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## Dedication

To the sisters who have "prayed me through" the most difficult time of my life so far. You all know who you are. You are many and you are strong. You are the difference for me, on many days, between despair and a distant hope. You are personified *comfort*, for me. I am eternally indebted and forever grateful. I am most grateful to the One who has been hearing you.

One of these precious praying sisters went home during the writing of this book. She doesn't need to study *comfort* now. She completely "gets it." I will miss Carol Dodd; she was a deep digger. But our reunion is both certain and soon to occur.

I also extend gratitude to Lindsey Van Hook, for interior design, to Jennifer Benavides, for cover design, and to Glenn Colley, for encouragement and collaboration, always in every project.

## Introduction

When I came to view my time on this planet as a testing ground, it revolutionized my thinking about God and eternity. When I came to better understand the purpose in the difficulties and unexpected twists in the road—even in the tragedies—I became less fearful of them and, in turn, more purposeful in my responses to them. I remember when I came to this epiphany. I was listening to Dr. Dave Miller talk about how “bad things that happen to good people.” He explained that it is just those things that prove to God our faith or lack of it. I now know that it’s the darkest day that most perfectly shows whether His light is in me or not. I do not perfectly anticipate those days and I certainly am not strong enough, in any sense, to find my compass in them without the strength that comes from His Word and His people. But I do count on the reality of testing now, and I prepare with prayer and study, knowing I can emerge from darkness with greater faith and fortitude. I can endure till He comes to get me and take me home.

*Home* has always been one of the most comforting words in our language. That’s because, when we isolate the word and examine its meaning, for most of us, *home* is not four walls or an apartment or a native land. It is the space of security, love and order. It is the place of expectations and cooperation. It is the place of comfort.

For Christians, it is only with like-minded people that we experience any of these commodities in this lifetime. Our base verse for this study says that, when we are resting in His comfort, when we are at home with the Father of mercies, we can offer the comforts of home to those with whom we share the security of salvation and even with those who are on the outside, needing to come home. In fact, in context, it indicates that our purpose in afflictions should be the consolation and salvation of others, which brings us to be in His likeness. He was despised, rejected, and afflicted that we might be comforted (Isaiah 53).

May this study prepare us to receive His comfort. More though, may it prepare us to give it.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).*



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 1: The Background

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

1. Do a little research in a Bible encyclopedia or even by Googling to find out what it would have been like to live in Corinth in the first century. Write a paragraph describing first-century Corinth. Include any findings about how Christianity would have been viewed by the society at large. Include the moral climate of Corinth. How were fornication and homosexuality viewed in the culture? What was the political situation in that day? See if you can find out why Corinth was so important, geographically speaking. Would this importance make the culture more prestigious and educated or less so?
2. Now go back and read 1st Corinthians. In this book, make a list of every problem or divisive issue that Paul addressed. Your list will begin with contentions over whose baptism was the “best” based on the identity of the baptizer (Chapter 1). It will end with confusion about the “body” in the resurrection at the end of Chapter 15. There will be lots of things you will list in between the two. This will be a great podcast discussion. (It’s very important to know what was occurring in 1st Corinthians in order to understand the theme of comfort in the second letter.)
3. As an exercise to help us see the complexity of the situation in Corinth at the time of Paul’s first letter, let’s read about just one of the problems being addressed here. (This one seems to be large enough to destroy a congregation today, but this was just one of the large issues that Paul addressed as he wrote 1st Corinthians.) Here’s the article to read:  
<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1531-corinth-a-troubled-church>.  
Make notes here.
4. Having completed these exercises, comment about the comfort level of being a Christian in the church at Corinth prior to the reception of the first letter from Paul by the body there. Let’s just make an imaginary list and bring the situation closer to our homes today. I understand that these situations are not things that DID happen, for the most part. They are things that COULD have happened. They are pretty consistent with Biblical concepts and situations presented in the book of 1st Corinthians. I present them here to help us practically apply the Word and receive its comfort in our 21st century lives.

- a. What if you had been the daughter of Stephanus? Can you imagine any ways in which your baptism might make your fellowship with the Corinth congregation challenging? Find all the references to Stephanus in the book, as you think about this.
- b. What if you were a teen boy in the Corinth church and you attended a Greek school in the area? How do you think this would challenge your faith?
- c. What if you had been a professor in a Greek center of learning prior to your baptism? What life challenges would your new-found Christianity present?
- d. What if you were the paternal aunt of the man who was in sin in 1st Corinthians 5? What would your particular temptations be? What things would you want to do to help protect the body of Jesus in the city, if you were his aunt and a Christian woman?
- e. Suppose you were a single young professional woman working in the marketplace in Corinth. How would your decisions about socialization with fellow-employees be tempered by the fact that you were a part of the “inferior” and “foolish” religion? How would this derision of your spiritual life feel to you?
- f. Suppose your husband had not obeyed the gospel and he was a judge in the Greek court system in Corinth. How would it be difficult to discourage fellow Christians from bringing matters between brethren into the courtroom? How would it feel to worship beside people who were bringing bitterness between each other into your husband’s courtroom?
- g. Imagine you were a mom of elementary school-aged children in first-century Corinth. In what ways would you have to “work overtime” to build a spiritual hedge around your children? How would you handle educating them in a sexually charged and flagrantly immoral world? Would it be possible to homeschool them?
- h. Imagine you attended a feast in the home of a Greek brother who was serving an entree that looked suspiciously like it had been “re-purposed” from a worship event at the Greek temple of Aphrodite? Would this be appetizing? How would you handle this if your children recognized the meat as having come from that temple? What if your children’s friends had Aphrodite statues and paraphernalia? Imagine how a conversation about this would go with your 8-year-old.
- i. What if your husband became angry when the letter of 1st Corinthians was read aloud in the assembly? What if he stormed out and said, “Who does this Paul think He is anyway...telling us over here in the cultured part of the world how to assimilate in this Greek society!? He doesn’t know what he is even talking about. He does not have the right to tell us what to do.”?
- j. Imagine you were an older woman with the gift of prophecy. How would this gift affect your friendships with those who do not have the gift? What if you had this gift and your husband was not a Christian? How would you answer when you were asked by younger women who were in unhappy marriages to take off your head covering while teaching—the covering that was worn everywhere you went to show submission to your husband?
- k. What if you sat beside someone, with your children, during the Lord’s Supper, who had recently come out of idolatry and this person was celebrating the feast as he was accustomed

to doing in the house of Aphrodite—with lots of laughter and flirtation and utter inattention to the body and blood of the Lord? What would you do?

- l. What if you invited your neighbor to worship with you and she attended the assembly when there was a long presentation in a foreign tongue with no interpreter? How would you continue your evangelism to her after that experience?
  - m. What if she (your neighbor above) then confronted you with the fact that she perceived your congregation was just full of dissension and cliques based on disagreements? She informed you that she really wanted to be a part of a religion that is more cohesive and where people are more at peace with each other. How would you respond?
  - n. What if you discovered that about 1/3 of the people in your congregation had been influenced to question whether or not there really was a bodily resurrection of the Messiah? What would you do with this information?
  - o. What if you heard the heartbreaking news that your cousins in Jerusalem had been driven from their homes and had to flee Jerusalem? They were hungry and fearful during this great persecution. How would you resolve to help them? How would you hang on to your faith when so much had gone so wrong at home, in the Corinthian church, and in the birthplace of the church back in Judea?
5. Now let's look at the foundational text for this year's study again.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

- a. Write the meaning of the Greek word for comfort (*paraklesis*) from your lexicon.
  - b. Now write out verses 3-7 and highlight each time a form of this word is used in these verses.
  - c. Write a paragraph explaining why there was a great need for this church to receive comfort now, in the second epistle, from the apostle and the Holy Spirit (the Comforter). How is it that the presence of sin in congregations (and in individuals) always places us in dire need of His comfort?
  - d. In what ways do we know that Paul had found comfort in the way his first letter had been received? Research and find how we know that the Corinthian church had been open to Paul's spiritual guidance? Is there *paraklesis* in following the admonitions of the Holy Spirit?
6. Hope is a big part of comfort. Sometimes we cannot solve all of the issues that sin has brought into our lives. Our own repentance of wrong-doing is not enough. There may be sin on the part of others which continues to wreak havoc in our worlds. It may be disease or death or loneliness or financial reversal or any number of forces that we cannot control. What we need is hope. We need light at the end of the tunnel. Read Romans 15 and see if you can find a

mention of how the Holy Spirit, through the Word, offers us comfort through hope. Write that verse here.

7. Finally, we should understand that forms of *parakaleo* are used 108 times in the New Testament. Sometimes the word means to beg; sometimes it means to exhort; sometimes it means to comfort or console. We understand how this variation of meaning occurs when we know that the two root words (*para* and *kaleo*) mean “beside” and “to call”. It’s good to know that *parakaleo* is the verb root (action word) corresponding to *paraklesis*, the noun, which means helper or comforter or encourager. Read John 14-16 and mark the four times when the Spirit is called the *paraklesis* to the disciples.
8. Read I John 1:2 and find Christ called *paraklesis* there. Write that verse here, highlighting our word.

### Practically Speaking

Research Aphrodite. Write a paragraph about the goddess. Then list idols in our society today that bear resemblance to some characteristics of Aphrodite. What things about Aphrodite could metaphorically represent some areas of unrighteousness we witness around us today?



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 2: Comfort in 2 Corinthians

I think Paul was pretty concerned about whether or not his first letter had been well received by the church at Corinth. Questions likely filled his thoughts when he went to bed at night. Did they become offended at his blunt manner in addressing egregious moral and doctrinal errors? Did they heed his words and correct their glorying in sin (1 Corinthians 5), their extreme abuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11), and their damaging sense of partisanship addressed in the early part of his letter? Did they come to grips with the fact that the spiritual gifts were for confirmation of the Word and not for self-glorification? There was so much to correct in the church at Corinth that had come to the ears of Paul from Chloe.

Titus was to have met Paul at Troas to deliver news about these needed corrections in Corinth, but Titus did not show up at the appropriate time (2 Corinthians 2:13) and the Scripture says that Paul had no rest in his spirit. Things went from bad to worse for Paul as he became physically ill, and as the validity of his apostleship was attacked, apparently by both the Galatians and the Corinthians. He was, for sure, disappointed that Titus, his great encourager and fellow-worker did not show up at the right time. Paul needed comfort!

1. As a side point here, let's think about Chloe. We only read about her in one verse in our Bibles. But we know some things about her household. 1) They aptly and wisely identified problems and took them to the right place for answers. 2) They were a credible and faithful source of information to the great apostle, Paul. He did not question this report but, instead, addressed the problems. 3) Chloe had much to do with the salvation of many at Corinth. These are more than assumptions. Chloe's household had the ear of Paul. What kind of mothers today can produce households which would be counted worthy to profoundly influence whole congregations in the direction of truth? List below five practical things mothers can do to help their children grow up to be church protectors (congregational comforters). We will talk about this in group discussions.
2. Next, think about the work of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life. Obviously here, Paul was distressed until Titus finally came to him with good news about the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 7. Since the Holy Spirit was obviously inspiring Paul with great words of comfort for churches, why didn't the Holy Spirit just reassure Paul, telling him that his words to the church in the first letter had been received and that his guidance had been followed?
  - a. Read the following passages: Matthew 10:19-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:14-15; John 14:26; John 16:13. While miraculous inspiration to the apostles did provide comfort to them in some ways (as they were being ridiculed for what they were saying, for instance), what was the primary purpose of inspiration?

- b. Why then, was Paul not given all of the answers about how the church was doing (without his having to find out those answers from Titus)?
3. Now, read through the book of 2 Corinthians and find the following entities that provided Paul with the comfort he desperately needed. Cite the verses below. (Some themes may be found in more than one place in the book). Cite them all.

Christ comforted Paul.

The resurrection comforted Paul.

Prayers of Christians comforted Paul.

A clean conscience comforted Paul.

The sure promises of Christ comforted Paul.

The guarantee of the Spirit comforted Paul.

Paul's work in the kingdom comforted him, specifically preaching Jesus and his ministry of reconciliation.

Paul's own sincerity comforted him (the fact that he believed what he was speaking).

The faithfulness (and change/godly sorrow/zeal) of the majority of the Corinthians comforted Paul.

The glory of the new covenant comforted Paul.

God's power through the gospel comforted Paul (...that it did not originate with Paul, himself).

The renewal of the inward man comforted Paul.

The temporary nature of afflictions comforted Paul.

Coming glory in eternity comforted Paul.

Coming judgment comforted Paul.

The death of Christ comforted Paul.

The love/grace/mercy of God comforted Paul.

The power of God comforted Paul.

The armor of righteousness comforted Paul.

Sanctification in the family of God comforted Paul.

The coming of Titus comforted Paul.

The comfort of the Corinthians and of Titus gave Paul comfort.

The liberality and faith of the Macedonians comforted Paul.

The heart of Titus comforted Paul.

The commendation of God comforted Paul.

The simplicity of the gospel comforted Paul.

The validity of his apostleship comforted Paul.

Paul's infirmities because of his ministry comforted him.

The communion of the Holy Spirit comforted Paul.

4. Realizing that the above exercise was tedious, let's pause and take comfort for ourselves. Let's do something easier and rejoice in our own sources of comfort. Look through the list above and check off the sources of comfort that apply to you today. From which ones in the above list are you taking comfort today? List them below using words like these after the top two below.

I take comfort in Christ today.

I find great comfort in His resurrection because I can be raised, too.

5. Write a paragraph about a time in your life when you found extraordinary comfort because of one of the things in this list. Maybe it was the simplicity of the gospel when you came from religious error. Perhaps it was the liberality of caring Christians when you were in a time of distress. Maybe it is the reality that a great patch of suffering through which you are traveling is only a temporary trial in this lifetime. Choose one and write your experience here.
6. Finally, read Colossians 2 and locate the word *parakaleo* in that text. List below the associated blessings that accompany this encouragement for Christians (from the immediate context). I want these blessings. I am receiving needed comfort in the progression of this study!

