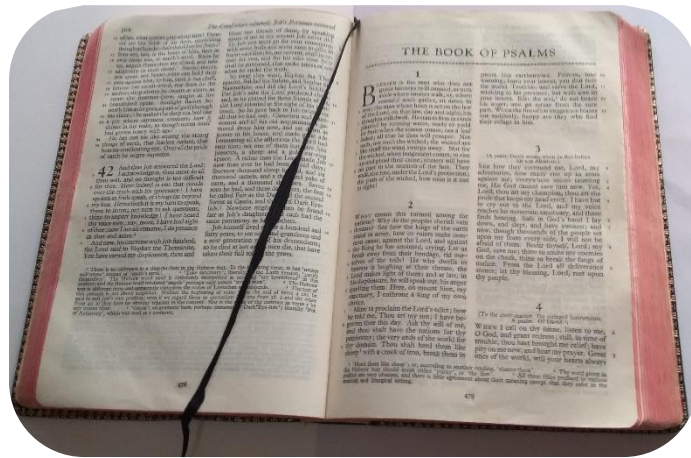


Handbook 6

Miscellaneous Studies

Heaven and how to get there!
Great Women of the Bible
Marriage and the Family
The Call to Discipleship
The Call to Stewardship
The Call to do Good Works
and more

by Albert Fairweather



***'Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path'*** Psalm 119:105

Back cover

Handbook Studies by Albert Fairweather
Albert and Elaine Fairweather have been in full time service for the Lord for many years. They live in Queensland, Australia.

Albert has been active in church planting in Australia and Kenya. For many years he edited Christian magazines. His teaching is now being published in Book form.



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We encourage translation, please contact the Editor

In this Handbook,

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Introduction Heaven and how to get there!

Jesus said **I am the door**

It has been said that there are many ‘ways’, and all roads of belief are leading up the same mountain to heaven, and all followers of all religions will meet at the top! But the Bible tells me something quite the opposite!

Jesus said that He is the only ‘door’ to heaven and He is also the ‘gatekeeper’! He said, **“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture”** (John 10:7-9).

He is not only the ‘door’ into heaven, but also the only ‘way’: He said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (John 14:6). This is Gods ‘way’, and we must come His way or be forever lost.

Heaven is the ultimate home of perfect holiness, where the God of glory dwells. It is indescribable in its beauty, the eternal place where no **unforgiven sinner** can ever enter. A most important truth is that **cleansing from sin** has been provided by **the Lord Jesus Christ** for all who step through the ‘door’ into His presence.

Dealing with the sin question

You cannot argue against Bible for God gave His word: It says, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). This means no one is exempt, whether priest in white garment or drunk in the gutter! Heaven would be empty but Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep”** (John 10:11). Jesus is not only the ‘door’ and the only ‘way’ for the sheep **to enter**, but He provided **cleansing** for all lost sheep that all may enter.

The Sacrificial sign posts pointing to the ‘way’

All the innocent lambs sacrificed with their blood sprinkled on Jewish altars were sign posts pointing on to Jesus: **“Behold, The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”** (John 1:29). At the first Passover, God said, **‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you’**. All who applied the blood of a lamb to their door posts and lintels were saved from the angel of death. (Read Exodus Chapter 12).

The teaching of the Bible is clear; cleansing from sin can only come by virtue of the blood of Jesus our Passover, for **“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7).

Christ on the Cross is the place where heaven and earth meet!

Christ on a Roman Cross is the meeting place of history and is central to all of God’s purposes. The Old Testament sacrifices and prophesies of the coming Christ pointed forward to this, and the New Testament is the revelation and fulfillment of these in the sufferings of Christ and the forgiveness of sins through Him.

It also looks forward to His personal coming for His sheep (John 14:1-3). The Lord Jesus Christ calls all to become one of His sheep, and to enter His sheepfold, there to enjoy His company and that of other believers.

He brings us to a decision time: He said: **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”** (Matthew 7:13-14). Christ calls for a total commitment.

Cleansing comes to us personally when we realize the awful reality of our sin before God, and we come to see our need to get down on our knees and ask for His forgiveness, by trusting in Jesus and committing our lives to Him. At that moment we pass through the ‘door’! Our prayer may be weak and stumbling, but God is looking for reality and truth in our hearts as we come to Him in His way.

This calls for a step of ‘faith’. Am I prepared to ‘trust’ Jesus with my life for time and eternity? Am I ready to commit to Him all the outcomes of all the situations that life can throw at me, and to ‘trust’ Him and wait on Him for all answers? If my answer is ‘yes’, then I have entered the ‘door’ to life.

The pastures of contentment – Read Psalm 23

Jesus came to give rest and peace to our hearts, an inner joy that the world cannot experience. He said: **“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”** (Matthew 11:28-30).

Our Lord can release the prisoners of depression, giving hope to the hopeless and impart the reason for living to every believing soul. **“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person on earth that cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus”**.

Jesus said, **“the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”** (John 6:37)

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Study 1

Great Women of the Bible

They were wives and mothers who helped shape history.

This is a brief Study on women of **faith** who supported and helped make their husbands men of God. They were ordinary women with extraordinary virtues. Today Christian wives and mothers are shaping history as they also faithfully follow the Lord, supporting their husbands and raising their children in the faith.

Great Women of History

Eve: She was *'the mother of all living'* as her name implies (Genesis 3:20). She was the mother of Cain, Able and Shem. Before Eve was made from his rib, God told Adam not to eat of *'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'*. Eve was made sinless but was deceived by the serpent and sin entered the world (2 Corinthians 11:3). God told the serpent (Satan) that there would be *"enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed"* (Genesis 3:15).

Her grief must have been great to see Cain grow up in wilful disobedience to God and then go on to murder Able his brother. Her *'seed'* was a prophetic foretelling of the virgin birth of Christ, the Redeemer. This promise was renewed to Abraham (Gen. 15:5) and to David's *'seed'* (2 Sam. 7:12) and fulfilled in Mary (Mat. Ch.1).

Her loss was great, but she was given this wonderful hope. Our God continues His faithfulness to us even when we fail Him.

Mary: The mother of our Lord (Luke 2:34-35). The promise of the *'seed'* given to Eve was fulfilled in Mary. She was not born sinless as some believe, but was a godly teenager descended from the tribe of Judah and King David (Luke 3:23-38). She, a virgin, believed the angel's announcement that she would conceive the Christ Child, and because of this she is blessed among women (Luke 1:26-38).

In her was fulfilled the hope of Jewish women and the promise made to Eve.

