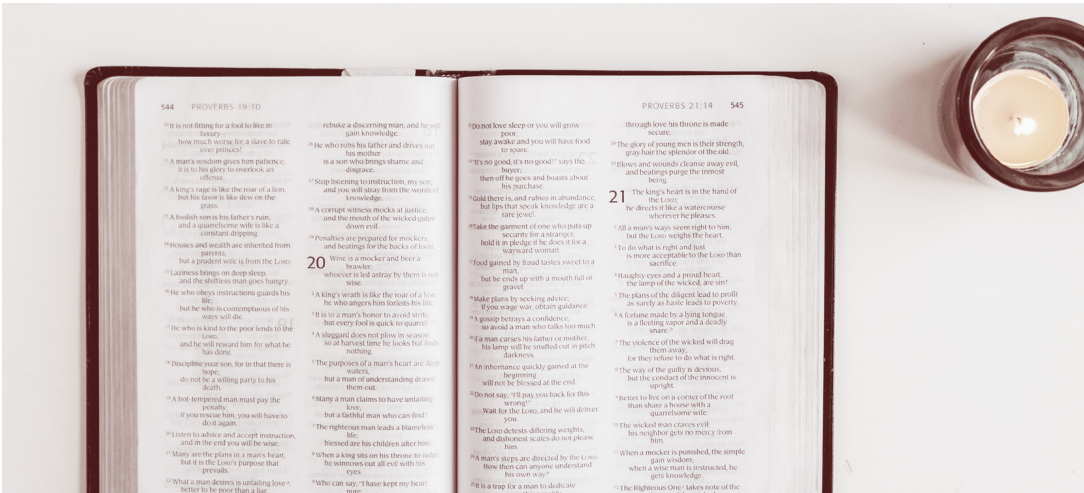
WEEK 1



# I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

JOHN 6:35

#FINDINGIAM



**DAY 1**

**BIOS & ZOE LIFE**

For years I've wanted to be like the spiritual giants who approach prayer and fasting with glee in their voices and a glide in their steps. They smile through the passing up of food with an apparent ease that's always eluded me. Yes, I wanted to be like them, but I was apparently too weak.

So, each time I heard about an invitation to fast from food I sidestepped the opportunity with my list of excuses:

*I struggle with low blood sugar.*

*I get real grumpy when I get real hungry.*

*If I have an emotional breakdown while pursuing a spiritual breakthrough, it sort of defeats the purpose, you know?*

*I think fasting works for some people but not for me.*

All I could think about was the struggle of my stomach. But then this past January something changed. I was feeling spiritually starved. Suddenly, all I could think about was the struggle of my heart.

There was a desperation like I'd never known as I confronted the source of my ache. I reached a place where I could not hear from God. I felt disconnected from believing God's promises were true for me personally. I was desperate to have relief from this unbelief.

I could sense His presence. I could connect with His truth. What I longed for the most, His voice of assurance and instruction, was stunningly silent.

That thing I mentioned in the introduction—the source of my holy wrestling, my silent suffering, the reason my pillow was sometimes wet with tears, the pain—was at an all time high. And then suddenly and almost cruelly, God seemed eerily silent.

I lay in bed one night racked with an imploding feeling.

One sleepless night turned into 2, 3, 7, 10. Starvation of the soul doesn't give permission slips for sleep to help you escape its grip.

I cried at unusual times. I withdrew from depth in my conversations with others. I lied about having a sore throat, a sour stomach, a bug of some sort—anything to excuse me from having to be present.

When you are absent in heart but present in reality, you know the slightest bump or jostle by anyone would shatter your ability to hold it together. You'd be nothing but dust that even a wisp of wind could and would blow away without any sympathy at all. As everything about you goes flying, you'd suddenly and horrifically realize you're helpless to gather the particles that were once "you" back into something of any sort of substance.

And then on night 11, finally, I slept. Physically, I felt better the next day. But spiritually I was so utterly exhausted and spent that I knew something had to break through. That's when another fasting invitation came.

Out of nothing but sheer desperation I said yes: "Yes, God, I will fast from food that gives me physical comfort so I can find something new with You. I don't want comfort. I want connection. I must hear from You. It's not even an option to go one more day without feeding my soul with Your whisper."

I didn't do a complete fast. But it was more than I'd ever been willing to try before. I was desperate. It's amazing the powerful influence desperation can have on a person for good or bad. Desperation can lead to degradation.



Desperate people can find themselves doing desperately degrading things to ease their source of pain. But desperation for God is different. True desperation for God will lead to revelation.

And after only a few days the revelation I got stunned me.

Apart from Him  
there is no true  
satisfaction.

God was *allowing* this source of pain in my life.

He wasn't causing it. He didn't take pleasure in it. He didn't like the hurt it was causing me. But He absolutely was allowing it. And the only whisper from God that kept rushing through my heart was that I had to learn to fully trust Him and Him alone.

Without full trust in Him, it is impossible to be fully satisfied by Him. And apart from Him, there is no fullness. Apart from Him there is no true satisfaction.

The instant fix I had been begging Him to give me would only benefit me in physical and emotional realms. It would have given me a temporary fix and a brief stint of relief, but it would never develop in me a permanent source of life from which to draw upon time and again.

God was after so much more for me. He was after my soul. That deeper place where God wants to ease the hunger of our souls can only be accessed when we are stripped of the cheaper, temporary sources of nourishment.

In John 6:35, we find God personalizing His original "I AM" statement from Exodus 3 through His Son's declaration.

### TAKE A MOMENT AND READ JOHN 6:35.

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

**JOHN 6:35**

Remember, God's "I AM" statement from Exodus was so completely full that it needed no qualifier. It was the promise that His presence was everything we ever needed. It was all peace, all provision, all perfection, and all protection. That was His promise given. But our human hearts were designed by God not just for His completion but also for His companionship. We needed His promise and His presence to be personalized.

Jesus and His seven I AM statements from John personalize God's promises.

Make no mistake, God is I AM. He is absolutely all we need, but He delights in us not only needing Him but also wanting Him.

So, He gives us something we've craved physically on a daily basis since the beginning of time—bread. But He isn't just any bread. He's the Bread of life.

There are two words for *life* in the Bible. One is *bios*, used 10 times in the Bible, which means "breath in your lungs or physical life." The other is *zoe*, which means "possessed with vitality looking to the fullness of life." It's used 135 times in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Let's look up one verse for each of these words to get an idea of how they are used. Look up the following verses and write some ways the word is used according to the passage.

*Bios*: Luke 21:4

*Zoe*: 1 John 5:12

Why do you think *zoe* is used 125 times more than *bios*?

Jesus doesn't want us to just live with breath in our lungs walking around as a shell of existence. He wants us to have a rare vitality, experiencing the fullness of soul someone should experience when Jesus Himself does everyday life with us.

**Do you believe this? Do you believe Jesus wants this for you? Why or why not?**

I believe it for me. I believe it for you. Because before the beginning of time, God has waited for you to read these words and come to this realization. That thing you've been so desperate to see come to pass? That unanswered prayer? That unrelenting ache? The cries you're so afraid are unheard? The unyielding addiction? That unsung recognition? Your unraveling hope?

Those answers and the easing of that ache aren't the source of finally becoming fully satisfied. They aren't. And you believing this lie is a scheme of Satan to keep you in an unsatisfied place.

Trust me, even if that problem was solved, the enemy has another waiting in the wings that will be just as distracting and devastating to you as this one. We live in a broken world where escaping brokenness isn't possible. Our souls were made for the perfection of the garden; therefore, they can't ever be satisfied by the imperfect grit and grind of this sin-soaked world.

I have a theory about why I've anguished and suffered so desperately through this message. Because Satan wants to steal these words, kill my desire to deliver them, and destroy the miracles this teaching will produce in my life and in yours. The enemy of our soul strategizes day and night to get us to settle for *bios* life so we will never taste the hell-shattering fullness of *zoe*.

It's been his plan since the beginning.

We see it when the Bread of life was tempted by the enemy in the desert.

**TAKE A MOMENT AND READ MATTHEW 4:1-4.**

Jesus had been fasting for forty days and the Scriptures make sure to note that "he was hungry" (v. 2). So, the enemy tempts Jesus to satisfy His *bios* need—eat

some physical bread—so that He would starve His zoe need—the deep satisfaction of fasting for deeper connection with God.

**In what way has the enemy been tempting you to satisfy physical and emotional needs and kept you from pursuing that *zoe* life we've been reading about?**

We need both *bios* life and *zoe* life. It's not one or the other—it's a "both and" deal. But we must remember it can't just be *bios* life. We were also made for *zoe*. As a matter of fact, I think God uses our hunger for *bios* bread to give us a picture of *zoe* bread. Think about the way physical hunger works. Hunger isn't a bad thing. **Hunger produces a need for provision.**

**Physical hunger produces a need for what kind of provision?**

**Doesn't it make sense that God would also allow us to experience spiritual hunger as well? What does the term *spiritual hunger* mean to you?**

Just like we read in Matthew 4 where the tempter came to twist the truth with Jesus, he will want to twist the truth of God's provision for us. **God is the source of life through His provision.** The enemy is the source of lies through his perversion.

What we consume will consume us. It's our choice whether we are consuming God's life or the enemy's lies.

—  
*God is the source  
of life through His  
provision.*  
—

Write out Matthew 6:33 here:

The word *seek* in the original Greek is the word *zeteo* which means "to crave."<sup>2</sup>

What are you truly craving today?

A declaration is "a positive, explicit, or formal statement."<sup>3</sup> Write out your personal declaration of what you need to shift or give up in order to crave the Bread of life like never before.

*WANT TO READ MORE?*

Visit [LifeWay.com/FindingIAM](http://LifeWay.com/FindingIAM)

SAMPLE

8-SESSION  
BIBLE STUDY

THE LIVING ROOM SERIES

# ALL THINGS NEW

A STUDY ON  
2 CORINTHIANS

KELLY MINTER

 Lifeway  
Biblical Solutions for Life®

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## *LOOK AROUND . . .*

Explore this sample taken from the first week of *All Things New*.

Here's how you can use this Bible study in your church or small group:

- \* To further biblical literacy among long-time believers
- \* To strengthen community through gaining wisdom for relationships
- \* To encourage your group as Paul encouraged the Corinthian church
- \* To foster discussion about how Christians relate to and interact with modern culture
- \* To build community through sharing meals from the recipes included
- \* To add an additional sensory layer to your study experience with music from Kelly


Visit [LifeWay.com/AllThingsNew](http://LifeWay.com/AllThingsNew) for more info or to order.



## MEET THE AUTHOR

KELLY MINTER IS AN AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND SONGWRITER. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT WOMEN DISCOVERING JESUS THROUGH THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE. SO WHETHER IT'S THROUGH STUDY, SONG, OR THE SPOKEN WORD, KELLY'S DESIRE IS TO AUTHENTICALLY EXPRESS CHRIST TO THE WOMEN OF THIS GENERATION. SHE HAS FOUND DEEP HOPE AND HEALING THROUGH THE BIBLE'S TRUTHS, MAKING HER MESSAGE PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL.

*No Other Gods*, the first installment of The Living Room Series, helps women unveil the false gods in their lives for the ultimate purpose of discovering freedom in the one, true God. *Ruth: Loss, Love & Legacy* follows the redemptive story of Ruth, displaying God's providence and purpose even in the most trying circumstances. *Nehemiah: A Heart That Can Break* is an unforgettable journey into the missional heart of God. *What Love Is: The Letters of 1, 2, 3 John* look at the words of the Beloved Disciple regarding life in Christ. All studies are presented in the same Living Room Series format (studies can be done in any order). Kelly also released her first memoir, *Wherever The River Runs: How A Forgotten People Renewed My Hope In The Gospel*, about her life-changing journeys to the Amazon jungle.



Kelly writes extensively and speaks at women's conferences and events around the country. She has her own event called **Cultivate: A Women's Gathering Around The Word**. This Biblically based and stylistically simple event is for women of all ages. Kelly also partners closely with Justice and Mercy International, an organization that cares for the vulnerable and forgotten in the Amazon and Moldova. Kelly's music includes *Loss, Love & Legacy*, which complements her Ruth study, and the worshipful *Finer Day*, and *Hymns & Hallelujahs*. To view more about Kelly's studies, books, music, and calendar, visit [www.kellyminter.com](http://www.kellyminter.com).



# INTRODUCTION

If you had asked me at the top of writing this study why I wanted to spend a year in 2 Corinthians, I would have pointed to all those wonderful passages like the thorn in the flesh, Christ's power in our weakness, the heavenly bodies we will one day receive, God's comfort in suffering, and a whole two chapters on generosity. These passages have been like firm trellises throughout my life, around which I've wrapped myself as the winds blew or the rains came or even when the warm sun shined. I've literally grown up on these beloved texts.

One of the earliest spiritual metaphors I learned was from 2 Corinthians, where Paul talks about carrying the treasures of knowing Jesus in fragile jars of clay. This has been especially meaningful to me because I've always longed to be a more steadfast, high-performing Christian. However, my best and truest efforts have never amounted to what I needed them to—at my core I have always been dyed-in-the-wool earthen. I simply cannot get away from this. But after meditating on Paul's words I'm reminded I don't have to. "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). The page where this verse resides is well worn in every Bible I've ever owned.

Perhaps more than anything it is this weakness and honesty with which Paul writes that has so moved me. Scholars have often described 2 Corinthians as Paul's most personal letter, and this may be one of the reasons I never tire of returning to its pages. For the sufferer, Paul writes to us about the Father of unrivaled comfort and compassion. It is a passionate, pleading, even provocative letter at times, where Paul lays bare his outstretched heart to a community of somewhat inconsistent believers who frankly don't seem to care for him as much as he does them. Paul's heartbreak over their failures and enthusiasm over their restoration remind us of how relational the ministry of the gospel is. I just don't ever want to forget that if I lose my heart for people I've lost the purpose of ministry.