### Practically Speaking

Where else does Paul talk about an armor that protects and comforts? Find and download a free printable of this armor, label it (if it is not already labeled) and leave it on the refrigerator for the duration of our study of comfort. For this vulnerable and fallible study author, this protection is an amazing source of comfort in a world where wicked darts are flying.

Alternately, you can purchase the armor from some Christian supply sources for your children and use it for your Family Bible time. There are also some hero figures who wear the armor which may be purchased for kids. Any purchase like this also counts as fulfillment of the Practically Speaking requirement. If you live in Midland, Texas, you may even see cookies that detail the armor of God. That counts, too.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Chapter 3: Father of Mercies

When I was a child, our family always owned a station wagon. We had six people in our family. This was just before the era of the mini-vans and just after the era when you could just pile all the kids in the back of a pick-up truck. It was the golden age of kids-having-fun-on-road-trips. We would all climb in the very back of the car (we called it the “way-back-in-the-back”) and sit Indian style in that square compartment on top of a quilt that Mama had folded to make a comfortable place for us to play board games or 20 Questions or I Spy. After a long day roaming around Smith Lake or returning home from the grandparents’ house, we would lie down in the way-back-in-the-back and go to sleep. There was a hair-pin curve about a mile before we got home, and I would almost always wake up on that curve at the top of Radio Hill. But I remember closing my eyes tightly and pretending I was still asleep when we pulled into our driveway. I wanted my dad to carry me in the house and lay me down in my bed and cover me up. In his arms there was safety and security and I wanted to make the last leg of the trip home in his arms.

I love that I can call God my friend (James 2:23). I am thankful to serve Him as my Lord and follow Him as my Shepherd (Psalm 23:1). I want to always know He is my Rock and Redeemer (Psalm 19:14) and the God of my Salvation (Psalm 18:46). But I am most thankful to call Him my Father. The base text of our study this year calls him the Father of mercies just before it calls Him the God of all comfort.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).*

1. Look up the Greek word for *mercies* in this passage. Write the word and its meaning here.
2. Read Luke 6 and find a form of the Greek word in that passage. Highlight that verse.
3. It is in this passage in Luke that we find the practical application of this term. Notice verses 31-36:

*And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

4. In this passage we learn that being merciful, like the Father of mercies, has to do with the recipient of the mercy. Mercy, in the God-extreme, means extending compassion to whom?

5. Mercy, like that of the Father of mercies, also involves the motivation for its extension. What must not be included in the reason for my extension of mercy?
6. Mercy is one of the most beautiful concepts for the Christian's contemplation. There is great comfort and security in the mercy of our heavenly Father. Read Exodus 25 now and highlight the part of that chapter that focuses on the mercy seat, the covering of the holy ark of the covenant. In verse 22, we read that it was above this seat/covering that God would be present with Israel. What tables were placed just beneath this covering of mercy?
7. Read Galatians 3 and highlight the part of the chapter that shows us that all were condemned under the commandments that rested beneath the mercy seat. This condemnation was not a comforting reality.
8. In the Holy of Holies, then, what was between God and the commandments which condemned man (because no man could perfectly keep them)? There is an illustrative sense then, in which the mercy seat shielded God from viewing the damning commandments.
9. Read Leviticus 16 and notice what had to cover the mercy seat once yearly and what had to be applied to it. Why did this have to be done until Christ died on the cross? How did mercy meet justice at this spot above the commandments of the old law?
10. According to Leviticus 16, what did Aaron have to always have in his hand when he approached the mercy seat, coming behind the veil?
11. Read Hebrews 9 and 10. Highlight references to mercy seat, high priest, and sprinkling of blood. What is our mercy covering today, coming between our transgression and our holy God and why does the sprinkling not have to be revisited yearly?
12. Read 1 Samuel 4-7 and see the period of time the ark of the covenant was in the hands of the Philistines. What could be said about the level of comfort for any true and faithful Israelite during these months? What annual event of importance for atonement was missing for those months? The application of what substance is absolutely necessary for receiving the comfort of atonement?
13. Do a little research and find when the ark finally and permanently disappeared.
14. Read Romans 5, searching for the entity from which we are saved by blood.
15. Read Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1 and list three things specifically stated that we have through the blood.
16. Read 1 John 1. In this passage is found the most comforting cleansing power of the blood. Find the verse, write it here and discuss the continual work of the blood in your group or podcast. Why is this verse so comforting?
17. Finally, imagine you were an Israelite woman. Your husband was in battle on the day when the Philistines soundly defeated Israel between Eben-Ezer and Aphek in 1180 BC. You witnessed the capture of the ark of the covenant. You heard about the deaths of your wicked high priests, Hophni and Phinehas. You knew that Eli died and you know about the baby Ichabod and the passing of Ichabod's mother. You lived through several months of mourning and of not having any mercy seat for sprinkling the blood. It would have seemed a very dark time

with little hope for the future of your country. What would you have felt when the ark was finally returned? Summarize these thoughts here.

18. Today, we have the permanence of the presence of the sprinkling. It will never have to be done again (I Peter 1:2). How do we take advantage of the sprinkling of our eternal High Priest? How do we today have the cherubim symbolically sprinkled? Who does this for us? Do you have the comfort of the mercy seat today?
19. Read Genesis 4 and postulate about the reason for the rejection of the sacrifice of Cain. Was it because it was bloodless?

Here are the words to the song “Father of Mercies,” a public-domain hymn.

*Father of mercies, day by day my love to Thee grows more and more;  
Thy gifts are strewn up my way like sands upon the great seashore,  
Like sands upon the great seashore.*

*Father of mercies, God of love, whose gentle gifts all creatures share,  
The rolling seasons as they move proclaim to all Thy constant care,  
Proclaim to all Thy constant care.*

*Father of mercies, may our hearts ne'er overlook Thy bounteous care;  
But what our Father's hand imparts still own in grateful praise and prayer,  
Still own in grateful praise and prayer.*

It is comforting to be a child of the Father of mercies. I want to make the last leg of the trip home in the arms of my Father.

## Practically Speaking

Choose a faithful father in your congregation who has been widowed and take him some comfort foods—some soup or cornbread or hot cocoa; just something to know you appreciate his faithfulness. Include the middle verse of the song above in your card accompanying the food.

or

Listen to the song above on YouTube, if you're unfamiliar with it, and sing it in your group study.

or

Think of someone who has been unkind to you and send that person a card wishing her a happy Thanksgiving holiday. Show mercy (compassion) as Christ did.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 4: Conditional Comfort

Often when I hear my husband speak about some particular promise of God, I hear him say, “This passage provides no comfort for the child of God who is rebelliously living in sin,” or “This verse is not comforting for those outside of Christ.” He is speaking about a promise like the one found in Romans 8:28 or the one found in 1 John 1:7.

It is overwhelmingly true that spiritual comfort is always conditional. Let’s look at comfort’s conditions this month together.

1. Much of the time, we can find a physical or material parallel in the Old Testament to teachings we are examining for our lives today from the New Covenant. Let’s start by reading Exodus 15. Here, Israel had just victoriously passed through the Red Sea on dry land and witnessed the drowning of the armies of the Pharaoh. Read the song in verses 1-20 and write down every phrase of that song that would have given you comfort if you had been an Israelite looking back at the Red Sea as it crashed in on the enemy armies.
2. In this context, God was attempting to get a stiff-necked people to determine to seek His comfort by meeting His *comfort conditions* as they made their trek to the promised land. How long did it take the Israelites to complain about discomfort after their Red Sea experience?
3. Find the if/then promise of Exodus 15 and write it here, remembering that places where water is in short supply are generally breeding grounds for disease.
4. Read Exodus 19, in which the children of Israel are approaching Sinai, and write the if/then promise here.
5. What big discomfort were they about to have to endure and why? Once again, it has something to do with water.
6. Leviticus 26 is an entire if/then passage. Read it and make a chart. On the left-hand side put your “if” statements; on the right, the corresponding “then” promises. (Your right-hand column will be loaded!)
6. In the context of Leviticus 26, where do we see the title “Father of mercies” most clearly illustrated? Are there sometimes additional if/thens after the original if/thens—to provide a way back to God’s comfort?
7. Read Deuteronomy 4 and notice the additional if/then *after* the original covenant had been broken by man. Where are these verses of comfort in this chapter?
8. Read Deuteronomy 11 and make an if/then chart.
9. Now, let’s turn the exercise around and see the if/then requests made by Solomon to God in 2 Chronicles 6 as he prayed at the dedication of the temple. Make an if/then chart from Solomon’s pleas in this chapter.

10. I want to take a moment now to notice how that God, when commanding, always offers evidence that His way will turn out best. This is a big part of His comfort blanket when He commands. "Climb in the shelter with me," (Psalm 46:1)... "Get under this blanket of commandment-keeping," (1 Samuel 25: 28-30)... "I'm spreading my wings for you to climb on," (Exodus 19:4)... "Do this my way and you will be my special treasure," (Exodus 19:5)! For this exercise, go back to each of the chapters mentioned in numbers 3-8 above and look for any contextual displays of love and power that were present when God gave His if/then ultimatums. List them here. Was He always clear about what the choices were and did He always give ample evidence that He knew what was best for the children of Israel? Explain.
11. Do you and I sometimes have God-trust issues? We intellectually know that obedience is the path to comfort, but there's a test in between now and then. There's a proving time between the hurt and its relief. There's a dry and thirsty time between the Red Sea and the water at Marah. Sometimes we fail to trust Him through the test to get to the place of comfort. As an illustration of this, let's look at the life of one king of Judah: Asa. Read 2 Chronicles 14 and 15, Below write all the good decisions made by Asa in these two chapters.
12. Now read chapter 16. It was in verse one of this chapter that Asa's trust in God was put to the real test. What was his personal trial (and the trial of Judah, for that matter)?
13. Hanani summed up the obstacle between Asa and comfort at the end of his life. What was the impediment?
14. How did Asa react when he had a second chance to seek the Lord? Cite that reference.
15. What was Asa's end of life discomfort?
16. Search Exodus 15 again for the specific passage that could have hedged Asa away from the extreme discomfort that brought him to his grave. Write it here. God always gets to the "then" part of His conditional promises.
17. Now read the following chapters from the gospels and list one plain if/then promise in each chapter, (Sometimes, the "then" may be implied, and sometimes there will be more than one from which to choose.) Note whether there is comfort or pain/loss attached to the "then" part of the promise.
  - a. Matthew 6
  - b. Luke 14
  - c. John 8
  - d. John 12
  - e. John 14
  - f. John 15
18. Now let's examine a few verses. List the condition of the comfort in the following comfort verses.
  - a. Romans 8:1
  - b. Romans 8:28
  - c. I John 1:7
  - d. Psalm 34:7



- e. Psalm 101:6
- f. Psalm 145:18
- g. Matthew 6:33

Just as the material blessings of the promised land were conditional on obedience to the great Deliverer (2 Sam. 22:2) and Provider, so the spiritual satisfaction and safety of His people today are tied to obedience. Comfort lies in trusting Him, believing His promises, and obeying His benevolent commands.

### Practically Speaking

Send a note of comfort to someone in the congregation who has suffered a recent loss—material, physical, health, death or infidelity of spouse. Include one of the passages from this lesson to provide comfort.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 5: For Thou Art With Me

It's ironic that, of all the ones who provide shoulders to weep on, arms to fall into, eyes to search my soul, hearts that are in tune, hands to wipe my tears and ears that are listening for my cries, the ONE who is, by far, the most comforting to me is the One I cannot physically touch or see or audibly hear. My God is infinitely more comforting in my times of deep despair than is any human being. Why, the very writing of this study has afforded me deep and lasting consolation during what has been, to say the least, the hardest part of my life thus far. He is with me!

1. Read the story of the life of Joseph. This is chronicled in Genesis 37-50. There are several times in this account when God is credited with being with Joseph, or with orchestrating the events surrounding his rise to fame. List those passages here as you read.
2. But God was “with Joseph” in an eternally important way. It is amazing to me that I can find great comfort today in knowing that God’s being with Joseph was His way of providing me with the Messiah—the answer to my soul’s deep need. Think about this with me.
  - a. I needed a Savior. Sin had separated me from God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23). I had no hope of heaven. In Genesis 3:15, the coming of Jesus was announced in a shrouded, but sure, promise. Write it here.
  - b. The promise had been repeated to Abram, Isaac and Jacob and was becoming clearer, as time progressed. Find and write one of those promises to one of the three Hebrew fathers here.
  - c. Somehow, the Israelites needed to leave Canaan and be cohesive, separated from the peoples around them, in order to gain national strength and be distinct tribes of one nation. If Jesus was going to come through Israel, and through the tribe of Judah, it was imperative that the nation actually BE a nation with distinct and separate tribes. This space to grow was accomplished in Goshen because of the selling of Joseph into Egypt. But how would the mingling of the Savior’s ancestors with the Egyptians now be prevented? God was with the plan for my salvation every step of the way. The Hyksos Pharaohs had overtaken a large part of Egypt—the part around the Nile River. The Hyksos Pharaohs were hated by the Egyptians over which they ruled (Dickson). They were part Canaanite and sometimes referred to as the *shepherd Pharaohs*. So, when the Hyksos Pharaohs showed favor to Joseph and his family, it made the native Egyptians hate the Hebrews, too. Thus, they did not generally socialize or intermarry with them. God was with Joseph, even in choosing and maintaining enemy relationships. He was preserving a nation through which the Messiah would come. Read this article from Apologetics Press about the Hyksos Pharaohs and marvel at the way God was with you and me even in this placement in Goshen. (You are going to love the tomb inscription that dove-tails perfectly with the travel of the patriarchs to Egypt.) <https://apologeticspress.org/the-beni-hasan-tomb-inscription-and-the->

patriarchal-period-4811/

Make any notes here.