Great Women whose faith grew

Sarah: The wife of Abraham, the friend of God. Sarah was barren for many years, yet through faith she conceived in her 90th. year and became the mother of Isaac. At first she laughed in her heart when God promised her a son, but later she laughed for joy when Isaac was born. Isaac means *'laughter'* (Genesis 18:15; 21:1-6). She is named among the heroes of faith *"because she judged Him faithful who promised"* (Hebrews 11:11). At times Sarah struggled to believe, but:

God fulfilled her longing and Isaac was born. We at times also struggle, and may have weak faith but our little faith is in a great God!

Naomi and Ruth: A woman of Israel and one from Moab. Naomi, the godly mother-in-law of Ruth of Moab, led Ruth to faith in the true God, and Ruth by faith escaped the terrible clutches of the god of Moab, Chemosh, who was offered human sacrifices. The Moabites were never to enter the congregation of the Lord because they refused passage to Joshua and Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3-5),

Ruth by faith entered, became the wife of a great man, Boaz, and the mother of Obed from whom descended Jesse and David, and the Messianic line down to Christ! Her decision was rewarded (Ruth 1:16-17). Naomi found rest with Ruth.

Naomi found rest, and Ruth entered the congregation of the Lord the same way that we do, by grace alone and through faith in the Messiah of Israel!

The Great Woman of Shunem: She is unnamed, but was a woman of great discernment and wisdom. She discerned that a holy man of God, Elisha, passed her home (2 Kings 4:8-10). With her husband's approval, she built and furnished a little room on top of their house for the prophet. In doing this she showed submission to her husband and had his confidence and support.

She was hospitable, hostess to Elisha, a great prophet of God. Elisha asked how he could repay her for her kindness. She showed humility and asked for nothing, only saying she was content as she was, dwelling among her own people. She was childless, so Elisha prayed for her and she conceived. When her son died, she went to Elisha, and he raised the boy from the dead.

She had all that really mattered: *"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content"* (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Great Women who influenced their children.

Jochebed: The mother of Moses: Amram was her husband, and he sought God in choosing a wife from his own tribe of Levi (Exodus 2:1-3). Moses their son was born when Israel was in slavery in Egypt, and Pharaoh had commanded that all their baby boys were to be killed. Jochebed, trusting God with her son, weaved a little boat from bulrushes, sealed it with pitch, and placed her baby in it, and put the boat into the waters of the Nile River where crocodiles lurked..

His older sister Miriam was watching when Pharaoh's daughter found the baby weeping and she had compassion on the child. Miriam was quick-witted, and the baby, named Moses, was sent home to his mother to raise. Jochebed only had Moses for a few years, but instilled in his young mind a love for his own people, and some understanding of her own trust in the God of Israel.

This mother ventured her child on the Nile waters, and Moses her child later saved Israel from slavery, and altered the course of history! Moses was called by God and given laws that influence nations for good to this day.

Lois and Eunice: Grandmother and mother of Timothy. Timothy was a young man who had a good report from nearby churches when Paul and Silas came to Derbe and Lystra (2 Timothy 1:3-5). Paul took him under his wing and he developed into a faithful and trusted servant of the Lord. He helped Paul in his ministry and was sent to teach and minister to many churches.

Paul wrote: *"I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also"* (2

Timothy 1:3-5); “from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Lois and Eunice had genuine faith, and instructed Timothy in the Scriptures, and his example influences Christians to this day, and greatly encourages our young people to achieve for God.

Women of Faith to this day believe God’s word and instruct their children in His ways: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). We should all thank God for the gift of godly mothers and wives! “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land” (Proverbs 31:23). “Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her” (Proverbs 31:28). “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31:30).

“Strength and honour are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come”
(Proverbs 31:25).

The Editor’s Testimony: I was blessed with a believing mother who taught me the fear of the Lord. Godly men taught me as a young single man to seek a woman of virtue as my wife. God answered my prayer and brought a lovely young woman into my life. and she has supported me in my ministry, cared for our family when I was often away for months at a time. Through her influence our five children have all followed the Lord. Together we believed God’s word, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

We are to honour our godly mothers and wives as precious gifts given from the Lord.

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Study 2

Marriage and the Family

From the very beginning marriage was ordained by God: God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so He made Eve from Adams rib (a surgical operation), and brought her to the man and the two became one flesh. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23-24).

God performed this first marriage and by His appointment, marriage is one man ‘leaving’ his parents and ‘cleaving’ for life to one woman, his wife.

God designed Eve to suit Adam **emotionally, physically and spiritually**. She was taken from his side, near his heart, to be loved and cherished. She was not taken from his head for her to rule over him, nor from his feet for him to walk over her. Their marriage in the Garden of Eden would have been idyllic – until sin entered!

When God created them He put into their hearts the desire for and love for each other: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28).

Age of the Patriarchs

In the days of Abraham, Egypt’s **Pharaoh** rebuked him for saying Sarah was his sister, “I might have taken her as **my wife**” (Genesis 12:14-20); And so did the Philistine Chief **Abimelech**; ‘And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom **a great sin**? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done” (Genesis 20:9). These Kings and Chiefs honoured marriage in 2000BC.

Isaac also said Rebecca was his sister, and the **Philistine king** rebuked him: ‘And Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with **your wife**, and you would have brought **guilt on us**” (Genesis 26:10). Abraham and Isaac feared, for evil kings often took beautiful women from their husbands for their harems. From this we learn that marriage was held to be sanctified between one man and one woman even 2000 years after Creation and the Flood. For a man to take another man’s wife was to commit adultery.

In the days of the Judges, 1100BC, **Samson** preferred to cohabit with the immoral Philistine women, and ignored his parents pleas to choose a virgin as wife from his own Jewish people (Read Judges 13:1 to 16:31).

Israel’s sad history

King David committed adultery with **Bathsheba**, 1000BC, but received forgiveness upon **repenting**. He should have been stoned to death, but God showed grace to David even under the law of Moses (Read Psalm 51).

In the days of **Malachi**, 400 years before Christ’s birth, the prophet mourned over marriage breakdown among the Jews. Read carefully Malachi 2:10 - 16. Israel had dealt ‘**treacherously**’ and ‘**profaned the covenant of the fathers**’. An ‘**abomination had been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem**’. The ‘**abomination**’ was that Jewish men were divorcing their wives and marrying ‘**the daughter of a foreign god**’, and they had ‘**profaned The Lord’s holy institution which He loves**’, that is His holy covenant of marriage given from the creation of Adam and Eve.

Their sinful actions caused the rejected wives and children to weep in the Temple: ‘**you cover the altar of the Lord with tears. With weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore**’. These men were totally insensitive to God’s covenant: ‘**Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness**

between you and **the wife of your youth**, with whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is **your companion and your wife by covenant**" (Malachi 2:14).