Speaking of ministry, if your only experience with the Christian faith has been rule-bound and oppressive, well then, might I invite you to the new covenant version? Paul spends valuable ink explaining that, since the coming of Christ, the ministry of the gospel is more gracious, humble, powerful, Spirit-filled, life-giving, and freeing than we ever imagined. He seems to sum the whole thing up in one word: glorious.

So that is how I began—eager to write about all the things I knew I loved about 2 Corinthians. Yet, after having immersed myself in the text, I discovered it was the passages less familiar to me that have so surprised and changed me. My hope is that you too might discover afresh a letter you thought you already knew. And if you've never done a Bible study before, all the more reason for you to explore its pages. One of the great anchors of Paul's letter is that Christianity isn't for the religious elite—I promise, the Corinthians will do a great job of backing this up. I warmly invite you, seasoned believer or new explorer, on a journey through this ancient letter.

The old has passed away, behold the new has come.



# SESSION 1 VIEWER GUIDE

## ALL THINGS NEW

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

What do you hope to gain from this study and the time spent together?

Kelly says the gospel is made for real life and that the church of God is meant to thrive in real life. What does that mean to you?

Why do we have such an aversion to admitting weakness? What is Paul's overall message about weakness?

When a relationship becomes painful do you tend to close your heart to protect yourself or keep it open? What was Paul's response to the Corinthians who misunderstood him? How can we learn from him?

When you hear the statement, "Jesus came to make all things new," how do you respond? Why is there such hope in that statement?

From this introduction to 2 Corinthians, what do you most look forward to diving into? Explain.

*Video sessions and Hymns & Hallelujahs available for purchase at [LIFEWAY.COM/ALLTHINGSNEW](http://LIFEWAY.COM/ALLTHINGSNEW)*



## SESSION 2

# THE CHURCH IN A CITY

My friend Kelly is a twentysomething singer/songwriter. She's growing up in the thick of country music land, navigating the weeds of fame while plucking the daisies of getting to be artistic for a living. I'd asked Kelly to be part of a group that would work through the personal study and provide feedback. She obliged and offered great insight. You wouldn't believe how refining the process is for a manuscript when a group of women of all ages and demographics take their minds and the Holy Spirit inside them to the Word. Kelly, Amy, Jessica, Marcie, Julie, Julee, Karen, and Karen (lots of same names) brought their wisdom and sometimes their pushback to the table. What you hold in your hands is all the better for it.

At the culmination of our study, Kelly asked if we could meet for coffee, even though she doesn't drink coffee, poor soul. She had some things she wanted to discuss regarding 2 Corinthians. We jotted a date on the calendar because you don't have to ask me twice to meet you for coffee, conversation, and Corinthians. That's almost too much goodness for one morning! We slid two chairs up to the reclaimed wood bar, because everything in this world is now made of reclaimed wood. (I don't know if you've noticed this. I suppose all this wood in its original state was just claimed wood—people saw a log and claimed it. Now it's reclaimed. In 100 years will everything be reclaimed reclaimed wood? I wonder about these things.)

In some ways, Kelly's mulling over 2 Corinthians yielded more revelation than questions. She'd become acquainted with the problems in Corinth—its lust for power, zeal for social status, penchant for pleasure, vulnerability to deception so

similar to our own—and noticed Paul's message was not only different from the prevailing mantras of the day, but that he actually swam against the current, dodging the culture and all its values that were rushing past him downstream. Paul was headed to a different destination. He was on mission for Jesus. And when your mission is different than what the world pines after, you'll find yourself maneuvering through the oncoming crowds.

"Everything is the opposite!" Kelly said, lifting her tea in the air. "I mean everything Paul says is like the exact opposite of what we're told we're supposed to live for." (Toss in the flash and fame of the music industry, and the opposites become polar.)

I knew what Kelly meant. After nearly a year in this letter, I too felt the inescapable tension between Paul's life and the life of ease and comfort. But Paul champions the paradoxical life of a believer with unfathomable love. Here are just a few of the opposites: Our celebrity industry prizes

youth, beauty, and, in many ways, perfection, while Paul writes about boasting in our weaknesses so Christ can receive the glory. We're taught to be razor-sharp competent so we can claw our way to the top of our businesses, but Paul says our competency exists so we can be better ministers. When someone offends us, we batten down the doors and windows of our hearts so as not to be invaded again. However, to a church

*Paul champions the paradoxical life of a believer with unfathomable love.*

who'd bruised Paul, he returned with both hands on either side of his heart stretching it as wide as it would reach. When we finally get a little authority handed to us we think it's for bossing everyone around, but could it be our authority is for building people up and working for their joy? Paul thought so. Our instincts tell us to hang onto our money so we can spend it on ourselves and have plenty for later, while Paul points to a poor church in Macedonia who wanted to give what little money it had away because the members saw it not as a duty but—get this—a privilege.

No doubt Kelly was onto something. The Christian life is indeed one of paradox. What Jesus holds dear is opposite of what we in our natural states cling to. What struck me about our conversation, though, was that Kelly's acute revelation hadn't left her deflated or guilt-ridden. She didn't come saddened by the text. On the contrary, she was relieved. She found Paul's message remarkably freeing.

She was happy to know she can still love music and write songs and flutter from stage to stage like the cutest warbling morning bird, but she no longer has to do it for the fluctuating approval of humans. Of course, this will be a struggle, but she knows anew that in everything she puts her hand to she can—she must—concern herself with whether she's pleasing Jesus. She need not concern herself with keeping in step with the latest fads when being commended by

Him is the highest praise. He is the One that satisfies. And it won't matter if her career lands her on the grandest stage in NYC or in the choir pew of a country church; however the Lord wants to use her gift will be her joy. And whomever the Lord brings across her path will be her ministry.

Yep, 2 Corinthians is a letter of opposites. A letter about discovering the quiet joys of swimming upstream, despite the hoots and hollers from quick pleasures that zip by us with the current. It's a letter about the adventurous faith of hanging all our hope on God, even though trusting our strength and pride to get us by almost always seems safer and more familiar. It's about an abiding peace at the ocean floor of our souls that oddly doesn't roll in after a visit to the spa, more assets in the portfolio, or a new white kitchen. Instead of having to earn or buy our peace, peace comes when our sins are no longer counted against us because God sent His Son Jesus into the world, who took our sins upon Himself. Paul calls this reconciliation.

As you work your way through 2 Corinthians, be on the lookout for opposites. Note the way Paul unconditionally loves the Corinthians, what he rejoices in, whom he trusts, and what he calls home. Do this, then think about what the world loves, what it celebrates, hopes in, and lays its head upon in the wee hours of the night. As you consider the striking differences, never forget you've been empowered to live beautifully and blatantly set apart because—since Jesus's death and resurrection—the old has gone, the new has come. And last time I checked, old and new are as opposite as they come.

# DAY 1

## A SEEMINGLY UNLIKELY PLACE FOR A CHURCH

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2

Whenever I visit a city I've never been to before, I start Googling it to death. Something about seeing the actual landscape of a place, eating at its restaurants, and strolling its well-known streets make me want to better understand its history and happenings. And, of course, determine what movie stars live there. The same is true when I start studying a book of the Bible. Learning about context and historical placement is vital to gaining a more accurate understanding of the book at hand.

Before we begin reading 2 Corinthians, let's set the stage with a few important elements we'll refer to throughout the study. Reconstructing the time line of Paul's visits and letters to the Corinthians is not without complications, but doing so gives us a good handle on the setting. Paul first visited Corinth and established the church there in A.D. 50-51. We learn from 1 Corinthians 5:9 that he wrote an instructive letter that is now lost. After hearing about significant problems in the church, Paul wrote the letter we know as 1 Corinthians around A.D. 53-54. Closely following that letter, he wrote what is referred to as the "sorrowful letter," also presumed to be lost. This brings us to 2 Corinthians, which Paul wrote in response to hearing the church had a few victories along with several failures that needed to be addressed. We'll become well acquainted with these issues in the days ahead, issues that will feel surprisingly familiar to us 2,000 years later.

**LET'S BEGIN THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER BY LOOKING AT THE FIRST TWO VERSES OF 2 CORINTHIANS. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2.**

*Paul was writing to the church of God at \_\_\_\_\_*

Think of the most culturally electrifying city you've ever visited. You may have memories awash with the arts and sporting events, a shopping spree surrounded by bustling commerce. You may have taken in a play or a movie, or had your senses stirred with ancient paintings or relics while strolling through museums. Perhaps you grabbed a hot dog from a steaming street cart or followed a waiter in a tuxedo to the finest meal your fork has ever pierced—a great city has both frankfurter and filet. You certainly spotted the wealthy being chauffeured about town, possibly at the same time you heard coins tumbling into the cup of the homeless. If you're like my sister, Katie, you spotted a celebrity—she finds them everywhere she goes. (She attributes this to putting on her "famous eyes" as soon as she gets to a popular destination.) Bright lights and garish signs, taxi horns and

### CORINTHIAN CHRONOLOGY:

- A.D. 50-51  
Paul establishes church in Corinth
- A.D. 52  
Writes instructive letter. (1 Cor. 5:9)  
This letter is lost.
- A.D. 53-54  
Writes 1 Corinthians.
- A.D. 54  
Makes "sorrowful visit" to Corinth.
- A.D. 54  
Writes "painful letter" (2 Cor. 2:3-4).  
This letter is lost.
- A.D. 54  
Writes 2 Corinthians
- A.D. 56  
Makes final visit to Corinth

symphonies, violence and class, rich and poor, and everyone in between, trying to find their way in this place we've known since nearly the beginning of time: the city.

You could make the argument that first-century Corinth was the citiest of cities.

When Paul arrived in the early A.D. 50s, Corinth was at the pinnacle of its development. A commercial epicenter of southern Greece, perched on an isthmus (think Seattle) that brimmed with tourists and trade due to its two harbors, Lechaenum and Cenchreae, Corinth was thriving, wealthy, and steeped in a blend of Roman and Greek culture. Tourists and locals could indulge in every good imaginable from wines to linens, olive oil to fresh drinking water, spices and meats, while inhaling the sea breeze rolling in through the ports where merchants and travelers came and went. A destination for world-class sporting events and entertainment drew the masses to this metropolis of approximately 80,000 people with 20,000 more on the outskirts. The ancient city of Corinth boasted everything you could ever want. But as we know: having access to everything we could ever want doesn't always end up being what we thought we wanted.

*The ancient city of Corinth boasted everything you could ever want. But as we know: having access to everything we could ever want doesn't always end up being what we thought we wanted.*

The richness of Corinth's culture had its downside, as do our own modern day cities. Prostitution, slavery, foreign pagan practices, poverty, and sexual perversion of all kinds coalesced within its territory. The term *Corinthianize* as even coined to describe debauchery and moral baseness that certainly didn't originate in Corinth, but was celebrated there. False gods were everywhere. The temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and life, was a central shrine in Corinth. As one put it, Corinth was the "Vanity Fair" of Rome.<sup>2</sup>

**PERSONAL TAKE:** *Given this information, describe what could be surprising about Paul writing to the church in Corinth.*

**TURN TO ACTS 18:1-11 AND READ ABOUT PAUL'S FIRST VISIT TO CORINTH. WE'LL GATHER SOME BASIC FACTS FROM THIS PASSAGE, SO THINK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A REPORTER.**

*What couple did Paul live with and what country had they moved from?*

*What type of work did Paul do to support himself?*

*cut hair  
fish*

*make tents  
all of the above*



What two people groups did he teach in the synagogues?  
Jews and \_\_\_\_\_.

According to verse 8, what happened to many of the Corinthians Paul taught?

How long did Paul stay and teach God's Word to the Corinthians?

- 1 ½ Years
- 2 years
- 6 months
- 12 years

Looking back at the second paragraph of today's lesson, when did Paul first arrive in Corinth? Early A.D. \_\_\_\_\_.

Your Bible may show in red the Lord's direct words to Paul in Acts 18:9-10. Where did the Lord tell Paul He had many people?

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."  
Acts 18:9-10, HCSB

This is a comforting and encouraging word for wherever we live.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** *You may not live in the heart of a major city, but most of us live well within the reach of a city's influence. In the columns below, describe the benefits and obstacles of being a believer in Jesus in a wildly diverse place like "the city."*

BENEFITS	OBSTACLES

One of the reasons I'm passionate about 2 Corinthians is because of how relative it feels at this time in my life and in the culture in which I live. If the church worked in Corinth, it can work in the places you and I inhabit. I admit that sometimes I think our world is too far gone with abuse, racism, and moral depravation. However, if the gospel of Jesus transformed Corinth's prostitutes, arrogantly religious, oppressively wealthy, pagans, farmers, merchants, athletes, slaves, and synagogue leaders (like the one you just read about in Acts 18), then the good news of Jesus Christ can transform

the people of our cities today. And though I'm tempted at times to think that God's people are only found in religious settings, God had His people in Corinth. In the city. Just like He has you and me in the cultural settings we live in.

**READ THE OPENING LINES OF 1 CORINTHIANS 1:2 BELOW:**

**To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:**

*Paul gives an additional description of the believers in Corinth: To those \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ Jesus.*

Hagiazo: to make holy, i.e. (ceremonially) purify or consecrate ... hallow, be holy, sanctify.<sup>4</sup> When God saves us we're purified and set apart for His purposes.

If Paul were writing to a group of monks or nuns you might think, *Okay, they've got a good shot at this holiness, sanctification, purity thing.* But to people in the middle of a wide-open boomtown like Corinth, with no prior history of Christianity, to be seen in God's eyes as holy?<sup>3</sup> (See margin for definition.) **Second Corinthians reminds us that God's church shines most brightly in the darkness rather than in already-lit sanctuaries.**

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** *What specifically about your culture makes it difficult for you to live a holy life? (Don't even think about writing down a generic answer on our first day together. Write what's hard for you in your culture. Be specific.)*

In the days ahead we'll see Paul pursuing God's people with unrivaled fervor. They were a struggling church that had bought into the trends and passions of the environment in which they lived. As one writer put it, "Many of their faults can be traced to their uncritical acceptance of the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the society in which they lived."<sup>5</sup> Uncritical acceptance. I can relate to this. If I'm not alert and aware, I can uncritically accept the prominent whims of the day and hardly realize it.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** *Without a judgmental spirit, how have you seen the Western church at large uncritically accept certain cultural norms that are blatantly unbiblical?*

We'll dig much deeper into Scripture in the coming days, but today I wanted you to understand the context of what we'll be studying. I'm excited to journey with you as we examine together what some have called Paul's most personal letter.