3. Read the following chapters and list those to whom the promise of His presence was made.
  - a. Acts 18
  - b. Joshua 1
  - c. Deuteronomy 31
4. Let's look at some of the Psalms that comfort us with His presence. Read the following and highlight the verse in each Psalm that promises His presence to His people.
  - a. Psalm 16
  - b. Psalm 23
  - c. Psalm 34
  - d. Psalm 41
  - e. Psalm 46

God was with Abraham on Mount Moriah. His ram was in the thicket while His angel was calling from heaven. He stayed Abraham's hand (Genesis 22). God was with Joseph in the household of Potiphar. He ran with him to a place of purity and impending imprisonment (Genesis 39:21). He was with Moses, even talking to him from a burning bush. He knew about the shoes Moses was wearing and the rod he was carrying (Exodus 3,4). He was with Joshua, even being repetitive in His admonitions to be courageous and in His promises of going with him wherever Joshua proceeded to go (Joshua 1). Joshua must have felt great trepidation at the task ahead. God was in charge of cake-burning and the level of fleece moisture when He was accompanying Gideon (Judges 6). He was with Samuel, calling to him multiple times in the night (1 Samuel 3) and later, making sure he knew what was what in the succession of kings and their anointing (1 Samuel 10,16). He was in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5), in the jail in King Zedekiah's house (Jeremiah 32:2-3), and in the dungeon with Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37:16). He was the fire in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9). He was with Hosea when he was forsaken by the wife God had commanded him to take, even having named his children (Hosea 1). His name is not in the book of Esther, but He was in charge of the gallows assignment in that amazing saga (Esther 7). He manifested even a bodily presence in a den of hungry lions (Daniel 6). He was in charge of keeping their mouths closed. He took on flesh and walked with His parents to Jerusalem (God was a child with parents!...Luke 2), with the devil on a desert mountaintop and on the temple's pinnacle (Matthew 4), with Peter on water (Matthew 14), and with the apostles to a well in Samaria (John 4). He rode in the middle of a bunch of common people on a clothes-covered donkey outside of Jerusalem (Luke 19:35) and He walked to the garden, the house of Annas, the Praetorium, and to Golgotha (Mark 14, 15). He walked from a tomb and then with two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) and He walked to Bethany with the apostles when lifted up to the heavens to go away to prepare my place (Luke 24:50). This Jesus is with me. He lives in me as I emulate Him (Romans 8:9-10). He has called me, through His

word, to the cross and, by faith, I have seen the empty tomb. I will rise, too, one day, and ever be with my Lord. That is ultimate comfort. He is at my right hand. I will not be moved.

### Practically Speaking

Just for fun, look at this promise from Hebrews 13:5:

*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

It's fun to turn this verse around backwards and see that He still will not leave us, even if our worlds are all backwards and confusing (Lockyer). Try it. Here's my re-punctuation:

*Thee forsake? Nor thee leave? Never will I!*

Since that little exercise was fun, but not extremely practical, let's also use this verse to encourage this month. Write it on a sticky note and leave it on your husband's Bible. Put it in your child's lunchbox. Write it on the back of a card envelope you are mailing. Leave it on the table with your tip at a restaurant. Just use the verse to comfort/exhort in some way!

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 6: Practical Comfort for Times of Trial

As we noted in the introduction to this study, we are praying that this study will revive us from the weariness that comes from sickness and loss. We are praying that it gives us motivation to push forward when discouraged. We are begging that it fills what has been depleted by long stretches of discouraging world events and less frequent times of fellowship with one another. We know He is aware of our study, and we know that, although we are weak and mortal, He is strong and everlasting. He can take our meager efforts at study and prayer and claim glory as His word convicts and changes lives. Let's dig into the subject of comfort in times of trial.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).*

1. The applicable phrase from our text is “who comforts us in all our tribulation.” God comforts you and me in all of our tribulation. We should first notice the little word all. The word is there in the original language, and it means just what you would think. There is no trial that you and I face of which God is unaware or for which He is unable to provide consolation. It literally means He is there to provide comfort for each trial through which I walk. Look up the Greek word for tribulation (*thlipsis*) and write its meaning here.
2. Now let's look at a portion of the book of Job. We have studied this book in a previous year, but, this time, I would like to take a closer look at the “miserable comforters” of Job 16:2. First, read the first two chapters of Job to remember exactly why Job was in dire need of consolation. List his losses here.
3. Next, read the speeches of “comforter” #1: Eliphaz. These are found in chapters 4, 5, 15 and 22. Read these speeches and look for evidence that Eliphaz believed Job suffered because he sinned. Cite a couple of passages here that evidence that belief.
4. Read the speeches of Bildad from chapters 8, 18 and 25. His hypothesis goes a bit further, even, than Eliphaz's and his rebuke is stronger. He believes Job is a hypocrite. Cite evidence of this from his speeches.
5. Zophar's analysis is found in chapters 11 and 20. Read those. Zophar believed Job's transgressions deserved a punishment that was even more severe than he had received (Baxter). Cite evidence for this.
6. These “friends” could be described as “the friends of no comfort in any tribulation.” This “comfort” is the antithesis of the description from our key text of our God. Let's set out to contrast God's comfort with that of these three comforters.
  - a. God knows and assures us that faithful people suffer. All suffering is not resultant from personal sin. That fact, in itself, is comforting. Right now, I can look around and see people whom I love who are going through some horrific pain and anguish which is due to no fault

- whatsoever of their own. You know these people, too. List one such example from your personal observation here.
- b. List three Old Testament characters whose suffering was severe, but unrelated to personal sin. Then list three similar New Testament characters.
  - c. One of the most comforting realities, to me, is the Biblical concept that this earthly existence is designed for our pre-death test. The trials of this life and our responses to them determine our eternal destinies. When I can begin to look at trials as an examination of my choices in view of heaven, I see beyond the pain and I am motivated to persevere in righteousness toward the goal. Part one of this article from Apologetics Press is helpful in understanding the “testing ground” reality. Read it and make notes.  
<https://apologeticspress.org/why-people-suffer-part-i-5271/>
7. The epistle of 1 Peter was written during a time of intense trial, likely near the beginning of the Neronian persecution (Dickson). Research the persecution of Nero toward Christians and make a few general notes here.
  8. In 1 Peter, the casual reader can see some major themes of comfort. Place a verse number beside each theme below as you read through the book.
    - a. The reality of heaven in a relatively short time.
    - b. The fact that the land of trials is merely a pilgrimage.
    - c. The value we each have because of the price paid for our redemption.
    - d. Our marvelous identity as chosen, royal, & holy and our privilege to live in light.
    - e. The honor of suffering alongside Christ.
    - f. The opportunities to influence others that come with suffering.
    - g. The test that is suffering.
    - h. Suffering’s ultimate glory to God.
    - i. The commission of our souls to the faithful One who created us for this earth and for heaven.
    - j. God’s willingness to receive the “casted cares” (He cares for us).
    - k. His strengthening, establishing, completion and settling of us through trials.
  9. Write a short paragraph contrasting the “comfort” of the three friends of Job with the comfort of the God of all comfort.

### Practically Speaking

Think of the most severe testing time of your life, so far. Write the nature of it in the space below. Then, list three lessons you learned from that dark spot or three ways you became stronger. See if you can thank God for the strength you gained even from that hard education in your life. Then look for someone else who is going through a similar trial and pray for that person’s endurance, decisions and take-aways from the tribulation.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 7: Comfort from the Word

I'm excited about this month's study. Sometimes, when we say there's comfort in the Word, we are thinking about a Dayspring card with a lovely picture and verse on the front, or a magnet with "This is the day..." on the fridge, or a mom necklace with an inscription of a bit of Proverbs 31. All of these things are wonderful reminders of His goodness, and I cannot love putting the Bible everywhere any more than I do!

But I also hope we can be impressed with the fact that, when our times of heartache come, we need an arsenal of the Word's impressive artillery, already stored up inside us, if we are going to defeat the enemy. My granddaughter, Maggie, calls him "that old Satan." Last night she asked her mom if he is really old. Let me just tell you...he is very old, and he has had lots of practice getting people (every person who ever lived, save one) to fall for his deceptive tricks and pleadings. We will be woefully unprepared to do battle with him if we have not laid down big expenditures of time in the Word during the good times. You may not even be able to now appreciate the payback for the hours of time you are spending this year studying His comfort. But one day you will. Your study today is to help you make it through this day in faith and righteousness. But the purpose is not limited to this day.

Before we move into the meat of this month's study, I want to throw out a couple of easy-to-remember lists that have helped me stay on track. Bible study should be **daily** (structured time and place, as much as possible), **directional** (topic or book-based; purposeful, not random) and **deep** (using tools and digging). Bible study should include **meditation** (reviewing what you are learning when the Word is not even in front of you...think stop lights and waiting rooms and notebooks), **memorization** (this is hugely helpful, and we need to stop with the excuses...people of all ages can memorize; it just takes a little longer) and **marking** your Bible. You will be so much better prepared to discuss Scripture with another person if you are a Bible marker. You can string related passages together by marking citations for related passages in the margins of your Bible and be prepared to have discussions about lots of things. I have even found that marking in my Bible is better, for me personally, than taking a journal to worship, simply because my notes are more "findable" and pre-categorized for later on.

So, this month, I'm praying we can make Matthew 5:6 a reality for each digger. (Most of you are already there!)

1. Write that passage here.
2. Find a form of the word "comfort" in the context of this verse in the beatitudes.
3. Then notice the progression between the two verses (4 and 6):
  - a. Mourning: About what should the person who is poor in spirit be mourning? What most hurts those who really are wanting to do right?

- b. Meekness (having a cause under which I am selflessly serving): Once I am mourning about the right thing, I am given to serving God and defeating evil. I get my own selfishness out of my way.
  - c. Hunger: I know that I need spiritual sustenance to do battle with the devil and I am seeking it, not as a matter of mere responsibility, but because I crave the Word and its answers. Write Psalm 119:7 here.
4. Now, for the rest of the month, let's be directed by Psalm 119. First, do a little research to find out how the chapter is related to the alphabet. Write a short summary of that here.
  5. Next, notice that there are 22 sections of this psalm. That's roughly one section for each weekday of our month of study. Let's try to take one section each day that we are able and, with a little research each day and a prayer prior to that research each day, let's fall in love with the power of the Word in our individual lives. Let's build our arsenals and take comfort in that power. (I hope you can do this somewhere with a coffee or cocoa and under the smoothest fleece blanket in your house. But I get it...that we mostly can't. I've also lived long enough to know that I will not be doing exactly one section per day. Do the best you can and be thankful the blanket is unrelated to the arsenal. Those two do not even sound like they're a compatible pair!) Let's work on this from the NKJV.
  6. ALEPH
    - a. Write the definition for *undefiled* in verse one and pray that this is what you will desire to be as you study this psalm.
    - b. From verse four, what is the adverb that modifies *keep*? How are we to keep the precepts of God? Write the meaning of that adverb here.
    - c. Look at verse 6. Many times, I have been disappointed when I've looked in the mirror. This verse is about being surprised and disappointed when I look in the mirror of God's Word. Find a passage in the book of James that speaks about the Word as a mirror and cite it here
    - d. Pray that God will help you to keep the mirror handy (maybe in your purse) and not let chaotic days go by when you do not look in it.
  7. BETH
    - a. Verse 9: How many young men need "way cleansers" in our pornographic society? Many of our families have been directly affected by sin and addictions related to pornography. What passage in Matthew 5 directly addresses this sin?
    - b. Verses 11-12: The heart is the fountain of sinful words and behavior. Find a passage in Proverbs 23 that says this. While not oversimplifying, remember that filling the heart with the Word, leaves less room for sin.
    - c. Verse 16 is difficult in our world of instant entertainment and video feeds on every device, including our wrist watches. What is the meaning of the word *delight*?
    - d. List some ways that we might cultivate a desire to study and meditate on the Word? This verse says we should want to pass time in the Word. We should have the "can't wait" attitude about our study.



## 8. GIMEL

- a. What is the key in verse one to bountiful living?
- b. Verse 18 is a prayer that one may see amazing things in the Word. Stop right now and pray this prayer. If I can get to the point of understanding so that I see amazing things, how will this help me to align myself with the sentiment in verse 16?
- c. It is very important that we constantly remind ourselves that we are strangers (verse 19) as we travel through the testing ground called life. Far too many of us have lost this valuable concept of the temporal nature of our sojourn. We view ourselves as settlers, not pilgrims. This “settler-view” gives us an erroneous world view and it is incompatible with Christianity. It is dangerous to our destinations. Look up the word for *stranger* and write its definition here.
- d. God rebukes proud (arrogant) people. It is in our nature to be proud. When was pride introduced into the world? What other adjective in verse 21 automatically describes the proud? How did these two things go together when the sin of pride entered the world?
- e. Verse 23: Sometimes important people speak against you and there’s nothing you can do to stop this. List some important people in your world who decry your faith? Are there important people in our government or entertainment industries who do this? Give an example.
- f. Verse 24: In an era in which many of us depend on counselors to help us cope with difficult situations in our lives, we should be very careful to choose counselors who respect God’s testimonies above all. As Christian women, who should be our primary counselors? Give Scriptures, if possible.

## 9. DALETH

- a. This portion begins with an admission of mortality, thus dependence on God. Take time to pray right now and confess to Him your utter dependence.
- b. Verses 28-29: I know that there are many sisters reading who have just come through one of the most difficult times of life. Your souls are melting from heaviness. I am one of these sisters as I write. If this study is teaching me anything, it is teaching me that there is strength in His Word for times of weakness. There is mending for brokenness in Scripture. There is hope for hopelessness. Write the ESV rendering of verse 28 here.
- c. I love verse 32! *I will run the course of Your commandments*. It means I am going to hurry up to start, but I realize it will be a journey. Sometimes all of our problems will not be fixed immediately. We often have to let them “run their courses.” But we have to be sure we are running a course, too. What part of me will God enlarge when I do this? How do I need this enlargement when my heart is melting from heaviness?