The Lord closes with: "For the LORD God of Israel says that **He hates divorce**, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore **take heed to your spirit**, That you do not deal treacherously" (Malachi 2:16). God always calls for repentance and restoration of marriages.

Malachi records for all time God's 'holy institution which He loves', yet today some professing to be Christians divorce and remarry another lover.

Israel's unfaithfulness in idolatry:

Israel is called **the adulterous wife** of the Lord and was **put aside** because of her unfaithfulness, yet **to be restored** in Christ's coming Kingdom: "Surely, as **a wife treacherously departs from her husband**, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, **O house of Israel**," says the LORD". "A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; They have forgotten the LORD their God" (Jer. 3:20-21).

"For your Maker is your **husband**, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. For the LORD has called you (Israel) Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused," Says your God. "**For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you**" (See Isaiah 54:5-9). Spiritual adultery is to pervert the ways of the Lord!

The Evil of Polygamy

The first recorded polygamist was **Lamech** (Genesis 4:19). He departed from God's perfect order and many later followed his example, including Abraham and Jacob. But God never **sanctioned polygamy** even though it became part of Jewish culture, as it did later with the Muslims and many tribes in Africa and other lands.

While the law of Moses **overlooked polygamy**, it never **condoned adultery**, "The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10).

"And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against **adulterers**, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien; Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:5).

Polygamy among Christians: I have seen men with more than one wife saved in East Africa. So we must ask, '**What is to be done in this situation**'. If a woman is put away from her husband in such circumstances, how is she and her children to survive? There are no Social Security programs and many end up in prostitution.

The Lord knows that these men and women entered these relationships not knowing the Bible teaching, so they should continue to care for their wives and their children, but they must not take another wife. However, he cannot be an elder, for an elder must be '*the husband of one wife*' (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). If a Christian man takes a second wife, he is committing adultery, and should be excluded from the local church fellowship. This needs teaching in churches.

Biblical history reveals that polygamy only led to problems and divisions in families, and it was never a happy situation for the wives, as was the case with Elkanah's wives, Peninnah and Hannah, (1 Samuel Ch's 1 & 2).

New Testament Teaching on marriage:

The Pharisees came to Jesus testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?". He answered them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning '*made them male and female*,' "and said, '*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*'? "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mat.19:1-15).

Jesus made it very clear: "Furthermore it has been said, '*Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce*.' "But I say to you that whoever divorces **his wife** for any reason **except sexual immorality** causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32). From this we learn that the only ground for divorce is when either a man or woman **persists in adultery**. No Christian should marry anyone divorced for this reason. But in the case of the guilty one **repenting**, every endeavour should be made to reconcile. Widows and widowers can remarry.

When the Jews demanded the death penalty for the woman taken in the act of adultery, but did not bring the man involved, Jesus confronted their hypocrisy by writing on the ground: '*So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first"*' (John 8:7).

These Jews being convicted by their conscience walked away beginning from the eldest to the youngest. '*When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"*' (John 8:10). She said, "**No one, Lord.**" And Jesus said to her, "**Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more**" (John 8:11).

From this we learn to have compassion on sinning ones, and to give them Biblical teaching so that they can turn their lives around. Many are ignorant of what God requires, and if they turn to the Lord they will change. This woman called Jesus '**Lord**', and Jesus showed **grace**, but also **truth** to be obedient and sin no more.

Where His light penetrates, people are saved from sin; *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”* (John 8:12).

Jesus and people living in de-facto relationships

Jesus confronted this problem with the woman of Samaria: *“The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ “for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly”* (Read John 4:5-43). This made her aware that He knew her secrets, and this encounter with the One who offered her *‘living water’* changed her life so that she went back to the men in Samaria who knew her so well and said *“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”* (John 4:29).

The New Testament has the word **‘fornication’** for a **de-facto relationship**. This is having sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other. *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Cor 6:9-10).

It is most important that Christians guard their virginity, for it is a precious gift from God and is to be kept for marriage.

Marriage rites vary within cultures

Marriage rites vary from country to country. From earliest times family and friends came together to witness two young people commit to each other and this was accompanied by a feast of joyous celebration.

Under Christian influences, marriage celebrants were registered by Governments to legally marry couples. This involved a church ceremony where the Marriage Register was signed and witnessed. In some lands a civil Register is signed, and the couple then attend a church marriage service, Marriage is firstly before God then before witnesses and with the signed Government Authority papers.

A Christian should only have a sexual relationship within marriage. God has a plan for our lives and we need to ask Him to lead us to the wife or husband of His choosing. A Christian should only marry someone who shares his or her spiritual values. Then together they can serve the Lord using their God given gifts.

Marriage is a blessed and wonderful provision given by our Lord for an intimate and loving relationship while life lasts. God tells us of this: *“Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”* (Hebrews 13:4). The consummation of a marriage sets forth the joy Christ has for His bride, the Church. This is why marriage is so sacred. Read very carefully Ephesians 5:18-33.

A message for young men: *“Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, And be embraced in the arms of a seductress? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He ponders all his paths”* (Proverbs 5:18-21).

Harmony in homes: Husbands and wives should work together discussing all issues, but remembering that among Spirit filled believers, the husband has the final decision as head. The wife is to submit to her husband, as he is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of His church. Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, just as Christ loved the Church (His body) and gave Himself for her (Ephesians Chapter 5:18-33).

The creation of Adam and Eve: The Lord had Christ and His church in view when He joined them in marriage. Paul quoted Genesis 2:24: *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* He went on to write: *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church”* (Ephesians 5:31- 32).

Paul also wrote, *“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:2). John wrote: *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready”* (Revelation 19:7). The Church is both the virgin bride of Christ and the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The Bible gives teaching on children: *“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them...”* (Psalm 127:3-5). With children comes a responsibility for fathers: *“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4).

Fathers responsibility: They must guide the home spiritually and take time to teach their family. Every family should meet once a day for prayer and a Bible reading. This should be simply explained to the children by the father, or mother in his absence. A suitable hymn also can help children understand God’s word and will for their lives. Godliness in the home is the foundation of any nation and it will help lead to prosperity and the well-being of a nation.

The Bible teaches discipline: Children need discipline; their will needs to be broken but not their spirit, and this training starts when babies are born. For if a child will not obey his or her parents, how can they obey their heavenly Father?

If children are spoilt and always given their own way, they will break their parents hearts as teenagers. The Bible says: *“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it”* (Proverbs 22:6). *“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him”* (Proverbs 22:15). *“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother”* (Proverbs 29:15).

Before marriage, future parents should discuss how to discipline their children, and so work together so that a child does not play one parent against the other to get his or her own way.