Dear friend, as you embark on this study, know you are not alone. As Paul put it best in his opening words, we're in this together, *with all the saints*.

**PERSONAL RESPONSE:** *I have no doubt the Lord is going to surprise you over the next eight weeks. What is your single greatest hope in studying 2 Corinthians?*

## DAY 2

# THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11

I once held the idea that if I followed the principles laid out for me in Scripture, if I loved God and made solid, biblical choices, I would be blessed with some version of a really good life, void of heartbreak or catastrophe or sickness. As I grew older, I gradually realized that following God didn't guarantee this premium package, this safeness. I'd seen really godly people suffer and read about such believers in Scripture. Still, I somehow felt that if I did my part then God would be obligated to do His: build me the kind of life we covet here in America and protect me from pain. This seemed like such a reasonable expectation.

For in bringing many sons to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God—all things exist for Him and through Him—should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Hebrews 2:10, HCSB

For the record, I do believe obedience yields blessing and that God delights in giving us material and relational gifts, often in response to our following Him. Even still, my understanding of how suffering fit—or didn't fit—into the bigger paradigm of the Christian faith was deficient. The Bible reveals that suffering has its place in our lives, even Hebrews 2:10 explains that Jesus was made perfect through suffering. What I'd missed all those years of pining for what made me feel good and attempting to protect myself from whatever I feared "coming upon me" (in the words of Job) was really quite simple: suffering is part of the blessing.

I hope this brings more relief to you than alarm. The thought of suffering shouldn't thrust a bolt of terror through our hearts because as we will study today, God is especially present in our suffering. But neither should we set out for a life of pain, martyrdom, and victimhood in Jesus' name. We've been around the woe-is-me people in their Gap® sackcloth, and they're painfully not enjoyable. Bottom line, we shouldn't fear suffering, but we don't need to be looking under rocks for it either.

### READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11.

*In verse 3 Paul praises God as the Father of \_\_\_\_\_ and the God of all \_\_\_\_\_.*

*List every positive you can find about suffering in these verses. Take your time, considering even indirect benefits.*

You've already noted that Paul opens his letter to the Corinthians by acknowledging two of God's characteristics that meet us in our afflictions (trouble or tribulations). Notice the impact of Paul's phrase in verse 3, "Father of mercies" (or compassion). Paul didn't say that God is a merciful Father, though He is, rather that He's the Father of mercies. He's the very source and origin of all compassion. He is compassion's first and only fountain—the Father from whom all compassion flows. This is a paradigm shift for the person who sees God as someone who only occasionally taps into His kind side.

Let's consider the original language of the word *mercies* (compassion). The Greek word is *oiktirmos* and is used only five times in the New Testament. It means "Bowels in which compassion resides, a heart of compassion, emotions, longings, manifestations of pity"<sup>6</sup> or "the inward parts."<sup>7</sup> When we look at the definition of this word, we get a strong sense of feeling. According to Scripture, I want you to hear today that the Lord feels for you.

#### **LOOK UP PHILIPPIANS 3:10.**

*Paul's goal was to know the power of Christ's resurrection but he also wanted to share in His sufferings. What benefit came with this? (A specific word is used.)*

#### **TURN BACK AND READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:5.**

*In this passage Paul states that Christ's sufferings overflow into our lives. What do you think this means?*

When Paul talks about the sufferings of Christ spilling over into our lives, he could mean a few overlapping ideas: 1. Sufferings on account of Christ. 2. Sufferings ordained for us by Christ. 3. Sufferings associated with Christ. 4. Sufferings like Christ endured. What I believe is important for us to know is that as believers, we will suffer certain things that are distinct to our association with Christ. Many Christians are suffering severe persecution around the world while others are hurting in lesser, but still painful, ways for their faith. For example, you may have been passed over for a promotion, lost a job, endured ridicule from friends, been betrayed or abandoned, all because of your belief in Jesus. Paul realized there is a certain fellowship that takes place with Jesus in times of suffering because no one knows suffering better than He does. It's part of His territory.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** *How have you become more deeply acquainted with Jesus as a result of sharing with Him in His sufferings?*

I've yet to meet a person who enjoys suffering, but I've met many who've found intimacy with Jesus in the midst of their suffering. There are certain parts of Jesus you just can't know on a path of ease, and once you've tasted that closeness with Him you wouldn't trade it for the smooth course. In addition to experiencing a special fellowship with Jesus (Phil. 3:10), Paul reveals another reason why suffering brings blessing.

*Whenever Christ's sufferings overflow into our lives what overflows out of us (2 Cor. 1:5)? This is so awesome to me!*

In the city of Manaus, Brazil, there's a natural phenomenon called *The Meeting of the Waters*. This is where the Rio Negro and Rio Solimoes meet and form what the Brazilians determine to be the official start of the Amazon River. The Rio Negro is black and looks like a river of Coke®; The Rio Solimoes appears to be flowing with coffee and cream. (These are my best scientific descriptions.) When you sail on this part of the Amazon, you're floating down one grand body of water that's made up of two rivers distinct in appearance, temperature, minerals, and speed. Even though the Negro and Solimoes don't appear to mix for several miles, they are one. And as Christ's sufferings and comfort can also seem incongruent, you will never have one without the other—the sufferings of Christ and His comfort flow together. As Charles H. Spurgeon put it, "when the scale of trials is full, you will find the scale of consolation just as heavy."<sup>8</sup>

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** *As you look back on what you have suffered, how has Christ's comfort met you at every turn? As you consider your response, know that our pain can often cloud our ability to see the goodness of God. So depend on the truth of Scripture.*

*Look back at 2 Corinthians 1:8-9. Though we don't know the specific trials Paul endured:*

*1. Where did they take place?*

*2. What effect did they have on Paul?*

*What reason does Paul give in verse 9 for having gone through these hardships?*

**PERSONAL RESPONSE:** *When has your pain caused you to rely on God instead of yourself (you may be in the midst of this right now)? How has the transfer from depending on yourself to God changed you? What have you learned about your own limitations and about God's inexhaustible, resurrection power? Take some time with this. And if you're not experiencing Him in your suffering, ask Him to help you identify His comfort in your trial.*

*According to verse 10, where does all of Paul's hope lie?*

One of the most beautiful declarations in all of Scripture is found in verse 4, "He comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction" (HCSB). When we traverse through difficulty, it's often hard to see outside of our pain. But we find great purpose in our suffering when we realize our experiences will serve as unique comforts to others going through similar trials.

*Describe a season when someone brought you timely comfort because God had ministered to him or her in a trial similar to your own?*

If we want to be able to comfort others with the comfort we've received from God, we need to be "comfort-able." What I mean is that I've experienced times in my life where I didn't want to be comforted or didn't know how to be, where I was plain mad and determined to sulk under anger's roof. If we find ourselves in a situation where we are inconsolable, unable to be comforted or encouraged, there is a problem. Receiving comfort requires humility and vulnerability before the Lord, open hands that say we don't know it all or have it all and need our Savior.

**PERSONAL RESPONSE:** *Where do you need to be comforted? What's keeping you from pouring out your heart to the Lord and receiving comfort from Him today?*

After working through this study, a friend of mine shared that the phrase, “On him we have set our hope” (2 Cor. 1:10) had at one time been a lifeline for her. She was pregnant with a child whom the doctors were concerned would not survive. In the midst of her pregnancy, she said she “envisioned hanging all my hope on the Lord as if on a hook.” She couldn’t hang her hope on her husband, her other children, the doctors, not even on her precious child surviving. She could only hang her whole life’s hope singularly on the Lord, regardless of what might come. She tenderly shared with our group that her child did not linger long on this earth but her hope in the Lord remains.

*God’s comfort  
is overflowing  
in nature.*

As the Negro and Solimoes rivers flow as one, Christ’s suffering and His comfort run together in our lives, side-by-side. As Christians, we never have to suffer without Christ’s comfort, and I believe there are certain comforts we will never know apart from His suffering. If you are plodding through a trial, perhaps an unbearable one far beyond your ability to endure, draw from God’s comfort that runs straight through the person of Jesus into your life. He promises it in measure to your pain. And when you’re met with God’s consolation, you’ll be eager to bind up the wounds of another person who’s in similar pain because God’s comfort is overflowing in nature. You’ll have more than enough to share.

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SAMPLE

6 SESSIONS

# entrusted

A Study of 2 Timothy

BETH MOORE

 LifeWay  
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# Dedication



Travis and Angela Cottrell,  
my son and daughter-in-law in the faith,

I knew from the start that, if Jesus graced me  
to see this series to a finish, I would dedicate it to you.  
You are second in my heart to my own children  
and there you will stay,  
come rain or shine, until I see Christ's beautiful face.

I don't think the apostle would mind if, on this occasion,  
I borrowed the fitting words he used to describe his beloved Timothy.

*"For I have no one like him."*  
Philippians 2:20, ESV

## LOOK AROUND . . . .

Explore this sample taken from the first week of *Entrusted*.

### HERE'S HOW YOU CAN USE THIS BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR CHURCH OR SMALL GROUP:

- To further biblical literacy among long-time believers
- To encourage community among church members
- As a study for those preparing to share the gospel
- To promote cross-generational mentoring opportunities
- For anyone considering full-time ministry
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# About the Authors



*Beth Moore* is a best-selling book and Bible study author and a dynamic teacher whose conferences take her across the globe. Beth lives in Houston, Texas, where she leads Living Proof Ministries with the purpose of encouraging and teaching women to know and love Jesus through the study of Scripture.

Beth and her husband, Keith, have two adult daughters and three delightful grandchildren. They are devoted to the local church and have the privilege of attending Bayou City Fellowship in Houston, Texas.

Her life is full of activity, but one commitment remains constant: counting all things but loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, the Lord (Phil. 3:8).

*Melissa Moore* has served as research and writing assistant to Beth Moore since earning her M.A. in Biblical Exegesis from Wheaton College in 2007. She has since received her Th.M. in New Testament from Columbia Theological Seminary. She currently resides in Houston, Texas, with a poorly behaved and not-so-suitable companion named Shadowfax the Weimaraner. When she is not working on a teaching or writing project with her mom, she enjoys working part-time on a M.A. in Biblical Languages at Houston Baptist University. She loves the arts, the outdoors, and all things related to Bible and theology.



# About this Study

*entrusted* is designed for both interactive personal study and group discussion. Here are a few suggestions for making your time with the study more meaningful.

To enhance your learning and application of Scripture, the study is written in an interactive format. I encourage you to complete all of the written work in your workbook. This isn't just fill-in-the-blanks. The interactive questions represent the very places where we'd look together in Scripture as we shared a cup of French roast coffee together. Please don't let the word "homework" scare you. The Holy Spirit uses your efforts as you respond to the activities in your own words.

I so wish I could be personally present with you each week in your personal study time and in your group time. This interactive format provides the most personal contact possible until the time we can share that cup of coffee. Then I'll look forward to listening to you as you have graciously listened to me through all these studies. I pray that you will gain as much from this journey as I have. Thank you for the privilege to serve you.

This may be our first series together, and, if so, I pray with all of my heart that this in-depth study and others like it will fan a lifelong flame in your heart for God's Word. Perhaps we've studied together before and, if so, I'm thrilled to tell you that this one earned its own place in my heart. Each series from *A Woman's Heart: God's Dwelling Place* to this one has been used by God to accomplish a distinctive and lasting work in me. The mention of each name stirs up the remembrance of that prevailing revelation.

I won't tell you in advance what God worked in my life through this journey, because the fun of it for me is to process the material along the way with you. When I pen Week One, Day One of any study, I have no clearer idea where we are headed than you do right now. When you get to difficult material, you will see that I am struggling through it, too. When you're convicted, you can be pretty certain I'm squirming, too. I love the uncertainty of what's ahead as long as I'm in the security of God's hands. It's like driving a winding highway in a convertible for the very first time. I want to feel the wind in my face. If you do too, we're going to make good traveling partners.

As we have in the last two Bible studies, we are offering you options. Goodness knows we need a few of those amid frantic schedules and demanding roles.

*You get to choose your own level of participation.*

## **Level 1:** *Participate in the video sessions only*

Through the years I've watched people drop out of weekly Bible study because they couldn't keep up with the homework. Don't think for a moment that if you can't do all of it, you're better off doing none of it. A shorter time in Scripture is far better than none at all. Watch the video sessions even if you can't get your homework assignments accomplished.

**LEVEL 2:** Participate in the video sessions  
+ do the weekly homework assignments

Moving up to level 2 in which you meet with God on the pages of Scripture numerous times each week exponentially increases your experience. When you turn the last page, you will truly know 2 Timothy and the important circumstances surrounding Paul's final letter. If you've got the stamina to do the homework (and you do!), you've got it in you to view the sessions. Keep in mind that many of the larger themes are addressed in the sessions, so try your hardest to view the coinciding ones at the end of each week of homework.

**LEVEL 3:** Participate in the video sessions  
+ do the weekly homework assignments  
+ *handwrite 2 Timothy*

I'm really excited about this level! For the third time in more than 20 years of writing Bible studies, we've arrived at a book of the Bible short enough to invite this exercise. During Session One of this series, and in the homework that follows we'll set the context for the letter. Session Six video will wrap everything up with a final challenge. But in sessions Two through Five, and the corresponding weeks of homework, we'll dig into the actual letter of 2 Timothy. Each time we come to a new segment of the letter, I will ask you to read it and then *handwrite* it in the back of your Bible study book on the pages designed for this exercise. If you don't choose level 3, you'll simply read the portion—without a hint of self-condemnation, I pray. This option is simply available for those who want to take the next step to retain what they're learning.