## 10. HE

- a. Verse 33: “To the end” means all the way to its consequence. There are consequences to choices. Think about this passage with verse 32 of the previous section. Sometimes the positive consequence is a long way off. But we have to stay the course. How did this passage apply in the life of Joseph or Daniel?

- b. Verse 37: How often I need to remember what things are worthless: houses, lands, diamonds, cars, clothes, make-up, etc...etc...! Stop and pray that God will help you to recognize worthlessness in the material things around you.
- c. Is it okay to dread the taunting of the world when you're choosing to do the right thing? Find the passage here and define the word *reproach* from your lexicon.

#### 11. WAW

- a. Verses 41-42: It is okay to respond to those who have defamed us, as long as the response is based in the Word. List some Biblical adjectives that should describe our responses to those who may slander us.
- b. Verses 43-44: Sometimes the rational word of truth that should be my response to defamation goes quickly from my mind (and never exits my mouth) when I am angry or hurt. If you are finding yourself in a situation like this, stop and pray that your mouth will not let words of bitterness escape, but rather will speak truth from the Word.
- c. Verse 45: I love walking at liberty. That means I can just feel free to walk out in the open in broad daylight because I have nothing for which to be ashamed. I know people right now who are hiding huge secrets from their circles of friends, even from their spouses. They are not free people. Even if my heart is melting from heaviness (vs. 28), I have much if I can walk in liberty. Think of three Old Testament characters who could not walk in liberty.
- d. Verse 46: Of what was the psalmist not ashamed, no matter the audience?

#### 12. ZAYIN

- a. Search this passage for the memory with which we can comfort ourselves.
- b. Define *indignation* from verse 53.
- c. Verse 54: Give an example of a statute that we sing today.
- d. Verse 55: Do you wake up in the night and think about the Word? Try to train yourself to fall back asleep in meditation. Meditation is better than melatonin. (I try to recall a passage from each book of the Bible, a passage beginning with each letter of the alphabet or a spiritual song that begins with each alphabet letter. Given the psalm that we are studying, I think this idea is very biblical!) Pray that God will help you use any night-time moments for remembering His name in the night.

#### 13. HETH

- a. Verse 57: Allotments of inheritance were important to the Hebrew people. Family property allotments were detailed in the book of Numbers and the livelihoods of families were dependent on the maintenance of the "portion". To say that God was a man's portion was a vocalization of high praise to God. Read the last verse of Genesis 48 for one example of the importance of a portion.
- b. Verses 59-61: Is this repentance? Why or why not? (Recently my daughter was talking to our grandson about a seared conscience from 1 Timothy 4:2. Ezra, who is seven, said "Can this happen to children...this conscience thing?" Her answer, of course, was in the affirmative. "Well then," he said, "I think I need to be thinking about this and working on it. I did not know this could happen." Maybe we all should think on it more.) If we think

our consciences may be allowing for impenitence, what should we do, according to verse 60?

- c. Verse 61: Could the *cords* or ropes of this verse have to do with impenitence, also? Can you think of ropes of the wicked that might bind us? Good discussion.
- d. Put verse 62 with verse 55 and we are building a strong case that it is a great thing to put God's word in your night wake-up times.
- e. Verse 63: With whom should we be knit together? Who, in your life, fears God? Are you "knit together" with these people? Stop and pray for these companions right now.

#### 14. TETH

- a. Verses 67-69: Is it easier to go astray when things are going well? Why or why not? The indication is that affliction brought the psalmist closer to the Word. Verse 69 gives a hint of the nature of this affliction. Has anyone ever forged a lie against you? How was this person thick-hearted, having a heart as fat as grease?
- b. Verse 71 is hard to verbalize until one has moved far past the affliction/persecution. It is especially hard to say this if the lives of other people are being hurt in the path of destructive sin in your house. Stop and pray for innocent people who are being hurt by sin in your sphere of knowledge right now.

#### 15. YOD

- a. Verse 74: Are God-fearing people glad when they see you coming? Will they be encouraged by your presence? Will you comfort them in their times of need? Think about the latter part of our basic text for this year's study. What is it that we are to be sharing from our key passage?
- b. Verse 76: What is for our comfort when we are going through the rough patches? The verse could be translated "*Let your kindness be for my ease.*" How is God's kindness for your ease right now? What things are easier because He is being kind to you?
- c. Verses 78-79: When someone lies about me, on what should I meditate? Why should I not dwell on the lie that has been told?
- d. Take the time to pray for your enemies right now, if you have such.

#### 16. KAPH

- a. Verses 81-83: Our souls are "all done," spent, without the saving/intervention of God. We are like wineskins in smoke. This is an interesting metaphor. A simple Google search will define this word picture for you. Make a note of what, exactly, is meant by this term.
- b. Verses 84-86: Sometimes it is hard to wait on the Lord when someone is treating you spitefully. It's just difficult to wait for exoneration that may not even come till the final day. (Job surely must've had that problem!) Find at least five passages that encourage us to wait on the Lord. List those here.
- c. Verse 88: Find the Hebrew word for *lovingkindness* in this verse. How many times is this word in the book of Psalms? How many times is it in Psalm 119? He truly is the Father of mercies!

17. LAMED (I love this one!)

- a. Verses 89-90: Truth is forever settled and its verdicts issue from heaven itself. His faithfulness lasts though all eras of time.
- b. From the remainder of this psalm, list the things that belong to God. Start with truth and go from there. I think there are five things, but your answers don't have to match mine. Good discussion.
- c. Verse 96 says (in a paraphrase) "I have seen it all and your commandment covers it all."

18. MEM

- a. Begin by reading this hymn, which captures the spirit of this segment of the psalm:

*God's law is perfect and converts  
The soul in sin that lies  
God's testimony is most sure  
And makes the simple wise.*

*The statutes of the Lord are right  
And do rejoice the heart  
The Lord's command is pure and doth  
Light to the eyes impart.*

*Unspotted is the fear of God  
And ever doth endure  
The judgements of the Lord are truth  
And righteousness most pure.*

*Moreover, they Thy servant warn  
How he his life should frame  
A great reward provided is  
For them that keep the same*

*O how love I Thy law!  
O how love I Thy law!  
It is my meditation all the day  
O how love I Thy law!  
O how love I Thy law!  
It is my meditation all the day.*

- b. Verses 98-100: What two things do we need to do to be smarter than our enemies, wiser than our teachers and understand more than the elderly among us?
- c. Verse 103: In what ways is honey used to comfort? Do a quick Google search if you cannot think of any ways.

19. NUN

- a. Verse 107: What does the Hebrew word for *revive* mean? What would a real revival do for your congregation?

- b. Verse 108: Use a commentary and determine what is meant by “the mouth’s freewill offering”.
- c. Verse 110: From what do we have to stray in order to get into the snare of the wicked?
- d. Verse 112: What is the difference between the word for “forever” and “to the very end”?

## 20. SAMEK

- a. What does *double-minded* mean in verse 113?
- b. From which verse in this section would we take that we should openly talk about heaven to those in the world around us?
- c. The word *stray* in verse 118 indicates an accidental erring, yet it says God hates those who fall this way. How does this speak to the seriousness of Bible study?
- d. Verse 119: God puts away the wicked like *dross*. Define that word from your lexicon.

## 21. AYIN

- a. Verse 122: Sometimes we need a co-signer when taking out loans; someone who will guarantee that we will pay the money back. The “oppressors” in the financial world really want to be sure they are not going to lose money on a mortgage. The psalmist here is asking God to co-sign; to be the surety...to believe in the man, even though he is weak and mortal. He is asking Him to promise to provide if there is a need. I need a God who will believe in me and provide for me when I am weak. I need a Savior who is never short in His spiritual reserve. I need Jesus!
- b. Verse 126: This verse is exceedingly dear to me because there have been many times when I have wanted to say to God “It is time for You to act.” When people are acting like the laws of God do not even apply to them and they seem to be getting away with it, I want to say, “It is time for You to act.” But then the result of my frustration and watching the wicked is in verse 127. “Therefore” means “as a result,” so what is it that results from my frustration with the wicked?
- c. Verse 127: Let’s all hate the sham, the fake, the hypocritical journey that we sometimes witness among those who are opposing truth, but still trying to be a part of the body. Duplicity is the reason for the rebuke in Revelation 3:14-19. To whom was it given and why?

## 22. PE

- a. Read verse 131 and think about a “panting” or “desiring” metaphor for wanting the Will of the Lord that has to do with a deer and/or a baby in other parts of Scripture. If you can find them, write them here.
- b. This section says God has a custom. What is it?
- c. What kinds of iniquity are particularly good at making men slaves (Verse 133)?
- d. Verse 136: What emotion should we experience when we see sin around us? Are there other emotions that you sometimes see from heathen people when sin is flaunted? Elaborate. Have you shed tears because of sin lately?

### 23. TSADDE

- a. How many times is the word *righteous* or *righteousness* used in this short segment?
- b. The word *righteous* has acquired a bad rap in our world. It has come to be synonymous with *pompous* or *prideful*. Research the meaning of the Hebrew word(s) from this segment and pray that you might have the qualities inherent in this word in your life.

### 24. QOPH

- a. The word *cry* is used 3 times in this section. At which point does it mean *to shout*? At what time of the day is the shout?
- b. When the psalmist cried with his *whole heart*, that includes feelings, will and intellect. Try to think of something that you have prayed about that included all three.
- c. Why was this psalmist awake in the night?
- d. Verses 150-151: When people who are far from the law of God come near to us, whom else do we want nearby?

### 25. RESH

- a. When reading the first part of this section, list from verses 153-157, the different terms used for the Word of God.
- b. From these verses, do you think it was difficult for the writer to stay faithful to God? Against what forces had he been persevering?
- c. Verse 158: What disgusted the psalmist? Contrast this emotion with the one in verse 136. If you have ever been in peril because of a wicked enemy, you know it is easy to vacillate between sorrow and nauseating disgust.
- d. Verse 160: What is the big emphasis of this verse? How does it parallel 2 Timothy 3:16?
- e. Pray today that you will love ALL of His law.

### 26. SHIN

- a. Begin today by praying verses 161-162.

“Lord, no matter who may persecute or deride me, help me to always stand in awe of your Word. Help me to rejoice when I am studying, like one who is finding great treasure!”
- b. What is the significance of the 7 prayers of praise daily in verse 164? All of our answers will not be exactly alike but do a little research and give your best guess.
- c. In this segment we love the Word. We rejoice at the Word. We praise Him for the Word. We have peace because of the Word. We have hope through the Word. We obey the commands of the Word. Which verses say each of these things?
- d. Which of these things can be said about the Word-in-the-flesh of John 1:1? Can all of these things be said about Jesus? Can you cite some New Testament passages that confirm your answer?

### 27. TAU

- a. Begin today by praying verse 176:

“Thank you, Father, for seeking me with your Son when I was, like a sheep, gone astray.”

- b. Then turn and read Isaiah 53:4-9 and Luke 15:3-7. Why did Jesus tell the story of the lost sheep, according to verse 1 of Luke 15?
- c. Praise God today, that through the Good Shepherd, He receives sinners. Do what verse 171 says the psalmist did and let your lips utter praise.

### Practically Speaking

Write out a prayer of supplication, as the psalmist did in the long passage we just studied; but yours doesn't have to be this long! Ask God to help you crave His Word and to overcome all of the obstacles that are in your way of faithful Bible study (if there are obstacles). Ask Him to help you as a sister, a wife, a mother and/or a grandmother to speak of His Word with awe and to view Bible study as finding treasure!

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 8: Comfort in Prayer

Because I have personally found great comfort in praying the Psalms during the weeks preceding the writing of this Digging Deep material, I want to challenge us all to frequently look to these amazing chapters from the Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts heavenward. One of my sisters called me and asked me to come over and share with her exactly how to pray the Psalms. “Well, I don’t really know how,” I said, “except to just look at the Psalm and adapt it my own life in the day I am praying and say the thoughts to the throne similarly to the way they were originally penned.” As a disclaimer, let me say definitively that I know that these prayers are not inspired once I’ve adapted and paraphrased them to fit my day and my life. Still, this is a comfort-filled exercise to me, just to know that I am praying similarly to the inspired writer of the psalm. To know that God heard this sentiment from him about 3000 years ago and now He hears again from me, is powerful to my heart as I try and serve the infinitely powerful God with whom a thousand years are *“like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night”* (Psalm 90:4). If there is a part of a psalm that doesn’t fit your life, just skip that verse and move to the next thought.

In this chapter I have categorized several sets of Psalms. Here’s your challenge. Choose the set that describes/fits you right now best. The categories are below:

I am encountering enemies.

I want to praise the Father.

I want to thank him for our Zion, the church.

I am mourning over loss.

I am being persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

I want to praise His sovereignty.

I need comfort from anxiety.

I have repented.

I just want to thank Him.

Wickedness is all around me.

Once you have chosen a category about which you would like to pray to the Father, look at the list of psalms below and pray through them, adapting them to you and to our era of time, to the best of your ability. I have placed seven psalms in each category, so you could pray daily for a week or you can spread them out through the month. Many of them take very little changing to be very appropriate prayers for our day. In each category, I have done one of them for you. (Really for me...all our prayers will be personal and different, of course.) First, you will see the psalm. Then you will see my prayer. You just choose a category and pray the seven psalms. Two more things: 1) I don’t presume that anyone has to pray when or in the precise way that I would suggest. You don’t have to pray these prayers. This is just a suggestion that has helped me. You don’t even have to pray these prayers to be a DD finisher. This is the one section you can skip if you don’t find it helpful or comforting. 2) If you come across a text in a psalm that just doesn’t fit your world right now, just



omit that phrase and go on praying. You do not have to write these prayers. Just be sure you speak them to your Father.