The Christian Family

God’s Purpose: Mankind was to enjoy God’s presence, and multiply in His perfect creation. *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply (form families); fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth”* (Gen 1:27-28).

Adam’s sin brough loneliness and broken relationships. Faith in Christ brings peace and rest to the human heart. Then in Christian marriage, *“God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land”* (Psalm 68:6). God said to Abraham: *“in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Genesis 12:3).

Husbands and their wives: While the husband is the head of the wife and she is to submit to him, he should love her as Christ also loved the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). He should seek to build her up in the faith and see that she reaches her full potential as a wife and mother, encouraging her to use and to develop her special gifts because she is also part of His body, the Church.

Wives play an important role, for her home should be a haven, a sacred place, protected from the evils of the world. God’s estimate of a godly woman: *“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies...Strength and honour are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come”* (Proverbs 31:10-31).

The Christian home should be a place of Christian love and harmony, an example to those around who do not believe.

Marks of the Last Days

Many in the Western World have departed from God, and laws once based on the Bible are being discarded, and as a result violence and crime is increasing. We are very near the time of our Lord’s coming, for the scriptures say: *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...”* (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

The sanctity of marriage and even life itself are no longer held as being a sacred gift from God. Marriage is being sanctioned between two men or two women, and millions of babies are being aborted each year and some of these left to die on the operating table. His judgment must fall on nations and peoples that forget God.

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:7-8).

Aborted babies go to Heaven, Heaven will have more inhabitants than Hell!

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Study 3

The Call to Discipleship

Jesus gave this command to His followers: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen”*

The Calling of Discipleship: The first disciples were called by the Lord, as were Peter and John, *“Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men”* (Read Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 6:12-17). We are also called to follow Jesus, and our Lord wants to ‘make’ something useful of our lives, To do this, He will discipline us and teach us if we humble ourselves and obey His word.

What is a ‘disciple? A disciple is a ‘disciplined one’, a pupil in contrast to a teacher. It has been said that *“A disciple follows to learn, and learns to follow”*. We are to be followers of Christ. Disciples are ‘made’ through the faithful teaching of the ‘all things’ in God’s word and by the example of their teachers.

A disciple abides in God’s word: Jesus said, *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:30-32). Those who are saved know Christ who is the truth (John 14:1-6). They meditate on His word and abide in its teaching; they believe the truth and must always speak and live the truth, with their waist girded with truth (Read Ephesians 6:10-18). To tell even a little lie, or do any deceitful act is to deny the truth, and Satan will use this to spoil the testimony of a believer.

Disciples are called to bear much fruit: Jesus said: *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”* (John 15:2). *“He takes away”* or *“He lifts up”*, for the Greek word ‘Airo’ really means this as in John 8:59, where they ‘took up’

stones to stone Him. Believers can allow their roots to grow in worldly soil and need teaching to correct and encourage, to ‘lift’ them up to do the Lord’s will.

The fruit of the Spirit is to be demonstrated in our lives: “**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law**” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Disciples are called to be a witness: Jesus said to His disciples, “*And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning*” (John 15:27). Believers are to live as lights that attract so people are drawn to Christ in this dark world (Matthew 5:14-16). People read Christians like a book, and they need to take time for people, and in this way build bridges of friendship, and also where possible help with people’s needs (1 Thess. 1:5-10),

Disciples are called to suffer: Jesus said: “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!*” (Matthew 10:24). We are also called to suffer, for we are not above our Master who suffered from the Jews and was crucified for the witness He gave.

Demonstrating Maturity

Disciples are called to love one another: Jesus said to His disciples: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:34-35). Disciples are commanded to **love** one another. It has been said: “*To dwell above with those we love that will indeed be glory. To live below with those we know is quite another story*”.

Along the Christian pathway we will have problems with fellow believers. We need to learn to love even the most difficult and unlovely, for this is God’s will. Job prayed for his ‘friends’ who were ‘*miserable comforters*’! If we pray for such believers God will give us a heart to love them.

A disciple must remember this: “***And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love***” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love fulfils the law (Galatians 5:14). Believers will find that when they pray for a brother or sister, their love for them in Christ deepens. There must also be love for the unsaved neighbour.

Paul instructed young Timothy: “***And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will***” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Paul gave this teaching: “*For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges*” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). We have no right to judge unbelievers.

Demonstrating love to those ‘outside’: Churches need to be welcoming, caring and friendly towards those ‘*who are outside*’, to unbelievers. We should never judge and look down on people because of the clothes they wear, their unkempt appearance or by their racial birth. Judgemental attitudes really hinder, especially towards those who are ‘outside’. Caring churches are growing churches.

Demonstrating love to those ‘inside’: Those ‘*inside*’ churches may be untaught and unaware but may respond to faithful teaching. To be ‘loving’ does not mean condoning moral evil or those who teach error. Such must be warned and if unwilling to stop sinning, removed from the church. Jude wrote: “*And on some have compassion, making a distinction: but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh*” (Jude 1:22-23).

Demonstrating unity among believers (Ephesians 4:1-6). Some are **unwise** and cause **needless offence** to visiting or local church members. These must be lovingly approached and counselled. Others have been **offended** by fellow saints. These must also be counselled and encouraged to forgive. One lady said, “***I forgive you, but I will never forget***”, but that is not forgiveness. Jesus said: “*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matthew 6:14-15). **So we must forgive from the heart.**

The Challenge of Discipleship: Christians should not be ‘secret disciples’ like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus (John 19:38-39). We are called to confess Him before men which Joseph and Nicodemus later did (John 7:50-51; Mat. 10:32).

Christ calls us to live for Him

Jesus calls us to a life of self-denial: Many went back from following Him (John 6:66). The Lord wanted real disciples, and He told them that there would be a cost to following Him. “*Then He (Jesus) said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”* (Luke 9:23-25). The man carrying his cross was under the sentence of death. When Christ died, we died in Him and when He arose we arose in Him into newness of life (Romans Ch. 6).

Paul lived as a true disciple: “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

A disciple turns his back on worldly ways: We are not to love the world, but to die to self-interests. **This was the secret of Paul's life:** *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* (Galatians 6:14).

The apostle John taught this: *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"* (1 John 2:15-17).

A disciple is focused on the end reality: Our life here is only brief, and our hope is in the Lord's return to take us home to heaven where we will be rewarded at the Judgement seat of Christ for faithful service. Discipleship is developing in our life more of the character of Christ by allowing the Spirit to mould us more into His image ready for that day. Then when we see Him we shall be like Him, ready for the eternity to come where we will live in the home He has gone to prepare for us.