**LEVEL 4:** Participate in the video sessions  
+ do the weekly homework assignments  
+ *handwrite 2 Timothy*  
+ *read "Next Level with Melissa"*

You might say I'm particularly partial to this level since I'm her mother. I say that with a grin but, while that's true, the real reason we incorporated this level is because you—or people like you—asked for it. Many have written me after a series and asked how they could go even deeper in the material. We first responded to their request with Melissa's articles in *James: Mercy Triumphs*. She's back this time by popular demand.

Woodrow Wilson once said, "I not only use all the brains I have but all I can borrow."<sup>1</sup> Good advice, if you ask me; so once again, I've borrowed my daughter Melissa's brain. And it's a big one. She has far surpassed her mother in formal theological training and the use of original languages, so I've asked her to bring a more academic approach to several of our concepts each week. Please keep in mind that her portions are options and that, stylistically, they are exactly what I asked of her.

Melissa and I know up front that neither of our writings will suit everyone's tastes, but we partner with a deep and sincere desire to serve you more fully. I would gladly have added her name to the cover, but she asked that I refrain. In years past, my daughter Amanda was very involved in the Bible study process as my first reader and editor. These days she has her hands full as mom to my beloved grandchildren and as pastor's wife to a rapidly growing church in Houston. You can know that she joins Melissa and me in serving you through this series as your number one intercessor. We wrote and she prayed.

**LEVEL 5:** Participate in the video sessions

- + do the weekly homework assignments
- + *handwrite 2 Timothy*
- + read "Next Level with Melissa"
- + *memorize 2 Timothy*

Trying to picture some of your faces almost has me tickled. But don't blame me. Remember all those who kept asking for more? Blame them. Beloved, if you commit to all five of these levels, 2 Timothy will live in the marrow of your bones—probably for the rest of your life. You'll find a short tutorial on the *Entrusted* website ([lifeway.com/entrusted](http://lifeway.com/entrusted)) and in the DVD bonus material that may help you if you're interested in this level.

Needless to say, we're not recommending trying to memorize all of 2 Timothy in the five short weeks of this series. The best recommendation for setting your pace is whatever works.

Because God led me to take this challenge, in the process of writing this study I've recited the four chapters of 2 Timothy aloud more times than I can count. I'm not the only one who recited it as the study was underway. I was beside myself with delight when Mike Wakefield, my editor on this project, told me he was memorizing it, too. We have each loved Paul's final letter all the more because God embedded it in our hearts. Not one second you spend on Scripture memory is ever wasted. Think about doing it! Pray about it! Then, some of you, do it!

Okay, friend, which level seems the most doable for you right now?

**1      2      3      4      5**

I'm asking you up front because I'd like to challenge you to go one level above what seems reasonably attainable. If you're willing, stretch yourself one more level! If you're pretty sure you can reach level 1, try stretching yourself into level 2 and see what happens. All you overachievers, keep in mind that higher levels and harder work won't make God love you any more than He already does. Nor will memorizing the letter make us superior to someone else who can barely manage a few sessions. We are secure in Christ and acceptable to God through Him.

We have nothing to lose here but much Scripture to gain if we're game for a challenge. Do only what blesses and not what burdens.

I wish I had a way to express the depth of my gratitude for the privilege to walk with you through a study of Scripture. I was on a walk recently in the woods near our home and a wave of emotion overtook me as I absorbed the reality of another study coming to fruition. I said aloud to Jesus, "How could You be so kind to me? How could You have such grace? Why have You done this?" I will never be able to wrap my mind around His kind of love. His depth of mercy. Jesus pulled me out of tremendous bondage and despair. I come to you with no worthiness of my own but this I promise you, my friend: together we will pursue the One who is worthy of all the glory, honor, and praise the two of us can offer. Let's not wait another moment.



# Introduction

## Dear Fellow Traveler,

On a flight to Miami several months ago, I pulled two slender folders out of my briefcase containing a cross section of letters I'd received in previous weeks. Several of my team members oversee our ministry correspondence, but they keep me in the loop so I don't disconnect from the very people I yearn to serve. Detachment would stick my calling in a coffin and nail it shut. Like most people, I flourish in lively relationships and community, but spending copious hours alone is an occupational hazard all full-time writers have to accept. A simple letter can be like a long arm reaching into the vortex to pull a lonesome sanguine like me back to the sidewalk.

In this case, the sidewalk was flying through the air in a silver cylinder at an altitude of 30,000 feet. Soon I was swept into each sender's story, awed by the ways Jesus customized His signature across the snippets of their autobiographies. As I made my way to the bottom of the stack, I had a "wait a minute" moment. The thought occurred to me how many letters referenced specific ages.

I fanned them out on my tray table from the oldest to youngest and nearly wept.

Elsie was 82. She'd been involved in children's ministry at her church for 69 years. Try to wrap your mind around that kind of faithfulness. She let me know how much she loved studying the Bible and that she still had lots to learn. I knew the feeling. Angelee was turning 40. Jesus had taken her by surprise in the sacred pages and she'd fallen head over heels in love with Him. Courtney was 32. She'd given her heart to Jesus in the 8th grade and made a commitment to serve Him and to show His love to her own flesh and blood. She'd kept her commitment even at the tender age of 14 when her mother passed away. She let me know she'd soon finish up her doctoral work in the field of Biblical interpretation.

Wednesday was 21. She'd been a believer for a while but had never experienced anything particularly traumatic until two weeks earlier when her little brother was struck and killed by a car. God was carrying her through. She wanted me to know. Olivia was 15. She'd just been awarded first runner-up in a beauty pageant she'd endured with grace and integrity by keeping her darling head in the Book of Esther. Sarah was 13. She'd been in daily turmoil with all sorts of doubts and had bought herself the book, *Believing God*. The testimony in her young curly cursive of how God awakened her faith almost unraveled me.

Other writers didn't specify age but the descriptions of their seasons of life filled in the age gaps. Josh had been a pastor for 16 years. In the previous year his wife had forgiven him for a heartbreaking betrayal. Their lives were being sewn back together one stitch at a time. Chris had watched God bring his young bride back to the land of the living after a season of severe depression.

Their backdrops, settings, struggles, circumstances, and writing styles differed dramatically, but each letter, without exception, shared three gorgeously glaring denominators: *Jesus. Scripture. Transformation.*

The blood flows hot in my veins with an ever-intensifying belief in the epic fusion of those three. This is my passion. This is why I've continued to hang on tight to my desk and attempt to write Bible studies while life bucks like a bronco. This is why I have guts enough to say to anyone who will listen, *No matter who you are, where you've been, or what list of demands vies for your time, do whatever you have to do to get with Jesus and study the Scriptures.*

Because the words of Christ are spirit and life.

Because God sends forth His Word with accomplishing power.

Because the Holy Spirit can bring the Scriptures to life in any life.

Because those who let Scripture sink into their bones are transformed.

Because nothing renews our minds like the Spirit of Christ working through the Word of God.

Because God could say your name before He said, "Let there be light."

Because He's got a plan for you that you don't want to miss.

Because you matter on this planet.

And because right now, in this very season, He wanted you and me in this very Bible study. Welcome, my friend. Because Jesus is mighty, miraculous, and merciful, neither one of us will be the same when we turn the last page.

*Beth Moore*

# Group Session One

## WATCH THE VIDEO—DIVINE TRIANGULATION

### INTRODUCTION

Though we won't find the younger man's name anywhere in sight, Paul's last letter to Timothy originates in Acts 14. This chapter will be our preoccupation today.

1. We will establish one enormous goal for our series:

\_\_\_\_\_ of God \_\_\_\_\_  
on \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_  
of \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Note the NIV wording of Acts 14:1. We are going to ask God from the beginning and throughout our series to blatantly \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

How should we communicate our faith?

\_\_\_\_\_ story  
\_\_\_\_\_ story  
\_\_\_\_\_ story

A big part of our effectiveness is our \_\_\_\_\_.

Ministry is the collective works God has called us to do in our lifetime upon this planet for \_\_\_\_\_ .

3. Walking with a \_\_\_\_\_ of effectiveness  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

A launching challenge: Who among us is \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
the power of Jesus could \_\_\_\_\_  
something that has been \_\_\_\_\_ of you \_\_\_\_\_ ?

4. We will deal with \_\_\_\_\_ of others  
all \_\_\_\_\_ .

Be forewarned: Those \_\_\_\_\_ can as  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

5. Five words for the journey:  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

WEEK ONE

Divine  
Triangulation



# Day One

## A TRAIL OF TWO CITIES

**FLASH FORWARD:** *Now the time had come ...* LUKE 1:57

The exact year circled the neighborhood of A.D. 30 with a circumference perhaps as wide as A.D. 33. The English word *thereabouts* seems embarrassingly weak-willed to attach to certain historical events of eternal proportions, but this side of the sky we're forced on occasion to embrace it. Our journey begins by wrapping our fingers around that circular band of time and stretching it into a scalene triangle connecting three diverse cities and three very different lives. History has a remarkable way of jumping to life when we give place and face to time. This will be our first task.

Scalene triangle: a triangle with three unequal sides.

**FIRST, JERUSALEM.** Circle Jerusalem on the map in the margin.

It's half past three in the afternoon in the dead center of the month of Nisan (March-April, according to our calendar). The thick crowd has slowly dispersed. All but one of His closest associates fled early on, most out of fear of guilt by association. Some spectators wandered away in weariness. It takes a long time to watch a person die like that. Perhaps others exited the scene motivated by eeriness, their sandals slapping the rocks with haste amid an ominous midday darkness cloaking the gleaming city of God. In a lightning-quick descent of maddening events, their master, teacher, and miracle worker had been arrested, tried, mocked, slapped, spit upon, and beaten with a blood lust that left Him almost beyond recognition. He was hammered to a cross, gasping for breath for six solid hours until He breathed His last.

And He'd let it happen, too. He'd given Himself over. For years He'd escaped and outwitted His haters. He'd slipped right through crowds. Why didn't He do it this time? He knew He was being betrayed. He'd said it that Thursday night at



supper, and yet He went exactly where His betrayer would know to find Him. Like He'd planned it. Like He'd done it on purpose. The kiss of death smacked the face of the Son of God. By the time the sun slid down the warm back of Jerusalem, His body would be stone cold in a hewn tomb, shut tight with a boulder.

**SECOND, TARSUS.** Circle Tarsus on the map on the previous page, and then draw a line between Tarsus and Jerusalem.

Over 350 miles north of Jerusalem, Hebrews who hadn't made the pilgrimage gathered beneath their roofs by sundown for the high Sabbath of Passover week. They were Jews of the Diaspora scattered far from their ancestral homeland centuries earlier by foreign conquerors and captors. The ground where these Judean seeds took root had not been unkind. The Jews who gathered around Sabbath meals that night were urbanites. This grand city of the Roman province of Cilicia sprouted from the fertile fields at the mouth of the river Cydnus where Alexander the Great once bathed. Fed by the snowy crests of the Taurus mountains north of the city, its crisp river waters spilled into the Mediterranean Sea about a dozen miles south. Hills, fields, a river, and sea: its latitude and longitude marked the map of Asia Minor as a mecca for commercial trade. Tarsus was the celebrated meeting place of Cleopatra and Mark Antony and, by A.D. 30, a land of poets and philosophers. In this city, scholarship was the trophy cheered by spectators and held high in the hands of winners in the competitive game of education. In these pursuits, Tarsus exceeded both Athens and Alexandria according to the ancient Greek geographer Strabo.<sup>1</sup>

Jews in Tarsus were Jewish by blood and belief, Greek by common language, Roman by rule and, select ones, by citizenship.

The soles of the feet in Tarsus were embedded in what has been called “the heart of the Greco-Roman world.”<sup>2</sup> Give that statement pause until that heart gets a pulse. These were bilingual Jews, Hebrew by lineage, covenant, and practice, adapted to Greek and Roman culture. At the risk of overselling the point, they were Jewish by blood and belief, Greek by common language, Roman by rule and, select ones, by citizenship.

A notable young man, about 26 years old in our circle of time, knew his way around that city like the back of his hand. But make no mistake, he would have washed that hand the moment he got home to cleanse himself of unavoidable Gentile smudge. Born and reared on the lush soil of Tarsus, he'd no doubt dipped the sidelocks (Lev. 19:27) of his hair in both the Cydnus and the Great Sea. He'd been a small kid, but a bright one, and from no run-of-the-mill family in the Jewish quarter of the city. His father was a Pharisee and, likely, his father's father, too.

## PHARISEE. What comes to mind when you hear that word?

“The term ‘Pharisee’ means ‘separated ones.’ Perhaps it means that they separated themselves from the masses or that they separated themselves to the study and interpretation of the law. ... They apparently were responsible for the transformation of Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to one of law.”<sup>3</sup> Take a moment to let that sentence sink in. Unlike the Sadducees, they shoved a sharp elbow into the stomach of skepticism. “They accepted all the [Old Testament] as authoritative. They affirmed the reality of angels and demons. They had a firm belief in life beyond the grave and a resurrection of the body.”<sup>4</sup>

The Pharisees “tended toward political conservatism and religious liberalism. They had developed the oral law as a ‘fence around the Torah,’ which included detailed interpretations, applications, and amplifications of the written Scriptures to enable people to obey them properly.”<sup>5</sup> To Pharisees, the way to God was obedience to the law and yet they “were the progressives of the day, willing to adopt new ideas and adapt the law to new situations.”<sup>6</sup>

These insights roll fresh color on the walls of the home where our young man of interest was raised. When his father named him Saul (from the Hebrew *Sha'uwl*, which means *asked for*<sup>7</sup>), few would have pondered why. Saul was the big and bold neon name in the small black print of the ancestral tribe of Benjamin. He was the first crowned head of Israel around 1000 B.C. Never mind that he didn't turn out so well. The Hebrew name was a badge of honor for this up-and-coming urbanite Jew, this native son of Tarsus. His Greco-Roman name was Paulos, meaning *small*. The designation would have no small place later in his life, but in the days his young, yet-to-callus feet clipped those Tarsus streets, it likely meant little more to him than a slight toward his height.