### **I am encountering enemies: Psalms 3, 5, 6, 11, 31, 49, 86**

#### *Psalm 6*

*O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger,  
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.  
Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak;  
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.  
My soul also is greatly troubled;  
But You, O Lord—how long?  
Return, O Lord, deliver me!  
Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!  
For in death there is no remembrance of You;  
In the grave who will give You thanks?  
I am weary with my groaning;  
All night I make my bed swim;  
I drench my couch with my tears.  
My eye wastes away because of grief;  
It grows old because of all my enemies.  
Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity;  
For the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping.  
The Lord has heard my supplication;  
The Lord will receive my prayer.  
Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled;  
Let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.*

Oh Lord, please hear me and don't turn from me in anger because I am weak. Please do not punish me now, but have mercy on me. Please heal me, for I am so troubled. How long will it be, Lord? Please deliver me! I feel like I will die with grief, but Lord, I cannot cause others to know You when I am gone from this life. I cannot cause others to thank and praise You then. I am so weary with groaning in this sadness. I cry until there are no more tears. I cannot sleep. My purpose and motivation are weakening because I am so deeply grieved. It seems I have lost everything that means much to me because of my enemy. Please let him depart from me with his sin. You have heard my cries. You have heard me begging for relief. I know you hear me. Let the enemy be ashamed and troubled and stopped.

## **I want to praise the Father: Psalms 29, 78, 93, 95, 98, 105, 113**

### *Psalm 29*

*Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones,  
Give unto the Lord glory and strength.  
Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name;  
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.  
The voice of the Lord is over the waters;  
The God of glory thunders;  
The Lord is over many waters.  
The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.  
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars,  
Yes, the Lord splinters the cedars of Lebanon.  
He makes them also skip like a calf,  
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.  
The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire.  
The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
The Lord shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh.  
The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth,  
And strips the forests bare;  
And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!"  
The Lord sat enthroned at the Flood,  
And the Lord sits as King forever.  
The Lord will give strength to His people;  
The Lord will bless His people with peace.*

Lord, I want to praise You because You are strong and glorious. I give You the glory, as best I can, that is due Your name. I worship You in the beauty of holiness. Holiness is pure, unblemished, set apart. It is beautiful. Your voice is on the waters in the oceans where we marvel at the expanse and it is also You whom we hear in the splashes in the lakes when our children are skipping rocks. You are the God who thunders and You are on all the quiet waters, too. Your voice is powerful, full of majesty and Your voice broke the big oak tree in our back yard in the storm. You make big trees just blow across the ground in powerful twisters and tornadoes. You command the flames and cause the earth to quake. You are in charge of animal reproduction and plant growth. In Your church, we speak of Your glory. You have control over the flooding, since the mighty flood in the day of Noah. You are our King forever; You give us strength in You and You bless us, as Your children, with peace.

## **I want to thank Him for our Zion, the church: Psalms 20, 21, 24, 48, 50, 84, 85**

### *Psalm 20*

*May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble;*

*May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;*

*May He send you help from the sanctuary,*

*And strengthen you out of Zion;*

*May He remember all your offerings,*

*And accept your burnt sacrifice.*

*Selah*

*May He grant you according to your heart's desire,*

*And fulfill all your purpose.*

*We will rejoice in your salvation,*

*And in the name of our God we will set up our banners!*

*May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.*

*Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed;*

*He will answer him from His holy heaven*

*With the saving strength of His right hand.*

*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;*

*But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.*

*They have bowed down and fallen;*

*But we have risen and stand upright.*

*Save, Lord!*

*May the King answer us when we call.*

Father, I am so very thankful that You hear me in the day of trouble and that Your name, Your authority, defends our practices and purposes. I am thankful that You give Your people help—eternal strength in the church, which is your Zion today. Please be gracious to us and remember and know that we are trying to serve You. Help us to be living sacrifices to You. We, as Your church, set up Your banners. We want everyone to know that we are nothing and the glory is Yours. Please hear our prayers and save us as Your anointed ones today. Hear us from Your holy heaven and give us aid from Your strong right hand. Some people trust in military might, but we trust in Your name and authority. Those who put their trust elsewhere fall, but Your church is risen and stands upright. Save us in the end. Let our King hear us when we call.

## **I am mourning over loss: Psalms 13, 38, 42, 77, 86, 100, 121**

### *Psalm 13*

*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?*

*How long will You hide Your face from me?  
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,  
Having sorrow in my heart daily?  
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?  
Consider and hear me, O Lord my God;  
Enlighten my eyes,  
Lest I sleep the sleep of death;  
Lest my enemy say,  
“I have prevailed against him”;  
Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.  
But I have trusted in Your mercy;  
My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
Because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

How Long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? I know that You are really not forsaking, for You said you will never, ever, ever forsake me. But this is so hard. It feels forsaken. I am so sad in my soul and then every day the sorrow returns. I feel like I am letting death and the devil have the victory. Please think of me and hear me. Give light to my eyes, lest I just die. Don't let my enemy say, "I've had my way with her." Let me, instead, turn to You, rejoicing in Your salvation. I will sing to You, because You have blessed me bountifully.

### **I am undergoing persecution for righteousness' sake: Psalms 4, 7, 27, 34, 35, 41, 118**

*Psalm 4  
Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!  
You have relieved me in my distress;  
Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.  
How long, O you sons of men,  
Will you turn my glory to shame?  
How long will you love worthlessness  
And seek falsehood?  
Selah  
But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly;  
The Lord will hear when I call to Him.  
Be angry, and do not sin.  
Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.  
Selah  
Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,*

*And put your trust in the Lord.  
There are many who say,  
“Who will show us any good?”  
Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.  
You have put gladness in my heart,  
More than in the season that their grain and wine increased.  
I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;  
For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

Please hear me when I call, Father, the God of my righteousness. You have relieved me in my distress. Please have mercy on me and hear my prayer. How long, will You let people turn my glory to shame—the glory I want for You, God? How long will it seem like the devil is defeating any good that I was trying to do? I know that You’re not honoring worthlessness and falsehood. I know, in my mind, that You have set apart those who are godly. I am trying to be godly. I know that You’re hearing me. Help me to be angry and yet not sin. Help me to collect my thoughts when I lie in my own bed. Help me to sacrificially live for You. Help me to trust You in this hard time. I know You will show me good at last. I know You will give us light at the end of this tunnel. I know Your goodness to us is far greater than any material good to our enemies. I can, therefore, lie down and sleep peacefully, knowing that You alone can make me dwell in complete and utter safety.

### **I want to praise His sovereignty: Psalms 33, 43, 53, 58, 79, 91, 93**

*Psalm 33  
The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.  
By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,  
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.  
He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;  
He lays up the deep in storehouses.  
Let all the earth fear the Lord;  
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.  
For He spoke, and it was done;  
He commanded, and it stood fast.  
The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;  
He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.  
The counsel of the Lord stands forever,  
The plans of His heart to all generations.  
Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,  
The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.  
The Lord looks from heaven;*

*He sees all the sons of men.  
From the place of His dwelling He looks  
On all the inhabitants of the earth;  
He fashions their hearts individually;  
He considers all their works.  
No king is saved by the multitude of an army;  
A mighty man is not delivered by great strength.  
A horse is a vain hope for safety;  
Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength.  
Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,  
On those who hope in His mercy,  
To deliver their soul from death,  
And to keep them alive in famine.  
Our soul waits for the Lord;  
He is our help and our shield.  
For our heart shall rejoice in Him,  
Because we have trusted in His holy name.  
Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us,  
Just as we hope in You.*

Lord, even when things look dark in the world in which we live, we know that this earth is still full of Your goodness. You are powerful enough that You made the heavens just by speaking, and all the hosts of the heavens You made with Your breath. That's more power and intelligence than I can even fathom. You gather up the seas in a heap and lay up the oceans in storehouse. You truly set the bounds for all of nature. I praise You. Everybody in the world should fear and praise You. Every person should stand in awe of You because You just spoke and it was created. Your Word holds it together. You are greater than any international governmental counsel of nations. They are nothing when measured beside You. Their plans fail, but Your counsel stands forever and Your plans will happen. They will be completed. Blessed is any nation whose God is You, Father. And far above any nation on earth, You chose the church as Your spiritual inheritance. We are blessed above any nation on the earth to be in Your spiritual kingdom. You can look from heaven and see all the people on the earth at once. All those 7.5 billion people You can see and, yet, You know every heart. You made every heart. You know and think about all that they do. There is no one mighty enough to be saved by an army or great strength. But Your eye, for saving, is on those who fear You; those who have hope because You have mercy. That's me! You will deliver my soul from death. You will keep me alive in this spiritual famine that is all around us in America today. I am depending on You because You are my only helper and shield. I am rejoicing in You. I trust in Your holy name. Please let Your mercy be on me, just as I am hoping in You.

## **I need consolation/comfort: Psalms 1, 22, 23, 46, 112, 117, 124**

### *Psalm 1*

*Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.  
The ungodly are not so,  
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

Father, please bless me and help me to be a woman who will not listen to ungodly counselors. As I choose places and people for advice, help me not to get the wrong counsel. Help me not to place my soul in positions of temptation from sinners. Help me not to be a person who makes fun of righteousness as so many do today. Help me, instead to delight in Your law. Help me to think on Your law, Your word, day and night. Help me to be like the tree planted by the water, taking in Your nourishment to be strong; and help me to bring forth fruit for Your glory in Your good time. Help me not to prematurely wither before I've had the chance to bear much fruit and help me to prosper in the good things that I may be able to yet do for You. I know the ungodly are different. They are like the chaff that just gets blown away—so temporary and fragile. They will not have anything to stand on in the final judgment and the sinners will not be welcomed with the congregation of the righteous in that day. You know me. Help me to be righteous in Your sight, so You will know me in the judgment, because the way of the ungodly will perish.

## **I have repented: Psalms 40, 51, 101, 103, 116, 126, 130**

### *Psalm 40*

*I waited patiently for the Lord;  
And He inclined to me,*

*And heard my cry.*  
*He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,*  
*Out of the miry clay,*  
*And set my feet upon a rock,*  
*And established my steps.*  
*He has put a new song in my mouth—*  
*Praise to our God;*  
*Many will see it and fear,*  
*And will trust in the Lord.*  
*Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust,*  
*And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*  
*Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works*  
*Which You have done;*  
*And Your thoughts toward us*  
*Cannot be recounted to You in order;*  
*If I would declare and speak of them,*  
*They are more than can be numbered.*  
*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;*  
*My ears You have opened.*  
*Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.*  
*Then I said, ‘Behold, I come;*  
*In the scroll of the book it is written of me.*  
*I delight to do Your will, O my God,*  
*And Your law is within my heart.”*  
*I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness*  
*In the great assembly;*  
*Indeed, I do not restrain my lips,*  
*O Lord, You Yourself know.*  
*I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;*  
*I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation;*  
*I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth*  
*From the great assembly.*  
*Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord;*  
*Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.*  
*For innumerable evils have surrounded me;*  
*My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up;*  
*They are more than the hairs of my head;*  
*Therefore my heart fails me.*  
*Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;*  
*O Lord, make haste to help me!*



*Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion  
Who seek to destroy my life;  
Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor  
Who wish me evil.  
Let them be confounded because of their shame,  
Who say to me, "Aha, aha!"  
Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;  
Let such as love Your salvation say continually,  
"The Lord be magnified!"  
But I am poor and needy;  
Yet the Lord thinks upon me.  
You are my help and my deliverer;  
Do not delay, O my God.*

I waited patiently for you, Lord. You heard me and brought me up from a horrible place—a pit of miry clay. You took my feet from the messy clay where I was sinking and put me on a rock. You gave me new steps—a purpose and a new song! I praise You for this. Others may see my forgiveness and they may trust You too, and they will be blessed. All who trust You instead of the deceitfulness of sin are blessed. You have done so many good things for me. I cannot even recall or count them all. You do not need anything that I have. You do not want animal sacrifices or offering. But You opened my ears to Your Will and I said “Behold I come. I delight to do Your Will.” Help me to always take great joy in doing Your Will. Help me to tell others about the wonderful life they can have in Your righteousness. Help me to make others want this. Help me not to refrain my lips from speaking this. Help me not to be selfish with your truth about righteous living and its blessings. Help me to speak it at every opportunity. Help me to boldly tell of Your faithfulness, Your salvation, Your lovingkindness and Your truth. Please keep giving me Your tender mercies. Save me with Your lovingkindness and truth, Lord. We get so mixed up in evil that is around us. Sin overtakes us so that we are ashamed and cannot look up. My heart fails me because I have sinned so often! Please be happy to save me. Please hurry to help me. If there are those who would destroy me again, please stop them. Confuse them, shame them, drive them back or dishonor them, but do not let them harm me, spiritually. Let those who are making fun of me or wishing me evil, be stopped, Lord. Let me make friends of those who are seeking Your ways and rejoicing in You. I love your salvation. Let me say with all your people, “The Lord be magnified.” I am just poor and needy, but still You think about me. You are my helper and my deliverer. O God, please do not delay to be with me and save me!