John the disciple of love wrote: *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure"* (1 John 3:1-3).

The Lord is preparing His disciples for glory. And this has been called:
"Training for reigning"!

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Study 4

The Call to Stewardship

A Study on things that God has committed to our trust.

A Steward was the manager of a household or estate. They were often trusted slaves or servants and they managed the household and estate affairs for the master, especially in his absence. Joseph is a good example of this in his management of Potiphar's household (Genesis 39:1-6).

There is a Stewardship in Leadership: The Lord Jesus has an important message to those who are intrusted as elders to care for the Lord's flock. *"And the Lord said, "Who then is **that faithful and wise steward**, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their **portion of food in due season**? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has"* (Luke 12:42-44).

Elders are under-shepherds, under the Good Shepherd. They are to shepherd the church of God by feeding and giving counsel them from the word of God (Acts 20:28). They are to be wakeful shepherds as the devil is very active.

Elders will be rewarded for their shepherd care of the saints (1 Peter 5:4).

There is a Stewardship of our Soul: The Lord gave Adam a **soul** when He created him (Genesis 2:7). The Lord Jesus said: *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own **soul**? Or what will a man give in exchange for his **soul**?"* (Mark 8:36-37). Missionary C. T. Studd said, *"Only one life and soon will be past, And only what's done for Jesus will last"*. We all have a precious soul that will one day depart this body and stand before the Living God. Jesus died for our sins so we need not fear in the day of judgement. His perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:14-19).

God has given us the gift of life! We need to invest it wisely by doing His will.

There is a Stewardship of our Time: The Lord has given instructions on how we are to live. *"See then that you walk **circumspectly**, not as fools but as wise, **redeeming the time**, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Ephesians 5:15-17). To walk '**circumspectly**' means to live carefully and walk accurately through life. *"So teach us to number our **days**, that we may gain a heart of wisdom"* (Psalm 90:12), or as the King James Version says, *"that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"*.

We have limited time! We need to invest it wisely and use it for His glory.

There is a Stewardship of our Talents or Gifts: There are Natural and Supernatural gifts given to believers: *"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as **good stewards** of the manifold grace of God"* (1 Peter 4:10). *"From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (Ephesians 4:16).

The purpose of these gifts is to edify or build up and make believers stronger in their most holy faith. We are not to live for ourselves, but for others, just as our Lord Jesus gave Himself for others..

God has invested in us and we are to invest in others!

There is a Stewardship of the Truth: Our Lord Jesus Christ said: *"I am the way, **the truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). All 'truth' is in found in Him and comes to us from Him. We are to live out 'truth' in our lives. In our Bibles we have God's instructions for living godly lives. We are to pass on to the next generation all "truth" found in these pages.

Paul instructed Timoty, *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2

Timothy 2:2). Paul also told Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, and they will turn their ears away from **the truth**, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The proverb says, “Buy **the truth**, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Prov. 23:23).

John wrote to his friend Gaius: “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth**” (3 John 1:2-4).

God’s ‘Truth’ is a great treasure entrusted to us. We will each be held accountable for this when we meet the Lord.

There is a Stewardship of our Treasure: In the Old Testament, God’s people were to give one tenth (the tithe) of all their crops and animals. Paul instructed the Corinthian church; “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you **lay something aside**, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Christians were first to give themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5) and to and abound in this grace of giving (2 Cor. 8:7). They were to give in secret (Matthew 6: 1-4); to give regularly (1 Cor. 16:2); to give proportionally (1 Cor. 16:2); to give bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6) and to give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7).

If God entrusts us with material possession, He expects us to share with others in need and to help support His servants.

There is a Stewardship of the Temple of our Body: The Lord has given us life and a body for our spirit and soul to dwell in. “Or do you not know that **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in **your body and in your spirit**, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present **your bodies** a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

God has given us life, physically and spiritually, so our bodies are the Lord’s for His use in His service.

We are to be faithful Stewards of our Souls, of our Time, of our Talents, of Divine Truth, of our Treasure and of the Temple of our Body.

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Study 5

The Call to do Good Works

Christians are God’s workmanship, and are created for His purposes.

God has done a work for us: “For by grace you have been **saved** through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is **the gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). His wonderful grace saves us from the penalty of sin.

The disciples asked Jesus this question: “What shall we do, that we may **work the works of God**?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is **the work of God**, that you **believe in Him** whom He sent” (John 6:28-29). By faith His work begins in us.

God is doing a work in us: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). He has work for us to do here on earth and it will manifest itself for Jesus said: “Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:20).

He has a purpose in saving us: Jesus said, “Let your **light so shine** before men, that they may **see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven**” (Matthew 5:16). We also have the example of our Lord: “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished **the work which You have given Me to do**” (John 17:4).

The Holy Spirit produces His works in us as we meditate on His word and wait daily in His presence for His leading. He will impress on our hearts what He wants us to do. But we must be totally committed to do His will. Can we say, “Lord, all that I am and have is Yours”. We can pray Paul prayer: “Lord, what do you want me to do”? (Acts Ch. 9). God’s word says: “Since we live in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25), “let us walk in the Spirit ... and ‘be led by the Spirit’” (Galatians 5:16-18).

We have the example of the Thessalonians: “Remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father” (1 Thess. 1:3). This is an example of **first love** for the Lord. Paul was there only three Sabbaths (Saturdays) and left behind a functioning church. “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you **turned to God** from idols to **serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:9-10) .

These Thessalonians were examples of ‘**first love**’! They lost no opportunities in serving Him! “From you the word of the Lord has sounded out” (1 Thess. 1:8).

Loss of ‘first love’: In contrast, the Ephesians had lost their way: “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you **have left** (abandoned) **your first love**. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent and do the first works**, or else I will

come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent” (Revelations 2:4-5). Churches die and lose their way if they become self-centred.

Perhaps life was good at Ephesus and they were prospering materially. But they were not walking with the Lord and taking up the cross daily and following Him. They had forgotten His cleansing from sin and His purpose in saving them for service. Their repentance would bring cleansing: *“how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* (Heb. 9:14).

There is a reward for ‘first love’: *“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister”* (Hebrews 6:10). We are called to remember God’s purpose for us: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

We should be excited at the possibilities that daily come our way to serve the saints and to witness and reach out to the lost. We should always be ready to give to anyone *‘a reason for the hope that is in you’* (1 Peter 3:15).

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Study 6

The Five R’s

Relationship, Rapture, Reviewing, Rewarding and Rejoicing.

1. Relationship by Receiving:

The Lord Jesus stands at the door of our hearts and knocks for admission. When we open the door and **receive Him** as our Saviour and Lord, we come into His family and become **‘born ones’**, that is, babes and children of God by the new birth. At that moment we are also **adopted** as sons by the Holy Spirit, *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father”* (Rom. 8:15).