From what you know of Paul through Acts and his letters, how would you picture him?

According to the earliest physical description on record, Saul was “a man of small stature,” but he'd become a towering oak in New Testament history, known to Bible lovers as the apostle Paul. Before we crane our necks upward to the sprawling branches on that tree, we stare downward at his impressive roots.

In this first week, you will see both Saul and Paul used as names for the apostle. Saul was his Hebrew name, while Paul was his Roman name. The first mention of the Roman name is in Acts 13:9, at the beginning of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

“The earliest physical description we have of Paul comes from *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a second-century apocryphal writing that describes the apostle as ‘a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.’ Although written many years after his death, these words may well reflect an authentic tradition about Paul's actual likeness.”<sup>8</sup>



Note the following two-part diagram. The cradle represents Saul's birth and infancy (estimated around A.D. 4). The second image represents him as a grown young man, most likely in his mid- to late-twenties at the time of Christ's crucifixion (around A.D. 30-33).

Search the references underneath the diagram and note every piece of biographical information pertaining to Saul before the crucifixion of Christ. Label each fact below the figures based on where they make the most sense to you in general chronology. In other words, would you relate the information to his birth/infancy (i.e., the city where he was born) or to who Saul had become by his young adulthood? Underline your phrases to indicate facts based on solid Scripture. Leave ample space between the two figures for the additions you will make toward the end of our lesson.



PHILIPPIANS 3:4-5 • GALATIANS 1:14 • ACTS 21:39 • ACTS 22:2-3 •  
ACTS 22:27 • ACTS 23:6 • ACTS 26:5

Peruse the biographical sketch you've drawn from Scripture and labeled on the diagram. Do any of those pieces of information carry fairly strong implications about what Saul might have been like?

For example, I wore wires on my teeth for 12 years of childhood. From that one biographical fact you could rightly assume my mouth was a mess. But if you further assumed I inherited that gruesome overbite, you'd be mistaken. The truth is, I tripped and fell face-first into a coffee table when running full

blast to my big brother when I was five. Drawing reasonable implications from factual information can wrap skin around a skeleton in a character study. Likewise, plausible theories can stick some muscle between the skin and bones and give history's corpse a moment's mobility. Both are valid aspects of a study experience as long as we keep them categorized and don't confuse them with facts.

With these rules of engagement in mind, if any of Saul's biographical facts on your diagram carry reasonably strong implications, draw a dotted line from them to a blank space in the margin and jot down the possibility followed by a question mark. The dotted line and question mark will differentiate what is theoretical from what you underlined earlier as Scriptural.

Done? Excellent job. Flip back to Acts 22:2-3 and read it once more. Did you catch Paul's reference in verse 3 to "this city" earlier? Follow your fingertip back to Acts 21:17 to identify what city he meant. There you will find the bold line between the first two cities in our triangle of three. There in the Holy City, 355 miles south of Tarsus, Saul's sandals found full traction.

Let's trace the path that took him there. Based on common Jewish practices in an orthodox home around the first century, picture this: Saul would have recited Deuteronomy 6:4-9 before the age the rest of us were in preschool. Through constant repetition of the *Shema*, the Jews reminded themselves of the chief aim of God's chosen people: instruction in the words and ways of *Hashem*, the One they called *The Name*. The little boy, Saul, would soon have begun memorizing Psalms 113-118. By five years of age, he would have begun reading Scripture. By six, he was under a rabbi's instruction in Tarsus. By ten, he was in the classroom throes of oral law. By thirteen, he'd come of age as a son of Israel and was responsible for knowing and living the 613 *mitzvot*, commandments derived from the Hebrew Bible. By fifteen, small Saul was in tall training to become a rabbi.

Return to your diagram and label these in the space between the cradle and the young man. Omit underlining them since they are not stated clearly in Scripture, but they are well established enough by historians of ancient Jewish tradition to forgo the question marks.

Finished? Okay. We have now arrived at the point when young Saul, around thirteen to fifteen years of age, having advanced far beyond his peers and slacked the jaws of his teachers, transfers to Jerusalem to ultimately study under the most renown rabbi of the day, Gamaliel. This is where we will pick up tomorrow.

Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9**

Our own biographies are still underway. They are subtotals—bits and pieces of our stories vulnerable to recalculation with every next ordeal.

Do you feel like yours is under recalculation as you begin this series?  
If so, in what way?

We are a  
holy collision  
of the natural  
and supernatural,  
sparks constantly  
flying.

Our stories are woven inextricably and often indiscernibly into the thick of our DNA where, to our eyes, the line between what we decided and what was decided for us is a blur. We are a holy collision of the natural and supernatural, sparks constantly flying. We are complicated marvels of genetics, relationships, experience, circumstance, age, education, talent, giftedness, intellect, personality, memory, and physicality. We are dust and spirit handcrafted by a Creator, known and fully understood by Him alone.

So were the men and women on the pages of Scripture. Let's welcome the Holy Spirit to huff and puff warm life into the print and rescue us from thinking complicated thoughts of ourselves while making mannequins of the mortals in Scripture. This process begins for us with a young man named Saul, the bright star of his class, before he'd quite seen the light. So happy you came along.

As you close today, share what brings you to your side of this page.

# On Reading Scripture

During my growing-up years around our house, Mom used to say, “The Bible isn’t just any book.” I like to think about the ways in which the Bible differs from other books—how it is a book, but how it far surpasses them all too. To me, the Bible is wild and mysterious. As we read Scripture, guided and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we encounter Jesus Christ. I believe there is real power in engaging this text and that it uniquely energizes us for the work God has given us to do in the world.

Since you and I don’t know each other just yet, let me give you a little insight. Sometimes my adult self gives people the impression that I am a “natural student” (their words, not mine—that would be embarrassing!). Although I have, over time, made a decision to dedicate myself to being a lifelong student of Scripture, I don’t think it’s my nature at all.

I wasn’t a bookish kid. I studied for a test at intermittent stoplights while driving to school. Frankly, I preferred higher impact sorts of things. I was the lone girl playing kickball or home-run derby with the squirrely neighborhood boys. I won the “Miss Fitness” award in fifth grade. Reading wasn’t exactly the sport I was looking for. So, to set the record straight, I’m not a natural student at all. I am simply and utterly captivated by the Bible.

It is an absolute testimony to the awesomeness of Scripture that someone who hated Spanish and French as much as I did would spend the past decade learning Greek and Hebrew.

I have a vivid memory of the first time I sat down of my own volition with a Bible. It was during the summer of my fifteenth birthday, on a day when no one else was home except me. I remember the state of my heart that day. I was crushed. And not because someone else had crushed me. I had done something stupid. I realized, as much as my adolescent self could, my own capacity for destruction. I felt completely alone and ashamed. That day, I recalled the words of a verse that is pretty well known to most of us in the church: “You will

seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13, ESV). I wrote to God in my journal and told Him that I was seeking, whatever that meant, and I hoped to find Him, if He even existed.

Then I literally just opened up the Bible at random and pointed at a line. My best recollection is that my finger fell on some verses either in Numbers or Deuteronomy because I remember tassels being involved. All I can really say is that during the process of reading those few pages, something happened. I had an encounter with God. N. T. Wright suggests that Scripture “is one of the points where heaven and earth overlap and interlock.”<sup>1</sup> That is a beautiful thought, isn’t it? In those earliest days, reading the Bible was mostly about me; I had no sophisticated method. And there was a grace for it. At first I didn’t really know how the parts fit in with the whole, but I went back for more, time and time again. I felt like the Bible had this mysterious way of reading me and perhaps even changing me. I knew even then that I needed a lot of changing.

Sometimes we read the Bible because we’re desperate. We pick up the Psalms and read:

*“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (Ps. 139:9-10, ESV).*

Invoking those words with the psalmist helps us get through the day, illuminating the darkness in front of us. But other days we pick up the Scriptures and read with just as much zeal purely because we’re part of the Bible’s grand narrative. The God we worship is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Deborah, Isaiah, Jonah, Micah, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Jesus, Paul, Junia, Phoebe, and John, the beloved disciple. When we engage this book we begin to lift up our eyes and gaze at something cosmic God is doing that surpasses our own generation. His

work of redemption and renewal spans centuries and civilizations. When we read this text, we are called to play our part in the drama of redemption.

It’s worth stating that Christians don’t worship the Bible by any means, but we believe there is tremendous power in it. We believe it is the revelation of God. We read the Bible because we need an encounter with God; we need to hear His words. These days we are always reading words—scrolling Twitter, reading emails, text messages, and the pretty Instagram quotes. We want quick inspiration. Reading Scripture, however, is slower, quieter work. It takes time, patience, and attention, but if we’re looking to nourish our souls, nothing can compete with it.

Not long ago I was at a retreat where a well-known poet challenged us to memorize poems. Someone in the crowd asked him to explain why. He said, “So you will have them when you need them.” I get that. I feel the same way about Scripture. I am not talking about memorizing Scripture, but reading it. Really reading it. More importantly, allowing it to read us. Sometimes we don’t know Scripture has taken root in us until we realize, in light of a particular circumstance, it was there, written on our hearts, preparing us to navigate the moment. That particular word was alive in us and changed the way we acted or reacted in that impossible situation. It brought us hope in a moment of soul-shaking despair. We were also able to pass it along to someone else who needed it. And it impacts us in more subtle ways, too. We find we’re more content and satisfied than we were before, though our circumstances haven’t improved at all.

*We are encountering Jesus when we read this text and over time, despite what we originally thought, we are making it; the Word of God is sustaining us.*

## Day Two

# MEET THE TEACHER

**FLASH FORWARD:** *I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today.* ACTS 22:3

We've dedicated Week One to constructing a scalene triangle between three different cities to connect three different lives in one loose circle of time.

How many cities have we accrued so far? \_\_\_\_\_

By the end of Day One, we established the first link between them.  
What was it?

I've steered you wrong if I've left you picturing Saul's entire childhood consumed with religious training. Jewish fathers were also responsible for teaching their sons a viable trade to earn a living. To do otherwise, according to an ancient Jewish saying, was to train his son to be a thief.<sup>9</sup>

**ACTS 18:3 PEGS SAUL'S TRADE.** (Forgive me. I can't resist a pun to save my life.) What was his trade?

Tarsus was known all over Asia Minor for tents composed of ebony hides and woven coats of long-haired goats native to the Taurus mountains. Saul's tent making was fund-raising to support what he loved most. And what Saul loved most was studying, articulating, interpreting, reciting, instructing, and debating the Hebrew Scriptures and oral traditions. A prodigy of rumination, he could gnaw a scroll like a bone.

The eyes of the pupil would have been wide with wonder the first day of class with the great Gamaliel. The name of this acclaimed rabbi shows up twice in the New Testament, both times in the Book of Acts (5:34; 22:3). We saw the latter reference in our previous lesson straight from Paul's own mouth. Glance up at today's Flash Forward for a reminder. Let's camp on the first reference to him in Acts 5:34. For now, please read the one verse only, and, after we take a moment to applaud it, we'll go back and consider the context.

**WANT TO LEARN MORE?**

Visit [LifeWay.com/Entrusted](http://LifeWay.com/Entrusted)

SAMPLE



# REDEEMED

GRACE TO LIVE EVERY DAY  
BETTER THAN BEFORE

---

ANGELA THOMAS-PHARR

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## LOOK AROUND . . .

Explore this sample taken from the first week of *Redeemed*.

### HERE'S HOW YOU CAN USE THIS BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR CHURCH OR SMALL GROUP:

- As a foundational Bible study for new believers
- To further biblical literacy among long-time believers
- To pray through the Psalms with the 40 Days of Prayer guide
- To break down complex spiritual concepts into easy-to-comprehend ideas

VISIT [LIFEWAY.COM/REDEEMED](http://LIFEWAY.COM/REDEEMED) FOR MORE INFO OR TO ORDER.



# INTRODUCTION

Hello dear friends,

A couple of years ago, my son, Grayson, spent the summer serving alongside a ministry in South America. Sometime before he left, our family was having a pretty typical kitchen-counter discussion. I'm sure there was some random philosophical question, with a little science, math, theology, and some mama-Bible-quoting thrown in.

I have no idea where our discussion was headed that day, but I think it was something about differing perspectives on Christian worldview. After a while, Grayson said he looked forward to discussing similar things with the people he would be serving in South America. From the little I knew about where he was going, I didn't think he was going to meet many people anxious to discuss worldviews. I told him, "Baby, I hate to disappoint you, but I don't think most of the people you're going to meet will give a rip about any of this. They have a heart problem caused by a sin problem. They just want to be happy and have no idea why they're miserable or lonely or scared, or why they keep living they way they do. God is sending you to tell them Jesus is the answer. His forgiveness is the way. They need to know the very real, very present love of God to redeem their lives. They need the most important thing!"

That's kind of how I feel about this study. We could spend our time working through a hundred different redemption details, but knowing more about being redeemed is not the most important thing. The actual, ongoing transformation of a life being redeemed by God is the most important thing.

So here's what this study is about and what I hope you gain:

Your life being redeemed and continuing to be redeemed until you are home with God in heaven

A biblical understanding of what it means to be redeemed

The ability to explain being redeemed to someone who doesn't know God, and the confidence to invite them to be redeemed because of what He has done for you

A beautiful, grace-filled walk with Jesus Christ

A group of friends who are being redeemed alongside you.

That's exactly why we've changed up the format with this study. I'm trying to do everything I can with words on a page, to connect your very real, everyday life with the very, real presence and power of God. Here's all I know: When those two things intersect, lives are going to change. Healing will happen. Prayers will be answered. You will know God even more intimately as your Redeemer. Your life will give evidence of being redeemed. And you will tell others what God has done.