## **I just want to thank Him: Psalms 30, 34, 63, 65, 66, 67, 92**

### *Psalm 34*

*I will bless the Lord at all times;  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;  
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.  
Oh, magnify the Lord with me,  
And let us exalt His name together.  
I sought the Lord, and He heard me,  
And delivered me from all my fears.  
They looked to Him and were radiant,  
And their faces were not ashamed.  
This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him,  
And saved him out of all his troubles.  
The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him,  
And delivers them.  
Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good;  
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!  
Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints!  
There is no want to those who fear Him.  
The young lions lack and suffer hunger;  
But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.  
Come, you children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.  
Who is the man who desires life,  
And loves many days, that he may see good?  
Keep your tongue from evil,  
And your lips from speaking deceit.  
Depart from evil and do good;  
Seek peace and pursue it.  
The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
And His ears are open to their cry.  
The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,  
To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.  
The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears,  
And delivers them out of all their troubles.  
The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart,  
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.  
Many are the afflictions of the righteous,*

*But the Lord delivers him out of them all.  
He guards all his bones;  
Not one of them is broken.  
evil shall slay the wicked,  
And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.  
The Lord redeems the soul of His servants,  
And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.*

Father, I magnify You. I exalt Your name. When I approach You, You hear me. You allay my fears. People who are poor and downcast look to You and are radiant. People who are so weak, like I am, can come to You without being ashamed. You will save me, in the end, from all my troubles. You have angels who are around those who fear You and You are able to deliver me. Even the lions are sometimes hungry, but not I. I have every good thing I need, and it all comes from You. I taste my food and I know You are good to me. I trust You. I fear You and those who do this have no want. Let me teach my children and grandchildren to fear You. Let me show them that a good and happy life is bound up in fearing You. Let me teach them to keep their words pure, to keep their tongues from lying, to run from evil and toward good, to seek peace and live peacefully with others. I know Your eyes are on those who are righteous, and Your ears hear the cries of those who are righteous. You turn Your face from evil-doers to erase eventually even the memory of them. But when I am righteous and call for Your help, You are hearing me and You will deliver me from troubles. Help me to have a broken heart over my sin and to always humble my spirit before You. I know that it seems like there are problems all around me at times, but You make a way out for me every time. You take care of my body and soul. The wicked will meet destruction in the end and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. You have redeemed me and I am so thankful! No one who is trusting in You will be condemned. How thankful I am for that truth!

### **Wickedness is all around me: Psalms 11, 12, 14, 17, 26, 28, 36**

*Psalm 11  
In the Lord I put my trust;  
How can you say to my soul,  
“Flee as a bird to your mountain”?  
For look! The wicked bend their bow,  
They make ready their arrow on the string,  
That they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.  
If the foundations are destroyed,  
What can the righteous do?  
The Lord is in His holy temple,  
The Lord's throne is in heaven;*

*His eyes behold,  
His eyelids test the sons of men.  
The Lord tests the righteous,  
But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.  
Upon the wicked He will rain coals;  
Fire and brimstone and a burning wind  
Shall be the portion of their cup.  
For the Lord is righteous,  
He loves righteousness;  
His countenance beholds the upright.*

Lord, I am putting my trust in You. I cannot fly to a place now and rise above all this evil. For wicked people are getting their arrows out to shoot at the hearts of good and upright people. They are secretive and subtle. If they destroy the foundations of truth, what will the righteous do? And yet, I know You are on the throne. You are in the midst of the church. Your throne is still secure in heaven. You see all that's going on and You are testing the righteous. But I know you hate wickedness, and You will rain coals of fire on the wicked. Fire and brimstone and a burning wind will be the lot of the wicked. You are righteous. You love righteousness. Your countenance is favorable to us.

Now, read the book of Nehemiah. This is a great book of fervent and answered prayers. There are nine instances of prayer in the book. Some are just statements that prayer was offered, but most have at least a portion of the words that were used. Highlight the prayers in the book and see if you can find the following “comforters” in the prayers in this book. Make a note of the ones you find.

1. Confidence in the promises God has made.
2. Confidence in God's willingness to forgive.
3. Confidence that God will hear my quick “emergency prayers.”
4. Confidence that God will punish sin.
5. Confidence that work should accompany prayer.
6. Confidence that God can handle the enemies of the work.
7. Confidence in offering praise to God.
8. Confidence in confessing sins.
9. Confidence in begging God to remember the goodness of a life lived for God.

### Practically Speaking

Have a special prayer hour for the women of your congregation and go to God in prayer for the needs of your group. Especially pray for any lost souls that women in your group are trying to reach for Christ. Make a list here of the prayers you want to continue for one another.

or

Start a Facebook or texting group for several of your sisters to which you bring your prayer requests and in which you constantly let each other know that you're praying for these requests. I am a part of at least four such groups right now and it is a huge source of comfort for me.

or

Join the Digging Deep for Encouragement Facebook group and begin regular prayer in that group for your sisters.

or

Personally pray through the beatitudes in Matthew 5 similarly to how we prayed the Psalms this month.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 9: Romans, A Much-Needed Space of Grace

The next three months of our study will be taken largely from the book of Romans. As we study, we will see the great chasm between the holiness of God and the desperate wretchedness of each one of us. Grace is the answer to every obstacle between God and man; the provider of every entity needed for heaven for all who want eternal life. But God's saving grace is not a net that He spreads and with which he captures all people for heaven. His grace stays in a distinct place and there's an access code, if you will, for entry into the place of grace. Let's look at the *grace space*.

1. Read Romans 1-4, answering the following questions:
  - a. Who wrote the book and to whom was it written?
  - b. In verse 5, there are three necessary components that provided apostleship for Paul. What were they?
  - c. To what other group do these three requisites apply as stated in verse 6?
  - d. By what do justified people live? How is Romans 1:16-17 related to the if/then concept of conditional salvation we examined in month four of this study?
  - e. As we study comfort, it is not possible to ignore the wrath of God. It is an extremely Biblical concept. Write several phrases from chapter one that emphasize this truth.
  - f. How many times did Paul say God "gave them up"? What do you think that means? (Good group discussion.)
  - g. Do a little research on the personal life of Nero Caesar, who ruled in Rome at the time of this writing. What is known about his sexual debauchery?
  - h. Were the Jews in the Roman Empire more righteous than the Gentiles, generally speaking? What made the Jews inexcusable?
  - i. Prove from Romans 2 that a straight line can be drawn from human activity (works) to our salvation or damnation.
  - j. List the credentials the Jews claimed as they were resting in the law and boasting. The next few verses are a logical journey to get to 3:27, which excludes what?
  - k. How did heart surgery replace the age-old surgery of the 8th day in the new covenant?
  - l. What percentage of the population stands condemned under the law of God without Christ? Cite a passage.
  - m. In 3:24-28 there are several prerequisites to justification. List these.
  - n. At what age did Abraham receive God's commendation as being righteous? At what age did he become circumcised? Is circumcision an absolute requirement, then, for righteousness?
2. Here we come to chapter 5, our dose of comfort for this month. We start with the *therefore* and it is a wonderful study to find out what it is *there for!*... According to verse one of this great

chapter, the capsule that contains the remedy we need so desperately is called *justification*. Write the Greek definition of this word here.

3. This justification in verse one is an innocent verdict from Almighty God; a verdict that is complete and final. The only way it can be altered is if the pardoned and justified one refuses the continuing conditions of this gift. Because of this verdict, we have peace with God. Write the definition from your lexicon of this word *peace*.
4. Which part of your lexicon's definition of peace best applies in the context of this passage? Is that the kind of peace that you most want?
5. Next there is this amazing "grace space" in verse two. (Let's think of it as a room.) But notice we need access to that space. (The space is always there and available for those who have access.) Write the definition for the word *access* here.
6. We need admission into the room of grace, but once we are admitted there is a mental activity going on in there (5:2). What is it and why are we doing it?
7. Now verse three gives us something else to rejoice about once admitted into the grace space. It's our tribulations or trials. Wait?! Why on earth do we rejoice in those? List the reasons (results) from the very comforting verses three through five here.
8. Let's camp out in verses six through nine, for a time, because they are full of comfort. You and I were in a bad place with no strength with which to rescue ourselves. We had transgressed the law and were, because of our sins, headed for damnation. We had absolutely nothing with which to recommend ourselves. We had no access to the grace space. We had no admission ticket, if you will. It's interesting that, in verse six, Paul makes it plain that we were characterized by two unpleasant realities. What were they?
  - a. But then, it's as if he wants us to be sure we understand that there was absolutely no way we could enter the grace space without the death of Jesus; so he makes it very plain in verses six through ten that God did the unthinkable and sacrificed Himself for us. He wants us to think about several aspects of the sacrifice.
  - b. Our spot was dire. According to verse ten, from what was He saving us?
  - c. On our own, we had no possible solution or hope. How does verse six describe that plight?
  - d. We were not sweet and lovable, commanding the affection of God. What noun is used to name our situation in verse six?
  - e. This sacrifice is far from usual. It is uncommon. Which kind of sacrifice is even unusual according to verse seven?
  - f. Every now and then, another sacrifice might happen in the scheme of history, but this was not even that. What was the every-now-and-then "perchance" sacrifice of verse seven?
  - g. Finally, in this instance, the Giver was not a man. Who commended His love?

The key words are all important: *God, commended, love, sinners, Christ, died*. Each one is packed with the product, which is an unbelievable rescue for me. Justification. I get to walk away from the sentence of eternal hell.

9. What word describes us before justification in 5:10?
- It is extremely important that we realize the estrangement we had from God prior to our admission into His grace space. It was not that we were friends of God who hadn't yet been admitted. It was not as though we were good people who were on a journey toward salvation. It's not as though we had a partial hope of salvation. Once again, the word is \_\_\_\_\_...estranged from God and in dire need of reconciliation. Fathom with me the awfulness of sin and the amazing, crushing burden lifted by a God-sacrifice. Fathom the rich meaning, in this context, of reconciliation with God.
  - Define the word *reconciled* (verse 10) from your lexicon.
  - There are three components of the sacrifice that are absolutely essential. They are in verses nine and ten. These three things had to be part of the sacrifice. List them here.
10. Verses 12-21 contain a comparison of Adam and Christ. It is mostly a contrast as you will quickly see when you examine the passage. Complete this chart with cited verses.

Adam introduced a system of sin-and-die into the world.	Christ introduced a system of...
Adam made way for death for us all.	Christ made a way for...
Adam disobeyed.	Christ...
Adam's sin brought the guilt of sin into the world for the first time.	Christ's death brought full...
Adam's sin brought physical death.	Christ's death brought eternal...

11. Read Isaiah 53-55. From Isaiah 53, make a comprehensive list of everything He did for us, every listed ingredient of the price He paid for our admission into the grace space. Your list will begin with...*He grew up as a tender plant.* (This, in itself, is amazing. He had never been fragile before, but God was a tiny baby!)
12. Chapters 54 and 55 are descriptive of the ladies who are studying along today. We are all Gentiles. Prior to the sacrifice, we were the strangers, the foreigners. List the difficulties that Gentiles faced prior to the sacrifice from chapter 54. Your list will begin with...*We were barren* (vs. 1).
13. According to 54:11, we were without what commodity?
14. Copy 54:17 and put this comfort verse on your refrigerator. It is rich!



15. There is great comfort in Isaiah 55:8-12. When I am hurting and wondering why God is not releasing me from the danger or the pain or the anxiety—why He is not stopping the enemy or removing the trial—I need to read verses eight and nine, remembering He already knows the end of my story. Think about Esther, here. What if Mordecai could have known in Esther 4:1 what he knew in Esther chapter nine? Read these two passages from Esther now. Make any notes here.
16. Notice, lastly, Isaiah 55:10-11. When you see the rain this month, think of bread. Think of sustenance and how very important the rain is to our lives. Take the time to think about the Words of God as rain (or melted snow). The end result of His Word coming down to us (John 1:1-4) is our spiritual sustenance, the bread of Life (John 6:48-51). It is our access into the space of grace. We will revisit this access in the next lesson. Take a photo this month of the rain (or snow if you are in Alaska) and post it to our Facebook group to remind us that His Word does not return void. Copy Luke 4:4 here.

### Practically Speaking

If you still have your plant from Month 7 of the previous study (*The Hour Has Come*), post a picture of it for us on the Digging Deep Facebook page along with Isaiah 55:11. If you do not still have that plant, memorize Isaiah 55:11 and say it to your spouse or your child or a fellow digger.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 10: Romans 6, Access to the Grace Space

Last month, we thought about the tragic and dire situation of mankind before the rescue of Jesus. We took some time to think about how unworthy of that rescue we are and how very far away we are from any comfort without His sacrifice. If we can't get into the room, we are all in the same condition because of sin. We are yet sinners (Romans 5:8). Last month we looked into the room where grace abounds—the grace space—and we saw rejoicing. Two things make people who are in the room rejoice: hope and tribulations. Those two things complement one another. The hope of heaven makes tribulations have purpose. And tribulations make the hope of heaven all the sweeter. This month, let's focus on gaining access into that room where we all want to be.