The Bible says, *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:11-13; 3:7). Jesus said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). Again He said, *“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’”* (John 3:7).

This is a position of dignity that the Lord wants us to live up to as His sons and daughters. We should so live as not to disgrace His holy family!

2. Rapture, believers caught up to heaven:

The word **‘Rapture’** comes from the Latin word **‘Rapturo’**, meaning to be **‘caught up’** with great or intense joy. *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (Read all 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

This is called **‘the blessed hope’**, for this is Christ returning for His own (Titus 2:11-14). There is a generation of believers who will go to heaven without dying. This will be with inexpressible joy as we are all gathered to be forever with the Lord and with the redeemed of all ages and His holy angels (Hebrews 12:22-24).

It is called **‘a living hope’** (1 Peter 1:3), for we have Christ living within us. He said *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). This is the blessed life that He wants us to enjoy now. *‘This hope we have as an anchor of the soul’* (Hebrews 6:19-20). We are anchored to Christ who has entered into the divine Presence within the veil, the very inner sanctuary where God dwells; He is there as our great High Priest.

It is also a **‘purifying hope’**. *“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”* (1 John 3:3). With the certainty of this hope we will live pure lives so as not to be ashamed before Him at His appearing (1 John 2:28).

This ‘hope’ has no uncertainty, for it is really the ‘confidence’ that we can fully trust all the promises He gives in His word!

3. Reviewing of believers service:

There will be the reviewing our **‘service’** or our **‘works’**, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body* (our works), *according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Cor 5:10). By our words and actions we are building, either for self or for the Lord.

Note: This is not our **‘sins’!** Jesus said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”* (John 5:24).

A Christ-centred Spirit led life is building with **‘gold, silver, precious stones’** (1 Corinthians 3:10-17). **Gold** speaks of **pure Deity**, and is Christ exalted in our lives and ministry. **Silver** speaks of **redemption**, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, soul winning (1 Peter 1:18). The redemption (atonement) price of every Jewish male was a half shekel. The rich were not to give more or the poor less (Exodus 30:13-16). **The precious stones** speak of the value of believers to the Lord, and we

are to build believers up in their most holy faith by faithful teaching so that spiritually they are lovely and beautiful for Him. This will receive a reward.

A self-centred life builds with **'wood, hay and stubble'** all consumable by fire. At the judgement seat of Christ our self-centred words and actions will be purged by fire. *"If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire"* (1 Corinthians 3:15).

4. Rewarding, crowns given for faithfulness:

1. An Incorruptible Crown (1 Corinthians 9:25). This is given for running well in the Christian Race (Hebrews 12:1-2) and for competing according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5). Paul finished his race well (2 Timothy 4:7). Jesus said: *"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown"* (Revelation 3:11).

2. A Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). This crown is for those who love His appearing, and if we do, we will live righteously. *"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure"* (1 John 3:1-3).

3. A Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 1:6-9; 2:19). This will be given for faithful evangelism and for establishing the saints so they continue in the faith.

4. A Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4). This is for faithful under-shepherds (elders) who care for the flock. They must give an account for the flock and believers are to submit to such leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Note also 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.

5. A Crown of Life (Revelation 2:10). This is the martyrs crown, reserved only for that select few who are faithful in their witness unto death. *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death"* (Revelation 12:11).

5. Rejoicing, now and forevermore

There will be a moment of joy and rejoicing for the Lord and for all the saints of the **Church** when **she** is **presented** as a chaste virgin to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom (2 Corinthians 11:2). This was also revealed to the aged apostle John: *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."* And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints: (Revelation 19:6-9). The raptured Church will be presented to her Bridegroom, arrayed in pure white garments, garments of the righteous deeds or acts of the saints. All these have been recorded and will be eternally worn as a fitting garment for the glory of heaven.

"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

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Study 7

In the Care of a Faithful God

We need to meditate on these wonderful words: ***"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"*** (1 Cor. 1:9).

Our faithfulness as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must flow from the very character of God who is always faithful and unchangeable in all **His attributes and actions**. The Psalmist King David exalted the Lord in worship: *"Your mercy O LORD, is in the heavens* (it surrounds His throne); *Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds* (encompasses the whole earth). *Your righteousness is like the great mountains* (immovable); *Your judgments are a great deep* (beyond our understanding, nothing hidden from His eyes); *O LORD, You preserve man and beast"* (the Lord is our Protector), (Psalm 36:5-6).

The Psalmist and Saints of old have proven that God is trustworthy. They have proven in all of life's circumstances that He can be totally relied upon.

The faithfulness of Him who inhabits eternity

In the counsels of Him who inhabits eternity, the plan of salvation was **formulated** in eternity past and then **implemented** in the life of Christ who came **to meet our every need**. *"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you"* (1 Peter 1:20). *"And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory"* (Romans 9:23).

Let us lift up our hearts: ***"I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations"*** (Psalm 89:1).

The Father's faithfulness in Implementing the plan

The giver of **Life** was sent by the Father into a **dying world** to give us real **life now and forever**. *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

His works show that He was God manifest in flesh, sent from the Father, fulfilling His plan. *"But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish; the very works that I do; bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me"* (John 5:36). Then Jesus said to them, *"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things"* (John 8:29).

The Father's plan was fulfilled **in His obedience**: He was the only Man who was perfect in all His ways, doing the Father's will. *"And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him"* (John 8:29).

It was also fulfilled in His death, for He was the only sinless Man, the innocent Lamb of God, who alone could take away our sins. *“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:8). He was *“... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”* (Revelation 13:8).

The Scriptures teach us, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:7). *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”* (1 Timothy 1:15).

His plan was made known through His birth, life and ministry, and also through His death, burial & resurrection.

This demands a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Only in this way can we be part of God’s eternal plan. There is no other way.

In faithfulness He planned for each believer

In doing the good works He planned: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). We are to be faithful in good works: *“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men”* (Titus 3:8).

In accepting His loving discipline: *“I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me”* (Psalm 119:75). *“For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights”* (Proverbs 3:12). *“For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrews 12:6).

In demonstrating holiness and love: Jesus said to love one another, for by this all men would know we are His disciples. *“...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”* (Ephesians 1:4).

In faithfulness the Holy Spirit within helps us to fulfil God’s plan

To walk in a worthy manner: *“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”* (Galatians 5:16). *“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”* (Eph. 4:1).

To walk in a wise manner: *“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:15-16).