Last year, our family committed to 40 days of prayer. Our 40 days wasn't anything fancy or hard, just an individual commitment to be intentional about praying every single day. We began with empty prayer journals and asked God what He wanted us to pray about in those days.

Because our family's 40 days were so profound and powerful, and because a 6-week Bible study has 42 days from start to finish, this study includes 40 days of prayer. In addition to praying each day, I'm also hoping you'll join us in reading through the Book of Psalms and meditating on the verses. Check out "40 Days: The Psalms, Meditation, and Prayer" on page 188 for more info.

I am praying this is not a sweet, little sugar-coated Bible study. I'm praying for fire. *Lord God, set our hearts ablaze!* I'm praying for God's great redemption truth to collide head-on and full-force with your greatest need. If God does what I believe He wants to do, some things in your life and mine are getting ready to change for good. Being changed for good doesn't mean every step along the way will be easy, or that every truth will make you feel warm and fuzzy. But God has made a covenant with us that a life being redeemed is the better life. May we long for God's better. May these weeks become a life-changing encounter with God. And when this book is finished, I hope God has begun something inside your soul that doesn't end. You want to keep reading His Word. You want to keep praying in His presence. You want to keep being redeemed.

If I were sitting across from you right now, I'd lean in and say,

*My new friend, you are truly known and precious to God. Please don't be afraid or intimidated by His holy love. God did not bring you to this study to condemn you. He brought you here to speak to you and to help you. God made each one of us creative, unique, beautiful, and interesting. And by His grace, you and I can still become all our Father dreamed we will be:*

An authentic woman who bears  
His image

One who is kind-hearted and  
confident, not passive or fragile

An influencer who leads without  
pretense or manipulation

A dreamer who runs toward her  
dreams without striving

Doing the work that helps us grow,  
yet living in contentment along  
the way

Intentionally making art with the  
life we've been given

Becoming wise and peaceful

Loving and gentle

Humble in heart

Grateful

Redeemed.

Welcome to *Redeemed*.

With love and gratefulness,

*Angela Thomas-Pharr*

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**WHEN  
LOVE  
MAKES  
A  
PROMISE**

## PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS

# I CAN'T

Hello, my friend.

Sometimes, when a person wants something to change, she'll think about it, talk about it, read about it, cry about it, and pray about it. They might journal about it. Download an app about it. Make a list about it. Go see a counselor about it. Sign up for a class about it. Put reminder notes on the mirror about it. Find an accountability group about it. Graph a chart about it. Beat themselves up about it.

And then one day, they just forget about it.

Until they think about it again. And the string is pulled that spins the crazy-maker top into circles all over again. Only the next time, it's always faster.

The Lord knows we have all tried to change some things about ourselves. We've tried to help other people change their lives. We've even jumped in to help change the world. A lot of us have tried and tried, with very little real change to show for all these circles. And now, most everybody I know is tired.

Maybe you know this. When you are tired and your spirit is heavy, the heart begins to mumble the saddest word: *Whatever*.

I may not know many things, but spinning in circles, weariness, and mumbling—I could teach a master class in those. You see, I have longed for spiritual and emotional maturity; to improve myself and my habits; to have greater discipline; for quick obedience when the Holy Spirit leads; to be a woman ever-increasing in wisdom, patience, and grace, who inwardly and outwardly is being changed and redeemed.

And the truth is God has moved powerfully in my life. But mercy, I could sit down and cry over all the times I abandoned His power, having taken two steps forward and then turned around to run half a mile back. Too many years have been wasted spinning in circles, going nowhere.

*Maybe you know something about spinning in circles too. How would you fill in this blank?*

*I've given up trying \_\_\_\_\_.*

See if you can relate to this:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

**ROMANS 7:15,18b-19**

Can I tell you how it humbles me to open my Bible and read those words? We rarely encounter that kind of vulnerability, and, yet, the apostle Paul recounted with such transparency his own inability to change. Then, in verse 24, we can feel the agony and downright hopelessness in his words.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

**ROMANS 7:24**

I don't know how you arrived at this study. I don't know anything about your life so far, but I imagine if the truth were told, somewhere inside, a part of you is asking, maybe even crying, "Who will deliver me?"

*Who will deliver me from my pain? My regret? My habits? My choices? My secrets? My sin?*

*Who will deliver me from these crazy circles? And the wasted time? And the weariness? And the loneliness?*

*Who will deliver me from . . . whatever?*

Okay, were some of those questions a little deeper than you were ready to go? Like, it's the first day of a new Bible study, and you were just gonna practice sitting down with all your stuff and warming up to the whole idea of whatever this *Redeemed* is going to be.

Honestly, I've been worried about jumping in too fast. I want you to know your heart is safe here in this study. You will never turn one of these pages and get a spiritual-shaming from me. I will never set you up to be emotionally manipulated.

I want to earn your trust, mainly because I want you to give these weeks more than just your time. I want you to go all in. Wholeheartedly and devoted. Not to me, but to God's truth. Maybe you're already feeling like you're here for a reason, even if you haven't had time to think about it yet. For all those reasons we don't yet know, the Holy Spirit would not let me dilly-dally with your heart today, put us on a slow train, or help you spin more circles going nowhere.

Here's is my goal for us: When you and I finish the last day of this book, not only will we know our Redeemer and His plan called redemption, we will be experiencing His very real and substantial redemption in our own lives. We will be redeemed. And our lives, character, relationships, and callings will continue being redeemed.

I didn't come to play. Not with God's truth, nor with your heart. So would you picture me standing beside you—with the truth of all my insecurities, struggles, and flaws—wholeheartedly and honestly asking, *Who will deliver us from ourselves? Who will stop us from staying the same? Who will keep us from becoming modern-day scoffers? I am complacent. And inconsistent. And unworthy. I am all things I don't want to be. Who will deliver me?*

The apostle Paul's soul released its desperate cry, "Who will deliver me?" and immediately, I mean, very-next-sentence immediately, his heart knew the answer.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

**ROMANS 7:25**

You and I are doing this study together because we both need to be delivered from ourselves. Even with our diversity of cultures and opinions, I bet we could agree on a couple of things. We both want to become the best possible version of who we were created to be. And we both want to live the best possible version of the life we've been given.

In A.D. 495, Augustine wrote that most people just want a happy life.<sup>1</sup> Nothing about the human spirit has changed. But here's the thing: The deep ruts I've made spinning circles serve no purpose except to prove that the life I long to live and the woman I long to become will not be created by my own hands. I can't. I can't make the life or the person I dream of being happen. I've tried. Lord knows I've tried. I desperately need someone to come and rescue me. I need someone to shape me, reshape me, lead me, walk with me, and take me the rest of the way home.

As I just typed those words, that old heavy feeling of discouragement wanted to come in and sit with me like it's done so many times before. But there was no room beside me today because, like Paul, I remembered the most glorious truth: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We have a Redeemer, and we shall be redeemed.*

Would you open your Bible and start reading Romans 7:15 until the end of the chapter? Paul took a little inventory of his great need. Are you ready to start this thing strong? And vulnerable? And honest?

What about your great need? Finish this question for God with some of your own personal needs.

*Who will deliver me from \_\_\_\_\_?*

Wait! Don't close your Bible yet. Paul isn't finished with us. Find Romans 8:1, and fill in the blanks below,

There is therefore now \_\_\_\_\_  
for \_\_\_\_\_ who are in Christ Jesus.

### **ROMANS 8:1**

Do you see the beauty of what just happened? Romans 7 reads like someone shouting, "I can't!"

You have to believe the very minute Paul wrote those vulnerable words of confession, the heaviness of old despair wanted to hold him down and keep shaming him. But, bless God, Paul did not go down that day. He remembered, "Jesus Christ, our Lord, is my Deliverer! I belong to Jesus now. This struggle cannot keep shaming me. Jesus took my condemnation to the cross. And there is therefore now no condemnation for me."

No matter your struggles. No matter your failures. No matter how stinking awful your track record, if you belong to Jesus Christ, "there is therefore now no condemnation."

### **PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS**

Sometimes we believe we can't because we never have. Maybe you've never had the time to be intentional about reading through an entire book of the Bible, thinking about what God is saying to you, and then spending consistent time in a conversation with Him, called prayer. It's okay if your first thought about all this is, *I can't*.

In today's study, as I began to confess, *I can't*, to God, it was like a flood-gate opened, and all my *I can't's* came pouring out. Where are you feeling the stress of *I can't* in your life today? Turn those into prayer. Let the gates of your heart swing open. God wants to come in.

*Oh God, I can't . . .*

## PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS

# GOD CAN

If your life is like most, one of the first things you're feeling is, *I just can't do this study right now*. Here are some reasons you may feel like you can't continue:

- The timing is probably crummy.
- You are not physically or emotionally rested. Actually, you may find yourself smack dab in the middle of the most exhausting season of your life.
- You're in this alone. Not one friend has signed up to do this. No one in your family is on board. You just don't have any support.
- You're just not feeling it. Whatever "redeemed" is, it doesn't sound very exciting. You want to feel more excited.
- There are a lot of extra things going on in your life right now. And the kids, they're so busy.

*Maybe I missed something, so help me out. List two more reasons why you can't commit to the next 40 days.*

So there you go. My five, plus your two. You should have a pretty strong list of reasons to close the book. Now you have it all down in black and white: *you can't*.

Can I tell you something?

- The timing will never get better. Not when you finish school. Not when you're married. Not when the kids are grown. Not when you retire. Never.
- You could wait until you're rested, but how long has it been since that last happened?
- The people who truly love you may never be able to support you in the ways you long to be supported. How many more years will that keep you from beginning?



- Feeling excited about something is rarely a good measure of value. I would love for you to feel excited. I actually believe those feelings may show up in the weeks to come, but then again, maybe not.
- Everything in the world that can fall on your head to distract you has probably already started falling. If it's any consolation to you, everything is falling here too.

Here's why I'm walking us through all of this. I desperately want us to begin this study in truth—to take an honest inventory of our hearts; the very real, everyday lives we lead; and the condition of our souls. If God has planned to show up in your life with the power to redeem, the first thing I am expecting you to face is resistance. We are not wackado people, so rest assured, any resistance you face will be rational, logical stuff. There will be 100 good reasons for you not to make this commitment right now.

*Let's press in a little further. Would you close your eyes for just a few minutes? As you do, will you think about one thing you know you cannot do? That's right. Something in your life you're giving up on. One thing you are sure you cannot do. We're not in a hurry, so don't skip this. Sit as long as you need, until you have it.*

Do you need God? Are you ready to search for Him? And fight against resistance to get to Him? If it's possible to fall in love with God, do you want to really love Him? If a woman can be changed by His power, do you need to be changed? If God can be your friend, do you want Him to be yours? Are you ready to hear God say, *Oh baby girl, I know you can't. But I can.*

God can.

Earlier we said every one of us needs a deliverer. Like Paul in Romans 7, our weary souls shout to the world, *I CAN'T. I can't do the very thing I want to do. And try to do. And dream of doing.* What I want you to know today is that the God of glory knows your great need, and He has already left heaven to help you.

*You.*

God left heaven to save you, to heal you, and to redeem you. He knows your struggles, your vulnerabilities, and your pain. He sees how you keep spinning in circles, revisiting the same places, disappointing the same people, listening to the same lies. The old patterns. The insecurities. The stupid habits. The addictions. All the ways you keep proving you can't improve, and you can't get unstuck. He knows you cannot change yourself.

And that has always been the point. You can't.

But God can.

You and I are not the first people to declare, *I can't*. Long before us, there was a Red Sea and the walls of Jericho and a lion's den and a stone rolled in front of a grave. And the people who needed God surely cried to heaven, *I can't*.

Here is the sweet mercy: The God of heaven hears when we cry, *I can't*. And even more amazing to me, He answers. The Bible says the love and mercy of God toward us never changes, so that when a desperate woman calls to Him, God stoops to her, moves closer to her, and answers her.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;  
you shall cry, and he will say, "Here I am."

**ISAIAH 58:9**

Every time we say, *I can't*, the Bible has already declared, *God can*.

I believe God wants to begin responding to you this very day. We're not waiting until Week 5 to get closer to Him. Do you need God today? Then tell Him. Really take the time to tell Him. Bow your head now, or write your prayer out, but go ahead and tell Him that you need Him.

*Maybe you long to finally believe God is real. Tell Him.  
Maybe you want to feel His presence with you. Ask Him.  
Maybe you want a better relationship with Him. Say that.*

Being redeemed is about being changed. No one can be redeemed in their own strength or by their own actions. If we are going to live as redeemed women with lives that keep being redeemed, there is only one answer. Each one of us needs a Redeemer.

We can't. Oh mercy, we really and truly can't. But hallelujah and praise be to God, He is our Redeemer, and He can.

Why does God want you to know He can be your Redeemer? Because He loves you.

He. Loves. You.

**How close is God to you right now? Here's what the Bible says:**

The LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

**JOSHUA 1:9**

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

**PSALM 23:4**

The LORD is near to all who call on him.

**PSALM 145:18**

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

**ZEPHANIAH 3:17**

Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

**MATTHEW 28:20b**

He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

**HEBREWS 13:5**

The theology of God's love and redemption is a really big deal, and I can't wait for us to know more about it. But for today, here's where we need to land:

When MY GREAT NEED accepts GOD'S GREAT LOVE, **REDEMPTION BEGINS.**  
**I CAN'T. HE CAN.**

God did not design us to spin in circles, staying the same, only more frustrated and discouraged with every passing year. We were made to grow and change. God's power to redeem—and keep redeeming—our lives is the means by which we are meant to grow and mature. You can try to dig down to find your bootstraps all you want, but God has so much more in mind for you and me.

Are you ready for God to do greater things in your life? Are you ready for redemption? Will you make a wholehearted commitment to our next 40 days together?