1. Read Romans 6. Now step back and look at the chapter as a whole. It's about the necessity of getting into Christ (where grace is applied), and it's about what is required to get there. There's an emphasis in the chapter on repentance from sin and on baptism. Which one gets the most time and emphasis in this chapter?
2. With the bulk of time spent in chapter six on ceasing from sin, Paul makes a clear answer to the somewhat rhetorical question in verse one. Most of us have a hard time believing that anyone would really think that the new covenant of grace was, in effect, giving people freedom to sin. This might be easier to understand if we think about the vast changes in the whole system of religion that those former Jews (this book had a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles) were processing as they moved from Judaism to Christianity. Things had drastically changed in their religious moorings. Is it possible that some of them actually were thinking, "Well, it's good that we don't have to spend so much time worrying about sin, making atonement, cleansing ourselves of every germ before we go into the temple. In fact, let's just not worry about sin too much, anymore." Or perhaps some were thinking, "Well, if these heathen people, so well known for idolatry and illicit sexual activity, even in worship, are in the kingdom, the restraints must be very much loosened from our old Levitical law." Thoughts?
3. In response to this question "Should we just go on sinning more and more so that grace may abound?" Paul spends the bulk of chapter 6 talking about living in freedom from sin. The concept of repentance from dead works is the main and focal point of the chapter. It's repetitive, but find all of these synonymous terms for repentance in the chapter. Let's use NKJV for these terms. Cite the verses mentioned.
  - a. Died to sin
  - b. Newness of life
  - c. Old man was crucified
  - d. No longer slaves of sin
  - e. Freed from sin

- f. Death no longer has dominion
  - g. Dead to sin, but alive to God
  - h. Do not let sin reign
  - i. Do not obey sin in its lusts
  - j. Do not present members as instruments of unrighteousness
  - k. Be alive from the dead
  - l. Sin shall not have dominion
4. The point we want to examine is this one. This is a key chapter to which those who believe that water baptism is essential to salvation go, and rightly so. This chapter tells us clearly what must be done to contact the death of Jesus, to reenact and obey the gospel. But, even in this key chapter, repentance is the overshadowing emphasis. Think about what hard work repentance is! Think about the putting away of sins that have been very much a part of every day of your adult life. Think about the pull of addictive sins that will drive the new Christian crazy. Think about sins that were integral to close relationships—friendships and sometimes even spousal relationships—in a society like the one described in chapter one of this letter.
- a. Now this: Repentance, it seems to me, is a much bigger load of human WORK than is baptism. I hear friends who abuse the book of Romans by saying that it teaches that human works have nothing to do with our salvation. But I do not hear those same friends saying that we do not have to repent of sins in order to access grace. Sisters, there is no getting around the fact that we have to do hard things—yes, work!—in order to live in the grace space. It is work to conquer alcohol and drug addictions. It is work to overcome pornography that has controlled your mind. It is work to provide for a family when you have been living off of the government. It is work to stop using foul language. It is work to form new relationships when all of your old ones are walking temptations for you to go back into your old ways. Repentance and its necessary consequences involve hard work!
  - b. The writer of the book had done some hard things, some strenuous things in the process of his repentance. In fact, Paul’s repentance had been at the risk of his physical life. At this point, read Acts 9 and make a note of at least one pretty hard thing Paul did to evidence repentance. The fact is, Paul chose the obstacle course—not the easy course. He did it to be saved! Then see if you can think of other work Paul had to do to repent. Make a list.
5. Verses 1-11 of Romans 6 give us a vivid picture of how repentance and baptism and subsequent living for Jesus are symbolic of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He spells out the symbolism here. For clarity, though, let’s label the picture in our minds. We have 1) repentance 2) baptism and 3) a new life.
- a. Which of these three is symbolic of death on the cross?
  - b. Which is symbolic of the burial in the tomb?
  - c. Which is symbolic of the resurrection?

- d. I know this is elementary, but we re-emphasize that the hard work of repentance and living a new life—changed and holy—are both right there in the reenactment of the gospel. They are work and they are necessary.
6. But baptism is right there in the dead center of the picture. It is right between repentance and the subsequent work of a truly changed life. It is a lot less work than repentance and the changes inherent in repentance. In fact, baptism is the one step to which the penitent person submits, rather than actually *doing* the action. The penitent person is the subject of baptism *done* by someone else, just as the buried person at death is the subject, lying lifeless in a casket while someone else buries him.

That is why we do not say “I wanted to be saved, so I baptized.” Why, you know that is incorrect! It is not even technically correct to say, “I got baptized,” any more than it is correct to say “I got buried.” The more correct phrase is, of course, “I was buried,” or “I was baptized.” The command is to *be* baptized rather than to *get* baptized.

Use your concordance and find every New Testament reference to water baptism. Write the language used in the command or the account, in the phrase containing the word *baptized*, *baptism*, *baptizing*, or *baptize*.

7. Let’s now recognize with all Biblical clarity that baptism is absolutely (although not as difficult as repentance) the point at which we gain access or admission into the space of grace. This passage is not fuzzy about that:

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him (Romans 6:3-9).*

This passage says that we are buried, as He was, in baptism. We are symbolically in the tomb with the dead Savior! It clearly says that’s where we get into His death, the death which paid for our redemption. Verse three even verbally equates our getting into Christ with our getting into His death. The grace space is the space that is in Christ and in His death. It is where there is rejoicing in hope and in tribulations. Baptism is so obviously the access, the admission to the place where I so desperately want to be.

Friends, there are some of you who are considered very good people. You study your Bibles and do very benevolent things. You have hearts for the poor and downtrodden. You want to go to heaven. But you have never been admitted to the place where the grace is. You have—perhaps while being sure that you never say you are working toward salvation—worked very

hard to be what you think He wants you to be in your everyday lives. You live sacrificially and in charity toward friends and foes. But you have never taken the important step of burial in water for the remission of sins to gain access into the room where there's grace and hope and rejoicing in the hard times.

Let me encourage you to take that all-important step to gain admission. Contact me and let me help you do that. It's not a showy, display kind of action. It is a meek and lowly submission to the Savior. In fact, you do not do it. You choose to allow someone to bury you. If the great apostle Paul could humbly submit to baptism to wash away his sins as he did (Acts 22:16), even when his family members were shocked and old cohorts were angry, then surely you and I can submit to the command of the One who loved us while we were yet sinners. If I think I am okay without baptism for the washing, then I think I am okay without his death. That is the clear implication of the passage.

Comfort is the theme of this year's study. Baptism and the washing away of sins is the essence of comfort. It is the most comforting thing you will do in this lifetime.

Make a list of results that come from repentance and baptism from verses three through nine. Your list will begin with "We get into His death." There are about nine of these.

8. Verses 12-14 give us the picture of the new life. This new life is symbolic of the resurrection of Jesus. The old preachers used to say we come up out of the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life. They were spot on. Read the following passages and answer the accompanying questions.
  - a. Acts 2: Pretend you actually were one of the men who held the mallets at the cross. Peter said there were people present at Pentecost who had crucified Jesus (verse 23). What would your baptism on the day of Pentecost have meant for your future, your place in the Roman guard, your family's view of you, or your social position with your cohorts?
  - b. Acts 8: Now be Simon in Acts 8. You have become rich and famous by using trickery. But now you have been baptized and entered the room of grace. You had lots of followers and now you can no longer deceive. You have no followers. For a weak moment you think you can just buy the power of the Holy Spirit to make a living, but that was a momentary lapse. What kind of work will you have to do to start all over financially? Are there employees who have helped you in this sorcery who will be impacted as well? What does your repentance look like?
  - c. What if you're the treasurer to the Ethiopian queen in the bottom of Acts 8? You are a long way from home when you make this decision to enter the space of grace. You are going to have a very hard time being encouraged by any other Christians in a place where the gospel has likely not been widely spread. How will you be faithful when you are leaving Philip behind? Will you providentially run into an apostle who can lay hands on you and give you a

gift of knowledge to help you? Will you find others who may have already heard the gospel and been baptized, those dispersed from Jerusalem? Whatever happens after this baptism, it's going to be challenging to stay the course. Do a little research and note here exactly how far the treasurer was from his home when he obeyed.

- d. Acts 10, 11: And what if you're a servant in the household of Cornelius, hearing the gospel preached by Peter? You were listening to the gospel spoken by Peter in the house of your master and the Holy Spirit suddenly fell on you and you, a servant girl, had begun to speak in a foreign language?! What a blessing it would have been for you, a servant of Cornelius to worship with him, to take the Lord's supper with your centurion master! But obstacles were coming. There were Jewish Christians who would have a very hard time accepting your fellowship. Your work and service was right there in Caesarea in the middle of Jewry. The Jews who were not Christians likely already resented your master, because he was a Roman centurion. Now they would doubly hate him because he was a Christian. Thoughts?
- e. Acts 13: What if you are Sergius Paulus, a Roman ruler at Paphos, and because of the miraculous blinding of Elymas, you believe and listen to the doctrine? Once again, you are in for some pretty significant life changes as a ruler over an island province having a huge temple to the goddess Venus? How does your Christianity affect your proconsulship in this heathen place?
- f. Or what if you were a Gentile woman in Antioch of Pisidia who believed in verse 48 of this same chapter? Notice that the Jews in the same town were fiercely persecuting Paul and Barnabas who were the teachers of these new Gentile believers. Would you have been fearful for your own life as you saw that your teachers were expelled from the city? How would it feel to watch them, the ones upon who you were depending for teaching and growth, walk away? What we do know, in this case, is that there were some Gentiles converted on this day who will be in heaven with us. Verse 48 makes that pretty clear.
- g. Acts 14: Notice the Gentile converts at Derbe in verse 21. They listened to the apostle who had been stoned just a few days prior and left for dead. And they believed him. But they were obviously, in this context, in a region of idolatry and animosity toward Christianity. We also know there were some Jewish converts in the region as well. We know that one of them was a young mother named Eunice. What was her life like after her baptism? She got busy raising up a leader for Jehovah and against all the odds, even with an unbelieving husband, she raised up a Timothy (Acts 16:1). Make any notes here. See if you can find evidence elsewhere of the great work that Eunice did.
- h. Acts 16. What if you were one of the women worshipping at the riverside with Lydia in the Roman colony of Philippi, just before the crowd was going to deliver your teachers to the magistrates, tear their clothes from them and threaten to beat them? What if you had just extended them hospitality in Lydia's house, washing their clothes that are now being stripped from them? Would it have been easy to profess Christianity in a town where its proponents were being dragged to jail?

- i. And what about the jailer? He went out in the middle of the night, risking his life. (It was obvious that he knew the punishment for allowing the prisoners to be outside the jail, because he was ready to take his own life a few hours before his baptism when he thought the prisoners were escaping.) His becoming a Christian and being baptized by the men who had many stripes laid on them by the magistrates (who were superiors of the jailer) automatically placed him in a volatile predicament. Thoughts?
  - j. We could continue, but we will stop there. The point is that newness of life is not always physically and emotionally pleasant, for the moment. But we must remember that when we looked into the grace space in Romans 5:2-3, we saw rejoicing over two things. The real people in the chapters we read above who were baptized into Christ entered the grace space. They were “in Christ.” They had both of those reasons to rejoice. Write them again here.
9. Below is a portion of an article penned by Kyle Butt of Apologetics Press which very interestingly points to the historicity of Sergius Paulus, mentioned above as a believer in Acts 13. Take the time to read this portion of the article and make any notes (For complete information from citations in this excerpt, consult the original article at <https://apologeticspress.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament-1420/>)

Throughout the apostle Paul’s missionary journeys, he and his fellow travelers came in contact with numerous prestigious people—including Roman rulers of the area in which the missionaries were preaching. If Luke had been fabricating these travels, he could have made vague references to Roman rulers without giving specific names and titles. But that is not what one finds in the book of Acts. On the contrary, it seems that Luke went out of his way to document specific cities, places, names, and titles. Because of this copious documentation, we have ample instances in which to check his reliability as a historian.

One such instance is found in Acts 13. In that chapter, Luke documented Paul’s journey into Seleucia, then Cyprus, and Salamis, then Paphos. In Paphos, Paul and his companions encountered two individuals—a Jew named Bar-Jesus, and his companion Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man who summoned Paul and Barnabas in order to hear the Word of God (Acts 13:4-7). This particular reference to Sergius Paulus provides the student of archaeology with a two-fold test of Luke’s accuracy. First, was the area of Cyprus and Paphos ruled by a proconsul during the time of Paul’s work there? Second, was there ever a Sergius Paulus?

For many years, skeptics of Luke’s accuracy claimed that the area around Cyprus would not have been ruled by a proconsul. Since Cyprus was an imperial province, it would have been put under a “propraetor” not a proconsul (Unger, 1962, pp. 185-186). While it is true that Cyprus at one time had been an imperial province, it is not true that it was such during Paul’s travels there. In fact, “in 22 B.C. Augustus transferred it to the Roman Senate, and it was therefore placed under the administration of proconsuls” (Free and Vos, 1992, p. 269). Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce expanded on this information when he explained that Cyprus was made an imperial province in 27 B.C., but that Augustus gave it to the Senate five years later in

exchange for Dalmatia. Once given to the Senate, proconsuls would have ruled Cyprus, just as in the other senatorial provinces (Bruce, 1990, p. 295). As Thomas Eaves remarked:

*As we turn to the writers of history for that period, Dio Cassius (Roman History) and Strabo (The Geography of Strabo), we learn that there were two periods of Cyprus' history: first, it was an imperial province governed by a propraetor, and later in 22 B.C., it was made a senatorial province governed by a proconsul. Therefore, the historians support Luke in his statement that Cyprus was ruled by a proconsul, for it was between 40-50 A.D. when Paul made his first missionary journey. If we accept secular history as being true we must also accept Biblical history, for they are in agreement (1980, p. 234).*

In addition to the known fact that Cyprus became a senatorial province, archaeologists have found copper coins from the region that refer to other proconsuls who were not much removed from the time of Paul. One such coin, called appropriately a “copper proconsular coin of Cyprus,” pictures the head of Claudius Caesar, and contains the title of “Arminius Proclus, Proconsul...of the Cyprians” (McClintock and Strong, 1968, 2:627).

Even more impressive than the fact that Luke had the specific title recorded accurately, is the fact that evidence has come to light that the record of Sergius Paulus is equally accurate. It is interesting, in this regard, that there are several inscriptions that possibly could match the proconsul recorded by Luke. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) records three ancient inscriptions that could be possible matches (see Hughes, 1986, 2:728). First, at Soli on the north coast of Cyprus, an inscription was uncovered that mentioned Paulus, who was a proconsul. The authors and editors of the ISBE contend that the earliest this inscription can be dated is A.D. 50, and that it therefore cannot fit the Paulus of Acts 13. Others, however, are convinced that this is the Paulus of Acts' fame (Unger, 1962, pp. 185-186; see also McGarvey, n.d., 2:7). In addition to this find, another Latin inscription has been discovered that refers to a Lucius Sergius Paulus who was “one of the curators of the Banks of the Tiber during the reign of Claudius.” Eminent archaeologist Sir William Ramsay argued that this man later became the proconsul of Cyprus, and should be connected with Acts 13 (Hughes, 2:728). Finally, a fragmentary Greek inscription hailing from Kythraia in northern Cyprus has been discovered that refers to a Quintus Sergius Paulus as a proconsul during the reign of Claudius (Hughes, 2:728). Regardless of which of these inscriptions actually connects to Acts 13, the evidence provides a plausible match. At least two men named Paulus were proconsuls in Cyprus, and at least two men named Sergius Paulus were officials during Claudius' reign. Luke's accuracy is confirmed once again.