To walk **circumspectly** means ‘to walk carefully and accurately, watching our words and actions’. **Redeeming the time** means ‘to make a wise and sacred use of

the present but passing opportunities’. Keep in mind that the days are perniciously and actively evil against those who seek to do good.

He is Faithful in times of testings and temptations

God tests us to see if we are genuine: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Testings can be severe as in the case of Job. Abraham was tested when he was called to offer up Isaac his son. But God stepped in at the 11th hour and made a way of escape, and He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can endure.

These ‘temptations’ are really ‘testings’ of our faith: *“that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 1:7). Daniel’s friends went into the fiery furnace, but God was with them!

God tempts no one to sin: *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed”* (James 1:14).

We have the example of Christ: *“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted”* (Heb 2:18). He endured the fires of Calvary, but rose victorious on the third day.

God is Faithful in keeping His promises

To His people: *“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised”* (Heb 11:11). At first Sarah laughed at God’s promise, and denied she laughed. But when Isaac (his name means ‘laughter’) was born she laughed for joy (read Genesis Chapter 18 and 22).

Our Lord was faithful to Rachael, Hannah and to Naomi and Ruth, each in their own special circumstances. He will also be faithful to all His daughters who have come to trust in Him.

God was faithful to His servants and to the prophets

To Enoch: *“And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”* (Gen 5:24). He disappeared, and search was made, but God had taken him.

To Elijah: *“Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”* (2 Kings 2:11). Search was made for Elijah, but God had taken him to heaven.

In view of this: *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”* (Hebrews 10:23).

Faithful in His covenant keeping promises to Israel

God has promised Israel national and spiritual restoration: “*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,’ Says the LORD*” (Romans 11:26; Isaiah 59:20).

The promise of the Spirit upon Israel: “*Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: ‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant; And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring’*” (Isaiah 44:2-3).

This is wonderfully explained in Zechariah Chapters 12 to 14.

God will be faithful to the tribulation faithful

They refused the mark of the Beast: “*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rev 2:10).

This crown is for martyrs and is the ultimate crown for ultimate suffering

He will judge the wicked

To clear the way for His rule in righteousness: “*because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31). World history moves on to its God appointed end and our Lord is in control. At His coming in power and glory He will judge the nations and people.

He was faithful in the past, is faithful in present and will be into the future.

God requires Faithfulness in His house

God said of Moses, “*He is faithful in all My house*”. (Numbers 12:7). This is the first mention of ‘faithful’ in the Bible. This is again mentioned: “*Jesus Christ, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house*” (Hebrews 3:2).

Then again in Hebrews 3:5-6, “*And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*”.

Moses was a servant to Israel; they were God’s house. Christ as Son was and is faithful over His house, whose house we are, the Church.

The Church both Local and Universal is now God’s House

Paul was a blasphemer and a persecutor of the church, but God saved him and called Him to be an apostle of Jesus Christ to teach and take care of His people.

He was faithful, “*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry*” (1 Timothy 1:12). Paul gave instructions to Timothy: “*but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim 3:15).

His house is a great house, “*But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honour and some for dishonour*” (2 Tim. 2:20).

Tychicus was a faithful servant to the Lord (Ephesians 6:21) as was Epaphras (Colossians 1:7) and Onesimus, a runaway slave: “*with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.*” (Colossians 4:9).

Faithful in Church Leadership

Elders and Deacons are to be faithful: “*This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (the overseership), he desires a good work*” (1 Timothy 3:1). Elders and Bible teachers are told: “*...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict*” (Titus 1:9). A message to elders: “*Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing*” (Matthew 24:45-46).

Paul taught Timothy, “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim 2:2). Also the wives of elders: “*Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things*” (1 Timothy 3:11). There will be a reward for faithful elders: “*and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away*” (1 Peter 5:4).

Above all, God is faithful and will reward our faithfulness

He is faithful in establishing: “*He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it*” (1 Thessalonians 5:24). “*But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one*” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Paul’s Closing comment on Faithfulness

Paul wrote to Timothy: “*This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*” (2 Timothy 2:11 -13).

Then we have Paul’s ultimate calling: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). God has His perfect plan for our lives. By walking by faith, not by sight, we will see this plan worked out in each step of our life’s

journey. All who are faithful will be rewarded: “*And he (Jesus) said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were **faithful** in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’*” (Luke 19:17). We must remember the teaching of our Lord and use the gifts the Lord has given us. Read Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27.

Can we say, “I have nothing I can call my own. All that I am and have and ever will be is from Him and to be used for Him?”

Jesus will be Faithful in coming for the Church

There will be a day when Jesus returns, then all believers will be caught up to heaven (Read I Corinthians Chapter 15). The world will wonder and make search when millions of Christians suddenly disappear

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** (raptured) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The Lord Jesus Christ gave us this promise: “*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to My self; that where I am, there you may be also**”* (John 14:1-3).

Living now, and forever: “You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

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Study 8

The Holy Spirit in the Last Days

In the Old Testament Age the Holy Spirit was ‘**with**’ all of God’s people, and came ‘**upon**’ chosen ones to help them in their special service for the Lord. The Spirit came ‘**upon**’ Saul when he was anointed king, but left him when he sinned. He then came ‘**upon**’ David, enabling him to be a prophet and wise king. Psalm 51 is his prayer of repentance after his sin of adultery and murder. He asked God not to take His Spirit ‘**from**’ him. He was not in danger of losing his salvation but of losing the empowering of the Holy Spirit upon his life and service for the Lord.

The disciples of Jesus: They were **Old Testament** believers when Jesus taught them that the Holy Spirit was then ‘**with**’ them and would come ‘**upon**’ them (John 14:15-18). Fifty days after His resurrection at the Feast of Pentecost, the Spirit was given and came ‘**upon**’ His disciples and the **Church Age** began.

During the Church Age: The Holy Spirit is now ‘**in**’ or ‘**upon**’ all who believe while Israel as a nation are set aside, but believing Jews are part of His Church. The prophets told of Israel’s regathering to their land in unbelief. Since 1948 they are again a nation in the land promised to Abraham and his ‘Seed’ forever.

The Great Tribulation: This will follow after the rapture of the Church, and is that seven-year period that Daniel foretold (Daniel 9:24-27), the time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble (Jeremiah Chapter 30, Rev. Chs 7-19), and that Jesus said would come (Matthew 24:21). It will take this terrible time to bring the nation of Israel to repentance. Only the Lord can save them from total destruction (Rom. Chs 9 to 11).

The Holy Spirit will be at work and people will be saved during this time, for there will be in Israel an ‘**elect**’ people (Matthew 24:21-22) and 144 thousand Jews saved and sealed at the beginning of this time (Rev. Chapter 7). Their testimony will bring a great number of people to faith in Christ from all nations, coming out of **great tribulation**, with robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14-17).