### **PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS**

Tomorrow we begin our 40 days of intentional time with God. If that sounds a little intimidating, let me put your mind at ease: There aren't any hard-and-fast rules about this. We all just need a little nudge sometimes. In the next 40 days, I'm hoping some of us begin spending consistent time with God, some recover the intimacy we used to have, and all of us find our time with the Lord sweeter than we've ever known.

Here's the goal: We're gonna read through the Book of Psalms and pray for the next 40 days. In a row. Even when you don't feel like it. And yes, I'm thankful to report, there is grace for puny, whiny-baby praying.

Here's what I'm expecting when we're through: you will never want to be away from God's Word or time with Him in prayer again.

## DAY 1

BEGINNING  
WITH PRAYER

Welcome to our first day of prayer. Day 1. Launch day. Go day. We're rollin' day.

*One of these days* is finally today.

I've been so excited about adding 40 days of prayer to this Bible study, I could burst. And then, at the very same time, I've been kind of nervous. Nervous because, *What if I'm wrong about adding this? What if people don't want to pray for 40 days? What if doing a Bible study and praying for 40 days is too confusing? Or too much? Or too hard? What if this becomes the smallest attended Bible study ever?* You know, I'm just over here in my house trying to go where God leads. I haven't taken a poll or anything. Actually, I haven't even asked anybody if they think I should add 40 days of prayer. I'm afraid they'll smile politely. So, with zero guarantees, I'm just going for it. We're praying for 40 days. Boom.

That declaration just sent me to my knees.

And it forces me to trust the Holy Spirit. You see, I can jump up and down, type in ALL CAPS, make teaching videos, post personal messages, write blog posts, and engage social media until we're all sick of me, but I cannot make one person engage her heart. I am forced to trust God because I can't get in my car and come over there and make you pray. I'm not assured anything I say or write in these pages will move your heart toward prayer. Maybe you signed up to watch some videos and fill in some blanks in this book, but this prayer thing? You're not sure. It might be too much to ask.

Here's why this matters so much.

A Bible study about being redeemed is awesome! We are going to learn some stuff! Big stuff! Smart, Bible-girl stuff! But here's what grabbed a hold of my heart and won't let go. What if this happens? What if you are doing the *Redeemed* study, and your life starts *being redeemed*?

Boom.

40 DAYS OF PRAYER  
STARTS NOW!

**The power of prayer has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see mighty wonders of Divine grace and power wrought, in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let the whole church answer God's standing challenge "Call to Me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great and mighty things which though knowest not" (Jer. 33:3).<sup>2</sup>**  
**J. HUDSON TAYLOR**

*I can't do that.* You already know you can't do that. But God can. As a matter of fact, He's been waiting for you to be here.

Prayer puts us in the presence of God. Entering into a conversation with God. Listening to God. Responding to God. Prayer is the link between having head knowledge about God and the soul that experiences the reality of God. In this study, prayer will be the difference-maker for all of us. The next 40 days will either be the time we learned some more "stuff" about God, or they will be the days we personally experienced the presence and power of God in our very souls.

I want us to get everything we can get while we're here. And if God allows, these days will only be the beginning for all of us. I can't make you pray, so I'm just praying that you'll pray. I'm inviting you to pray, but mostly, I'm trusting God, the only One with the power to persuade you.

## **BEING REDEEMED**

What in the world does *being redeemed* mean? *Redeemed* is one powerful word, but *being redeemed* is not just one thing in the Bible. There's a lot more explaining to do, but for the sake of beginning with the basic Bible truth, being redeemed involves three distinct parts of the Christian life:

The moment you believe Jesus died to save you,

*You are redeemed.*

As you live the rest of your life growing as a follower of Christ,

*You are being redeemed.*

When you die and go to heaven,

*You will be fully and finally redeemed.*

A lot of theology and some technical words are involved, but ultimately, *being redeemed* is about *being changed*. When you first believe in Jesus, also known as the day of your **salvation**, *you are redeemed*. On that day, the Bible says your standing with God is immediately changed, you are given a new identity, and the Holy Spirit comes to live in your soul. A Christ-follower (a Christian) is changed from death to life, dark to light, lost to found. You go from a stranger to God—to a daughter of the Most High King.

*Based on what you already know, list some of the immediate things that change when someone places his or her faith in Jesus.*

From the day of believing until we arrive in heaven, you and I live the Christian life with a new ambition—to be conformed to the image of Christ. The process of the old woman I have been, being changed into the likeness of Christ, is the ongoing work of *being redeemed*. This process is also known in the Bible as **sanctification**.

For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

**ROMANS 8:29 (HCSB)**

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

**2 CORINTHIANS 3:18**

*How have you seen someone being changed as they continued to follow Jesus? (Maybe that person was you.) List a few examples.*

And then one day, hallelujah, the journey to heaven will be over. Upon a believer's death, she is immediately taken into the presence of God, where she is *finally and fully redeemed*. That means being fully remade into the image of Christ. Fully in the presence of the Lord. This eternal change is called **glorification**.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

**PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21**

There are three unique phases in our redemption, and each phase of being redeemed involves being changed:

**SALVATION:** We are *changed* from unbeliever to believer.

**SANCTIFICATION:** We continue *being changed* into the image of Christ.

**GLORIFICATION:** We are *eternally changed* into the likeness of Christ.

Since you are still reading these words on earth, at this very moment, you can only be one of two places. On your life time line, you are either pre-salvation or post-salvation. Either you do not believe in Jesus or you believe. You are either unredeemed or redeemed. And in case you are wondering, God never uses vague words like *sorta* or *kind of* to describe our position before Him. The redeemed have made a certain decision; the unredeemed have not.

This Bible study is about two things:

- 1. MAKING A REDEEMED DECISION**—being changed into a follower of Jesus Christ.
- 2. MAKING A REDEEMED JOURNEY**—being changed into His image.

It's about becoming *the* redeemed, who are being redeemed constantly. And both of these things require you to choose. God will provide the power for both, but the choice is always and only yours. In just the same way, prayer is how we connect our lives to God's power, but praying is also your choice. You can choose not to. But I'm praying something specific is stirring inside of you right this moment, a flicker of hope in your soul. Will you give hope 40 days? 40 real, honest days? Will you commit to 40 days of prayer? Let's mark it down with the dates and your signed pledge:

*Today, \_\_\_\_\_, I am beginning 40 days of  
prayer. The date of the 40th day will be: \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I long to be redeemed.*

*Sincerely committed, \_\_\_\_\_*

## READ AND MEDITATE

Today, we'll begin reading and meditating through the Book of Psalms. In the back of this book, you can check out "40 Days: The Psalms, Meditation, and Prayer" on page 188.

As you turn from today's study toward a time in prayer, read the first two chapters in the Book of Psalms and spend a few moments meditating on the words God is using to speak to you today.

TODAY'S READING: PSALMS 1–2

**MY DAY 1 PRAYER FOR YOU**

*Oh Father, our God and our Redeemer, may Your presence fill the place where my friend sits with Your Word. Give her a fresh, new awareness of You. Give her the gift of knowing and believing You are near. Cover her with Your grace. Convince her that she is loved and welcomed into Your presence. In Jesus' precious name, amen.*

**RESPOND IN PRAYER**

Here we go . . . praying for 40 days together.

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**Some words to help you begin:**

- ***Father, You are . . .***
- ***Father, forgive me . . .***
- ***Father, redeem me . . .***
- ***Father, be near to me . . .***
- ***Father, be glorified  
in me . . .***



## DAY 2

## BEGINNING WITH A WORD

So, this is how this whole thing started.

One morning I said to my husband, Scott, “I have no idea when I’m supposed to write the next Bible study, but I think God spoke the title to me in my sleep.” Here’s the part where you should know that I rarely dream. Lots of people seem to have very detailed dreams, but not me. I’m one of those go-to-sleep-and-wake-up kind of people. You can imagine the she’s-never-said-that-before look in Scott’s eyes when he asked, “What’s the title?”

“Redeemed,” is all I said—because it’s all I knew.

**Redeemed: points to something that has been recovered by paying a sum to get it back.<sup>3</sup>**

Well, right then, my big lug of a hunky husband started crying. Then I started crying. And somehow, through all those choked up tears, Scott forced two words,

“That’s it,” he said through his tears.

This project began the morning God whispered, *Redeemed*. And ever since then, I’ve been trying to pay attention. Looking, reading, searching, listening, asking, seeking. My first inclination was to reach for the deep theologians with their weighty thoughts and academic words, so I did. I jumped into the study of redemption like it was the first day of summer, and I was the neighborhood kid sprinting all the way to the pool for a running-jump cannonball into the deep end. So. very. excited.

I guess I spent six months or more in a full-fledged redemption theology geek-out. I loved studying so much, I considered going back to seminary to get my doctorate or traveling to international libraries to find better, geekier books. The deeper I dove, the more there was to find. Complex theologies with intricate biblical patterns, all woven together with fine threads of differing perspective, opinion, and insight. Honestly, I loved all of my time down there in the deep end, swimming around on the bottom, discovering new thought trinkets to handle and examine.

But there is one very important thing to remember about being in over your head at the deep end of the pool. There is no air down there. Nada. And no air means no life. Maybe you know what I mean.

Have you ever felt in over your head with God? Maybe you try to pay attention at church, but the teaching doesn't connect with your head, much less your heart. Do parts of the Bible ever feel like thick patches of God-fog to you? You want to seek God. You want to know Him. But you can't ever seem to find your way.

*Take a minute and jot down some of the ways you have felt in over your spiritual head in the past. Understanding the Bible? Theology? Other religions? Be as specific as you can.*

*How would you describe knowing God right now? Is it:*

- He's becoming more clear. I'm learning to trust Him and see where God wants me to go!*
- I'm in a God-fog. I truly want a real relationship, but I can't seem to find my way.*
- I have no idea what you're talking about. Is this a Bible study? I thought I signed up for a book club.*

*While we're taking a look inside, what about your soul today?*

- Filled with meaning and purpose for my life.*
- Being healed.*
- Wounded. Hurting. Lonely.*
- Empty and bored, or empty and distressed.*

Do you remember yesterday's lesson? You and I begin a relationship with God when we are redeemed. As we continue being redeemed, the relationship grows deeper and sweeter as we are being changed into the likeness of Christ.

Your relationship with God is not meant to be a scary dive into murky waters, but a real, thriving, everyday relationship. Being redeemed helps us live a better life with meaning and purpose! God's grace removes our shame. He meets us right where we are. And His love can remove our fear.

Our earth assignment is to keep being redeemed. Yep, our everyday life, in this crazy world, during these crazy days.

**Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth's shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon . . . what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know You God because I am in the way.<sup>4</sup>**  
**FLANNERY O'CONNOR**

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SAMPLE



GLORIA FURMAN

# MISSIONAL MOTHERHOOD

THE BIBLE STUDY

THE EVERYDAY MINISTRY OF MOTHERHOOD  
IN THE GRAND PLAN OF GOD



**TGC** THE GOSPEL  
**COALITION**  
WOMEN'S INITIATIVES

LifeWay Press®  
Nashville, Tennessee

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Visit [LifeWay.com/MissionalMotherhood](http://LifeWay.com/MissionalMotherhood) for  
more info or to order.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gloria Furman is a wife, mother of four, cross-cultural worker, and writer. In 2008, her family moved to the Middle East to plant Redeemer Church of Dubai where her husband, Dave, serves as the pastor. She is the author of *Glimpses of Grace*, *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*, *The Pastor's Wife*, and *Missional Motherhood*.

## A NOTE FROM GLORIA

Hello!

Greetings from the sandy Arabian Peninsula. As the sun rose this morning over our city, I was reminded of what it says in God's Word—His mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23). Taking in the brilliant desert sunrise usually makes me think of my friends and family in different parts of the world going about their days or nights. It makes me smile to remember that it's always morning somewhere. God's mercy to us in Christ is ever present, day or night.

I'm thinking of you and praying for you as you take part in this study wherever you may be—from the bustling mega-cities in India to the picturesque fields in rural Indiana. We serve a great God—the only God—and I'm eager to talk about Him with you and discuss His plan to glorify Himself through the strategic, missional ministry of motherhood.

In Christ,

Gloria

# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *Missional Motherhood*! This six-session Bible study can be used in a number of settings. It's primarily designed to be used in a weekly small group setting with a leader and a small gathering of women. However, the study can also be used as an individual study, in a one-on-one mentoring relationship, or with a large group of women. Because this study is only six sessions, it's also possible to use this in a retreat setting. If used in this way, you will need to carve out time and perhaps find creative ways for participants to complete the personal study between group meetings.

## STUDY ELEMENTS

### GROUP SESSION

During the Group Session you will discuss and process together what you are learning through the video teaching and the personal study. Each Group Session will consist of three parts:

**REVIEW:** A list of questions will help you assess and discuss what you've studied in your personal study time.

**WATCH:** Following the review, you'll watch the video teaching for the session. Space is provided for you to take notes on the teaching.

**DISCUSS:** Review and process the video teaching as a group, using the questions provided.

**CLOSE:** A suggested final prayer prompt or activity closes the Group Session.

## PERSONAL STUDY

There are four Personal Study sections each week. This material will give you an opportunity to dig deeper into some of the themes discussed in the video and help you preview what's coming in the next session. You can complete all of these at one setting. However, it would probably be best to space the personal study activities out through the week to give you time to ponder the truth and how to apply it.

## **NOTE TO GROUP LEADER**

The Group Session portion of Session 1 is different from the other group sessions. It contains more information, providing an introduction to the study, and lays a foundation for what will take place in the weeks to follow. As the leader, you will need to handle this material differently from the other Group Sessions. You may choose to present it by sharing the information in your own words, sprinkling in some of the discussion questions provided. A second option would be to divide the material among your participants, allowing groups of 2-4 women to discuss specific sections then present their sections of material to the larger group. Or you may choose to treat it as a personal study time, allowing participants to read and respond to the questions individually, then discussing the material in a large group setting.

# ABOUT THE GOSPEL COALITION

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide

gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom He shed His life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so we truly speak and live for Him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of His grace: prayer, ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.