10. The last verses (16-23) of Romans 6 deal with a reality that we do not sometimes consider. This is nowhere more clearly taught than here. There is no middle ground. There is nowhere in between being a slave to sin and being a slave to righteousness. One leaves slavery to sin only when he enters the grace room and becomes a slave to righteousness. From this passage what is the end of the fruit of righteousness and what is that of sin? Which fruit is poison and which is a comfort fruit?



## Practically Speaking

During the past several months, I have been amazed—simply overwhelmed—by the goodness of my sisters in Christ. I have never seen a comfort army so strong and mighty as God’s women are for one another. It is a powerful anti-depressant when you have this kind of support through a tough time. Look around and find that sister who is silently struggling through a marriage problem due to no fault of her own, a sister who is roughing it because of a bad decision on the part of someone else, a decision which is just wreaking havoc in her life. Find that mom whose child is hospitalized and she’s stretched so thin that survival mode has turned to crisis mode. Find that single mom who lost her job or that newly converted mom who can’t control her kids in worship (or maybe that old-hat mom who still can’t control her kids in worship.) Reach out with a delivery service cup of coffee or lunch, a mug at worship with some packets of cocoa tucked inside, a little gift card for something special at a boutique or just a card with a happy refrigerator magnet inside. Give her some comfort. Someone will give it back to you when you most need it!

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 11: Romans 8, Unspeakable Comfort

The one chapter to which I cling most tenaciously, when in the hour of trial, is Romans eight. I hope I can make you love the message from the Spirit there as much as I do.

1. First, read Romans 7 and Romans 9-16. Find the following comfort verses and cite them below.
  - a. A verse that comforts by assuring us of deliverance from the old law.
  - b. A verse that comforts those who believe in/on the stumbling stone.
  - c. A verse that assures us that God accepts Gentiles and Jews, making no difference.
  - d. A verse that comforts by extolling the riches of our Father's wisdom and knowledge.
  - e. A verse that comforts by making us know we can overcome evil with good.
  - f. A verse that comforts by speaking of the nearness of our salvation.
  - g. A verse that comforts by teaching us that we are in a kingdom of righteousness, justice and peace.
  - h. A verse that tells us the scriptures are comforting and give us hope.
  - i. A verse that comforts by telling us that God is the bruiser of Satan.
2. Now read chapter 8. This is, in my mind, the most comfort-filled passage in the Bible. We will spend our time in selected texts here.
  - a. Verse 1: *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."* The short way to spell condemnation is H-E-L-L. It's an unthinkable wretched place to imagine. No one can really believe it exists and contemplate it long without coming to righteousness. I am convinced that many people have just put it from their minds, as if it were some mythological arena, and thus have given themselves permission to go on living in sin. Read the following passages and write five short descriptive facts about hell: Matthew 13:50; Mark 9:48; Matthew 25:4; Luke 16:24; Revelation 14:11.
  - b. The wonderful, comforting fact is this: There is no hell for those who are in Christ! If you're in the grace space of chapter five, there is no condemnation!
  - c. We know this passage is not teaching the impossibility of apostasy. What condition is given about our walk in the same verse?
  - d. Some versions do not include the part of the verse about walking after the Spirit. But even though some manuscripts do not include that portion of the verse, how do we know, from this chapter, that our salvation is still conditional upon our walking after the Spirit? (There are several strong indicators here and many more in many other places.)

- e. Every verse is precious, but let's now look at verse 15. We have just studied about slavery. If I leave slavery to sin, I am a slave of Christ. There are no other options. That means I am bound to do His bidding, which is so much better for me than if I were choosing my own path and behaviors. He has chosen in infinite wisdom what is best for me. Our Creator knows our needs far better than do we (Matthew 6:8). Still, when I think about my relationship with God, I want more than a master/slave relationship. I crave the father/child relationship of this verse. The very thought that the God of the universe has adopted me and that He has given me a place at His table, sustaining and loving and directing me for ever and ever...why, it is an unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15)! Read verse 17 and notice what relationship follows if I am adopted by God, the Father.
- f. Read Galatians 4 and find this concept of adoption in a similar discussion of freedom from the old law. Cite the verse about adoption here.
- g. Have you ever thought about what it would be like if we just got to go on to glory whenever we entered the space of grace. I mean, what if, whenever we put on Christ, He just translated us on to heaven? Well, you can automatically see a lot of problems with that. It would be difficult for any of us to find the right motive for obedience. But secondly, we would miss out on all the trials and thus, all the comfort. This is stated succinctly in Romans 24 and 25...*“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”* State this advantage in your own words.
- h. If we could instantly see heaven when we obey His gospel, we'd lose the expectant anticipation that builds our spiritual muscles. When we work to see what we can't now look on, we gain patience. What verses in chapter five did we notice that placed hope and patience in the room of grace? What can we do when we are in the room because these two things are there?
- i. Verses 26-27: This is a huge comfort passage. When I do not know what to pray—when the anguish in my soul is so deep that I just cannot find the words—in those times, the Spirit makes my heart known to God with groanings which cannot be uttered. What in the world could I do without this assurance, that the requests born of pain—requests that I cannot even articulate—are carried personally to the throne by the Holy Spirit, Who is perfect, flawless and complete in His articulation. He, the One who wrote the Bible, the GREAT Communicator, is taking my unspoken pleas to the throne of the Almighty?! I cannot even approach the appropriate gratitude for such a gift. I have redeemed this promise many times. I love this supreme comfort passage! We have studied several times, in a deeper study of the Spirit, how that His miraculous work of revealing to man has been completed. But I can see no reason to believe that He is not still carrying my pleas during times of infirmity before the throne, just as Christ is interceding as I pray through His holy name. Find a passage that speaks of this intercession of Jesus. Write it here.

- j. Verse 28: Here it is...the passage from which my greatest comfort has come throughout the pilgrimage I am on in this testing ground.

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*

It is just a simple statement. Almost all the words are small. Any child can understand it. But it is the most profound statement in its effect during the dark times of life in all of Scripture.

I love the word *know*. It means I can count on this promise.

I love the word *all*. It means that, not just the good things, but the good things and the bad things are *both* going to be included in the promise.

I love the term *work together*. It means that the good things and the bad things that are occurring in my world are both useful to Him in the weave that makes this promise a reality.

I love the word *good*. The good events and circumstances and the bad events and circumstances are woven together by the master weaver to produce something that is no longer even partially bad; it is all good. It is what is best for me as His child, in its end result.

I love the promise recipient descriptions: *those who love Him*. Oh, how I do love Him! While I was yet a sinner, He gave His life for me, He commended His love for me all the way to the death (5:8).

...and *those who are the called according to His purpose*. Those who have accepted the invitation, the appointment, to glorify Him.

Ladies, this orchestration of the events in my life, through providence, to make all the circumstances work out for my ultimate benefit is valuable to me in an immeasurable way. On rare occasions, my friends in Pentecostal churches have chastised me for a “lack of faith” in miracles today. Some believe, since I am convicted that God has pushed the “pause” button on miracles today, that my faith is weak. For the record, I believe every miracle recorded in Scripture occurred. I believe it will be miraculous when we fly away with Jesus. It will be miraculous when the graves are opened again. It will be miraculous when we put off mortality. He is not done with miracles.

But I would add that this orchestration of all the *natural* events in my life, to my ultimate benefit, while He is orchestrating all the events in all the lives of all His children everywhere to their ultimate benefit, is nothing short of amazing. It is not miraculous, because it is done within the confines of His laws of nature. But it is just as amazing to this girl as is the

miraculous. I have faith. I believe He is currently doing this in my life, even in the most difficult of circumstances. I praise Him for this!

I will never forget, when my mother was dying with cancer, the prayer that was led at her bedside, “Father we are thankful that when we don’t know what to do, we serve a God who does *always* know what to do!” He is the Romans 8:28 God. Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Ruth, Esther, Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul and Peter have all gone on record with me in praise for this reality. Add other names from Scripture to this list of those for whom the Romans 8:28 principle, in hindsight, was clearly working.

- k. Recently a preacher told me that Romans 8:28 is not a promise for individual Christians. “It just means that God has worked out a plan for salvation that’s going to save all those who obey.” What response would you offer to this line of thinking? Is this true? Good podcast discussion.
- l. Verses 31-32: In a chapter and book that are power-packed with consolation, this truth cannot be overlooked:

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*

It is like the apostle is saying, “Can you not see that He loves you? If He has given you the blessing of His own darling Son’s life, He is on your side!...And if He is on your side, you have nothing to fear!”

He goes on to say that Jesus is the One who is in charge of condemnation, and He has excluded you from it! There is absolutely no hell reserved for those who are in Christ! Not only does He exclude your reservation for hell, but He is holding your place at the throne of God (verse 34). This chapter! I know we would have great security even if this chapter were absent from Scripture, but I praise Him for every word of this great chapter!

List here some Bible examples where the odds were stacked against a believer and, with God being for the believer, the victory was won.

- m. Lastly the reason for the comfort of this chapter is given. He loves us! In all, how many obstacles are guaranteed never to separate us from His love? List these things below and see if you can think of a Biblical example for all of the things that are in verse 35 (someone who faced each particular trial in Scripture.)
- n. The word *conquerors* in verse 37 means that we gain a surpassing victory. It surpasses our imagination. It surpasses any previous victory we have enjoyed. It surpasses the victories of this earth. It surpasses the bounds of nature. Through whom is this victory, according to the

passage? Where would I need to be (from chapter five) in order to claim the surpassing victory?

- o. After looking at the superlatives applicable to the comfort offered in Romans 8, is there any way one could not consider salvation and accompanying promises a gift? Is it somehow a negation of grace when we understand that an action must be taken in order to have admission to the place of grace? Defend your answer here.

### Practically Speaking

Create an analogy or repeat one that you have heard here for how we can be required to do something to receive a gift and yet it is still a free gift. Make an analogy that you could use if studying with someone who was opposed to stating that any work of faith must be a prerequisite of salvation.

Here's mine. Suppose I was giving my husband a Father's Day suit this year as a gift to honor his fatherhood. Suppose I went down to Macy's and paid for the suit. Suppose I even picked it out and had it altered to fit him perfectly. I left a beautiful shirt and tie in the bag with it. Leaving it in alterations, I might give my husband a card on the evening prior to Father's Day. The card might have a photo of the suit, shirt and tie inside. It might say "All yours. I love you, Just go down and pick it up!" Would this be a gift? Would picking it up be a work that negated the grace of the gift? To add another dimension to this scenario, my husband would have to wear the suit to actually benefit from the gift. He would have to put it on. Because he has to put it on in order to derive benefit, is it thus, not a gift?

*For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God...(Ephesians 2:8).*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 12: Practical Comfort from James

When possible, we like to reserve this month for something very practical:

1. This month read through the book of James. It has been called the most practical book in the Bible. From each of the five chapters, choose one verse that affords great comfort. You may choose differently, but here are my verses:
  - a. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (1:5)
  - b. "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God." (2:23)
  - c. "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (3:18)
  - d. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (4:10)
  - e. "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (5:16)
2. Now do four practical things with your verses:
  - a. Choose one of your verses to pray daily this month: Example: I will pray 1:5 every day:

Lord, please give me wisdom as a wife, mother and grandmother, as an older woman trying to carry out Titus 2, and may your wisdom in me be a blessing to someone else today. Give me wisdom in my answers to those who would tempt me. Give me wisdom in the face of the skeptics who doubt your Word. Give me wisdom in voting, in every decision, in choosing friends and in choosing what entertains me. I beg for your wisdom, and I know you will give it. Thank you for exalting me to the place that I am your child and you do not scorn me for needing this wisdom. Thank you for generously giving it.

- b. Choose one of your passages to place in a comforting card for someone who is struggling in some way.
  - c. Choose one of your verses to commit to memory.
  - d. Choose one of your verses to focus on during a Family Bible time, if you have others in your home.
3. Choose one of your verses and search for a Bible character who applied its principles successfully. Search for exactly how the principle worked to comfort him/her. List your character and the application here: Example:
  - a. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (4:10)
  - b. Moses exemplifies this promise. Scripture says he was the meekest man in all the earth (Numbers 12:3). God exalted this man who chose to suffer with people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for even a season (Hebrews 11:25) to be the leader of the

nation as they exited Egypt to inherit the land to which the Messiah would come. He witnessed so much greatness at the mighty hand of God—the burning bush, the plagues at the end of his rod, the parting of the Red Sea, the water from a rock and the manna on the ground, the pillar of fire and the cloud that led. He was in a coveted position of closeness to God, yet he begged God to spare the people rather than to make a great nation from his own seed (Exodus 32:7-14). He humbled himself in this way, because he wanted the name (reputation) of the Lord to be unaltered by the sin that had been committed around the calf by His people. This man was humble in God’s sight. He was one of two men, called from beyond the grave to be with Jesus on the mountain, when Jesus was transfigured. He was lifted, in a literal way, from this pinnacle of His earthly events. He was lifted up.

4. Pray that God will help you take, from this study, great comfort for all of your life’s upcoming challenges and trials. Pray that this study will help you go to heaven when you have made it through this testing ground.
5. Write to the elders at West Huntsville church of Christ, (1519 Old Monrovia Road NW, Huntsville, AL 35806) and thank them for their support in making this study available. I’d love to flood them with these cards. They are great men who are supportive of this Dig!



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