SESSION 1:  
**INTRODUCTION**

## GROUP SESSION

Welcome to *Missional Motherhood*! My hope is that God would use this study to strengthen your faith as you go about your everyday ministry of motherhood. I truly believe that when we take a step back and understand what the Bible says about the grand plan of God, then the details in life (like motherhood) come into clearer focus.

Before we dive into the introduction of this study, let's take a few minutes to introduce ourselves to one another:

*Share your name and a little information about your family and your neighborhood.*

*Share what drew you to this study.*

With just a tap of my finger, I can make the camera lens on my phone zoom in to take a close-up photo. If I want to take in more of the big picture, though, I have to take a few steps back. Some Bible studies are like the zoom feature, helping you focus very closely on one specific passage of Scripture. However, this study will ask you to step back and take in the panorama of life as we read about it in the Bible. There is something of value in taking steps back on a regular basis to see and remember the grand plan of God. This exercise is especially helpful as we seek to nurture life. Knowing the big picture helps us appreciate the thousands of little details of our work as mothering women.

Our pace for this study will be quick, but our discoveries will leave an impact on our lives for a long time. We are taking a wide-angle look at God's grand plan, but don't disable your zoom feature quite yet. We're going to need a close-up look at the Scripture in order to apply God's Word to our motherhood.

Have you ever told a temper-tantruming toddler to "use their words"? Me too. When we talk about theology and motherhood, we not only need to "use our

words,” we need to use the right words. We need to be intentional when we “use our words,” especially words about who God is and what He is doing. But we also need to be intentional with our words about motherhood. So, let’s talk about some of the words that are going to keep coming up in our discussions:

*In your own words, briefly describe “God’s grand plan.”*

*What comes to your mind when you think of “missional”?*

*What comes to your mind when you think of “motherhood”?*

One time I took my children to visit a farm that had a barn loft filled with incubators. Being desert-dwellers their entire lives, my kids had never been to a farm before. In the loft hundreds of chicken eggs were being warmed in neat little rows and cages lined the walls for the tiny birds who had already hatched. As we ooh-ed and aah-ed at the rows of eggs and the cheeping masses of fluffy chicks, one of my kids expressed alarm at the fact that there were no grown chickens in the loft. “Oh no! Where are their mommies?”

Perhaps you’ve heard the expression that someone is a “mother hen.” The image that comes to mind is of a female chicken, her wings spread out to envelop a bunch of baby chicks. We might call a girl or woman a “mother hen” because of the attention and care she gives to others. She receives this nickname because of what she does, versus her biological connection to the people she nurtures. I share this illustration not to make you think of feathers and omelets, but to point out the fact that “mother” is a verb, too.

Mothering (or nurturing) is a calling for every woman, including those who do not have biological or adopted children. There is so much that falls under the umbrella of our mothering, nurturing work: caregiving, showing hospitality, discipling, teaching, raising children, serving, and more. Every Christian woman is called to the spiritual motherhood of making disciples of all nations.

*Each of us comes from various life circumstances. No two women, no two families, no two churches, and no two neighborhoods are the same. What are some of the “and more” things that fall under the umbrella of the mothering, nurturing work that you do?*

*Who are the women in your life who have nurtured your faith in God, “spiritually mothering” you? What makes them unique? What do they have in common?*

Over the next six weeks we are going to explore the idea that the everyday ministry of motherhood is, by nature, missional. It is missional because God created motherhood for His purpose—to glorify Himself.

*READ EPHESIANS 2:8-10. What words stand out to you?*

*What does this text say about the nature of our salvation in Christ?*

*What does this text say about the nature of the good works that we do?*

Salvation by grace alone through faith alone is a foundational doctrine of Christianity. Without it, Christianity is a mere religious system that has no power to truly save. While many of us know this doctrine, we are still tempted at times to add on our works to justify ourselves or to use as bargaining chips when pleading with God for our children’s salvation.

*Do you feel like the truths of Ephesians 2:8-10 reflect your beliefs and experiences of the Christian faith? Why or why not?*

In the coming sessions we will repeatedly come back to the thesis of missional motherhood:

*Jesus invites women to missional motherhood: to follow His pattern, to trust His promises, and to nurture others by the power He provides.*

Well, we have a lot to talk about! I’m eager to step back with you and take in the big picture, then dig into some specific texts to discover what they mean for our motherhood. Before we go any further, take a few moments to pray together and ask God to open your eyes, so that we might behold wonderful things in His Word (Ps. 119:18).



## DISCUSS

*How would you define missional motherhood in your own words?*

*Have you ever fallen into that “I’m just a mom” trap? Explain. How does that way of thinking hinder your ability to see the big picture of what God wants to do through you?*

*How does understanding motherhood as a calling change the way you approach it?*

*What is tyranny of the urgent and how does it affect your motherhood?*

*What are some of those urgent things that get in the way of doing what’s most important?*

*What do you most want to get out of this Bible study? Why?*

## CLOSE

Break into small groups and spend time praying for each other. Ask God to give you new eyes to see yourselves as God sees you and a willingness to take up the challenge of being a missional mom.

## PERSONAL STUDY

# ONE

Welcome to your personal study time! In the group session, we talked about how our focus on the details of life is renewed when we take a step back to survey the big picture of God's story. This 10,000-foot view of life is so helpful, especially when we're puzzled, indifferent, or even frustrated by the situations we see unfolding in our daily lives.

Specifically, we're zooming in on the topic of motherhood in this study, but in order to do that we are zooming out to see God's grand plan. We're reading in Scripture how God uses motherhood to bring Himself glory. After all, that is the goal of motherhood—to glorify God.

*From culture to culture, there are different views concerning the goal of motherhood. How does your particular culture view the goal of motherhood? How does this view differ from other cultures?*

If you're new to the Christian faith, words like *glory* and *glorify* can feel like heavy lifting for your mind to consider. If that's you, then I want to encourage you; your feelings are right in line with reality! The word *glory* in the Bible comes from a root word—a verb—that means *to be heavy, weighty, or burdensome*. Glory carries the connotation of heavy abundance and weighty honor. Glory is substantive and real, not flimsy and imaginary. To glorify God is to ascribe to God the abundant, weighty honor that He is due. It is to acknowledge God as glorious as He really is. When we glorify God we are not adding to Him as though we could make Him complete; we are humble creatures adoring His manifold perfections.

God's glory necessarily elicits a response from us. Let's dig a little deeper into this idea by looking at a "missions song" that was composed in response to God's glory.

**READ PSALM 96.** Look up the word ascribe in the dictionary and write the definitions.

*Psalm 96 is a globally-resonating “missions song.”*

**READ ALL THE WAY THROUGH PSALM 96 THREE TIMES.** Next, mark the places where you see the words glory and ascribe.

*Make a list of all the reasons the psalmist gives for why the people (and all the earth) should ascribe glory to the Lord.*

**READ THROUGH PSALM 96 THREE MORE TIMES.** Now mark all of the places where you see verbal command words like say, declare, tell, and sing.

*According to Psalm 96, what is the appropriate response to God’s glory?*

*Who is being called to respond to God’s glory in these ways?*

*Sometimes it is difficult for us to see how our everyday ministry of motherhood can have any influence in missions—God’s global “call to worship.” Have you ever struggled with this? Explain.*

*In your reflections from our group session, and especially in light of Psalm 96, what connections can you see between God’s grand plan to glorify Himself in all the nations and your motherhood?*



# TWO

In our area of the world, the weather is fairly predictable for the vast majority of the year. I rarely (if ever) open the weather app on my phone. We just know it's going to be hot and dusty. The only question is how hot. Every once in a while, a northwest *shamal* or a southern wind from the Saudi Arabian "Empty Quarter" will blow across the country, kicking up a sandstorm. During these sandstorms we have to make sure the windows are closed; otherwise everything will get covered in a gritty layer of sand. The clouds of sand can even cover up the sun. This sun-covering effect is disorienting (and even a bit creepy).

Losing sight of God's glory is similar to the sandstorms. As we go about our everyday lives—raising our children, discipling young women, working, and serving others—we tend to assume our priorities will remain intact. But assuming leads to forgetting. As the sandstorm of our everyday lives swirls about us, we forget the orienting, illuminating purpose for our lives: to glorify God. We can become disoriented, losing sight of what's most important. After all, the glory of God is what we live for.

The following verses tell us how glorifying God should be at the center of all we do. Write out the verses below in your own words.

*Colossians 3:17*

*1 Corinthians 10:31*

*1 Peter 4:11*

It is evident from these verses and the rest of Scripture that we should glorify God in all we do. In our everyday, in our mothering and nurturing, we should seek to glorify Him.

By virtue of our salvation in Christ and identification with Him in His death and resurrection, every single Christian ought to have a missionary heartbeat. Homemakers, students, widows, children, and businesswomen—all of us are given the exciting privilege of ascribing glory to God among the nations wherever God has placed us. The gospel message and our privilege of sharing it are worth singing about! God has a global plan for His glory, and it is our joy to participate in giving Him the glory He is due with our hearts, deeds, eating/drinking, speaking, serving, and whatever we do.

That “whatever we do” is different for all of us. My mind is just swimming with all of the various ways the women I know are bringing glory to God! Amy\* feels like she is 38,000 weeks pregnant, and she is praising God for persevering her body. Lena\* is struggling with her family’s transition to a new country, and she is telling the Lord (and her daughters) how she needs God’s help every hour. Hyejin\* is shepherding her son through difficulties in his school and telling him to ask God for wisdom. Kalla\* works hard from sunup to sundown, and she talks with the people she sits next to on the bus and her coworkers about her Savior.

*What are some of the ways that you glorify God through your ministry to the individuals in your life?*

\* Names have been changed.

# THREE

The Session 1 video introduced you to the idea that the nature of our everyday ministry of motherhood is missional. Mothering work is missional because God created us, and He ordained every single one of our ministries to bring glory to Himself. God has incorporated us into His global mission—so our missional influence expands from our baby’s crib to our desks at the office to our next door neighbors and to our neighbors among the nations.

I can issue a dozen “mission statements” like this a day: “Guys, we need to get ready on time this morning.” “I’m going to get this to-do list done.” “So-and-so is coming over, and we’re going to read Colossians together.” “We’re having Mexican food for dinner!” (That last one was probably more of a victory cry than a mission statement.) However, of all the mission statements that pass through our minds as we go about our daily lives, there is one all-encompassing, exhilarating mission that preoccupies our thoughts. It is what Jesus said to His disciples just before He ascended back into heaven to be enthroned at God’s right hand:

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**MATTHEW 28:18-20**

We’re going to spend time discussing the “Great Commission” in future sessions, but for now, let’s talk about first and previous impressions.

*What are your first impressions of this passage?*

*List any previous impressions you may have had.*

*What are some of the commonly held beliefs/attitudes about the work of nurturing others? How about discipling younger women? Raising and discipling children? Evangelizing your neighbors?*

*Does Matthew 28:18-20 come into conflict with any commonly held beliefs or attitudes about the work of mothering/nurturing others? In what way?*

I hope this text helps clarify for you the focus of this study on missional motherhood. The priority of our ministry on this side of eternity is helping prepare others for eternity, too, by evangelizing and discipling the nations.

*Based on what you've read, heard, and discussed so far, where do you think motherhood fits into this big picture?*

My prayer for you is that you would be thrilled to see the significant meaning of your motherhood in the grand plan of God. The One who created all things is worthy to receive glory and honor and power (Rev. 4:11). God did not create you to be "just" a mom. By His will you were created for His glory. Those are profound and encouraging thoughts.

# FOUR

I don't know all the circumstances you will be confronted with today. It would be silly for me to try and address all of the issues that women are facing across the world. **But there is one Book that does speak to our greatest obstacles, our most daunting hindrances, and our most desperate situations: the Bible.**

The Bible tells us who God is and how we can know Him. It points out that our most important need is for a right relationship with God. Every other need you have pales in comparison, like an ant hiding in his dust-bunny house in the basement of a Shanghai skyscraper.

Now, if there was ever a controversial statement to make then it was that one! Even at this very moment, I feel like the biggest need I have is for a more effective decongestant for this nagging sinus pain. And something convenient to eat for lunch. And ...

*What about you? What feels like the most urgent need you have right now?*

Every other need you experience points you to the one great need of knowing and being known by God. Are you hungry? Hunger is a pointer to help you see that you were designed to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Are you thirsty? Thirst is a pointer to help you see that your spiritual thirst can only be quenched by the living water Jesus gives. Are you cold? Afraid? Restless? Sad? Lonely? Lost? These needs point you to the one and only God who made you, loves you, and gave His Son to die in your place so you could love Him back in spirit and truth forever.

*Do you feel eternity beating in your heart?*

*How does your answer to the previous question point you to your need for God?*

These pictures and pointers serve to remind us of eternal truth. And we need all the reminders we can get! It is astounding to consider all of the contrary messages (i.e., lies) we are faced with each day. According to the world, life is generally meaningless and humanity is only a group of optimistic clumps of cells. So, a growling stomach simply exists to remind you that you skipped lunch and nothing more. But the Bible renews our minds, so that we can see through the lies of this world. This clarity is critical for missional motherhood. What woman hasn't been lied to about who God is, why He made the world, and what motherhood means? The course of this world would have us live as zombies—dead to God and our desperate need for Him.

*What are some of the lies about God that your culture tells mothers and women specifically?*

*We're going to talk about this passage in a few weeks, but for now let's work on committing Romans 12:1-2 to memory. In lieu of answering more questions today, spend some time meditating on that passage.*

Praise God that He has not left us to our own devices to plod along like zombies, simply following the course of this world without interruption. He has intervened. He has revealed Himself in His Word and sent His Son, the Word made flesh. In God's Word, the Bible, we read the real story. There's so much more we can say about this, but for now, let's look forward to gathering together to hear and discuss this real story.

**Learn more at [LifeWay.com/MissionalMotherhood](https://www.lifeway.com/MissionalMotherhood)**



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