There will be two witnesses in Jerusalem: They prophesy during the first half of this seven-year Great Tribulation. Many will be warned of the coming judgement by their testimony and will turn to faith in Christ (Revelation Chapter 11).

We read in Revelation Chapter 12 of the **pregnant** woman who represents **Israel**, and the **dragon**, who represents **Satan**, ready to devour at birth her **Child the Christ**. He is caught up to heaven after being crucified and rising from the dead (Acts 1:10-11). The dragon has access to the outer courts of heaven, but then he will be **cast to the earth**, and he “*will make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*”.

Many will be **martyred** who refuse to bow and worship the **Beast** out of the sea, Satan’s man, and who also refuse to receive his mark so as to be able to buy and sell (Revelation 13:1-10). This evil ‘Beast’ will have total control of the world’s economy, but Jesus said He would shorten those days (Matthew 24:21-22).

The Lord Jesus returns to judge the wicked: These days are foretold in Zechariah Chapters 12 to 14. The Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, will return in great power and glory and save His elect people from the power of the Beast who will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire. The devil will be chained in the bottomless pit for 1000 years (Rev. Chapters 19-20). Immediately after those days He will gather His elect, all those saved during the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:29-31).

The Holy Spirit poured out on His elect: This will begin the Kingdom Age, the 1000-year reign of Christ over the earth (Rev. Chapters 19-20). “*And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, **That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I***

will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21).

Rebellion and the dawn of the eternal age without end: The 1000-year reign of Christ on the restored earth will be a time of great blessing, but many born during this time will not be saved. These will join under Satan, released at this time, and fire from heaven will consume those gathered with him against His holy city, Jerusalem. The unsaved dead are raised and the final Great White Throne judgement of God upon all unbelievers of all ages will follow (Rev. Ch,20).

Then time will cease as we know it, and God will dwell with His people (Revelation Chs. 21-22). The Bible ends with these words: *“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20).*

Our prayer should be, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” and bring an end to the suffering of many in this evil age of wars and suffering.

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Study 9

Creation – Fact or Fiction?

I am amazed that University Professors teach as fact that all the multitudes of life forms, from microbes to elephants, evolved over many millennia. How is it that to live on earth we need nearly all our body parts to function; how wonderfully made are our bodies and what a miracle is the male and female reproduction process!

What really puzzles me is how we survived while each stage evolved? How did the simple cell develop legs, arms, mouth, brains and reproduction organs? The ability to think, smell, feel, taste and reason, while one mutation (all of which degenerate) and all would be lost! This is just an impossibility, for God made us in His image.

To me it takes more faith to believe in the impossible theory of evolution than in an all wise and all-powerful Creator who designed and made all things.

It is evident that the only alternative to evolution is special creation. But to accept this means we have to accept responsibility for our actions, and accountability to our Creator God as Judge of our beliefs and sinful actions.

I have found that reading my Bible is uplifting to my soul and spirit, giving me an inner joy and peace as I contemplate His perfect creative acts, His personal interest in me in that Christ has forgiven all my sins, and the plans He has for my life.

It is also wonderful that He does communicate with His believing people by His Spirit through His word, the Bible.

The Genesis solution

The Bible begins with these words: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”*. It teaches that He is uncreated and that He was, is and always will be. In the beginning He called time, space and matter into being, and over six days shaped it and created life in multitudes of forms, with the marvellous functioning and life sustaining systems we can observe today.

Creation screams Intelligent Design!

What does the Bible really say about the real Big Bang? *“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth”* (Psalm 33:6). The earth is perfectly set in space to rotate around the Sun; any closer and it would burn and be uninhabitable, and any further it would freeze.

God set the moon to rotate around the earth. These heavenly bodies give us our seasons and the tides to cleanse and oxygenate the oceans. All the planetary bodies move in perfect unison as God designed and they keep to perfect time, just as God is one, with perfect unison between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

“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” (Psalm 33:6-9).

What about the fossil record?

The observable fossil record fits perfectly into the Bible scheme of things. A beautiful, perfect original world, with seas alive with marine life, also land animals and plants of His making, all thriving alongside man the pinnacle of His creation. The earth had few hills, and all watered from pole to pole by a dripping mist giving a perfect climate. There really was a paradise on earth with mankind living in perfect harmony with God and nature.

The Bible account tells us that all was spoilt when ‘sin’ entered through the disobedience of Adam, the man God created. Man became so wicked that God in Noah’s day sent a world-wide flood and the ‘mist’ that God created to water the earth collapsed with a terrible deluge covering the whole earth.

All the fossil layers we see today were laid out in a matter of weeks, and the subterranean heat and pressure on the buried forests and marine life produced all our coal and oil in a short time, and the earth’s convulsions pushed up mountains making deep valleys for the oceans to receive the vast amounts of water..

The earth bears the scars of that cataclysm, and is not billions of years old as evolutionists pronounce, for Bible records give an age of about six thousand years

since creation. Carbon dating is wrong and the evolutionists are wrong, blinded by their unbelief, for they do not want to be accountable to God.

God's solution to all our problems

The one act of disobedience of the first man, Adam, brought 'sin' and 'death' into God's perfect creation. How can anyone deny the reality of sin and death as daily we see on our TV's man's inhumanity to man, pandemics and the whole creation affected by earthquakes, droughts and storms.

Into this sad world, God sent His unique Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says He is the exact image of the Creator God, God manifest in flesh. He came to pay the penalty for our sins on that terrible cross of shame. He rose again the third day, was seen by many who bore witness to His resurrection and to what He taught.

In His unique teaching, Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). He will forgive all who come to Him.

The apostle Paul persecuted and put to death Christians, until Jesus Christ met him on the Damascus road and turned his life around. Paul later wrote: *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"* (1 Timothy 1:15).

Paul gave a full explanation of the Gospel (Good News) that he preached: *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles".* Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

The whole of Creation waits in expectancy

The creation suffers the consequences of sin, but God has subjected it in hope! The day is coming when our Lord Jesus returns, and the sons of God (we who believe) will be revealed with Him in glory, and the whole of creation will also be rejuvenated in the age of His kingdom and there will again be paradise on earth.

"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 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" (Romans 8:19-25).

That will be a glorious day, and true Christians wait in expectancy for this. Jesus said to His apostles, *"Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matthew 19:28). Then all who are 'born again' will enjoy the glory He has prepared. The Bible says:

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:16-17).

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Study 10

Learning from the Trees

Part of God's amazing Creation

God in His Word uses trees to illustrate many things. Here are some of these:

God's people are Trees of the Lord's Planting

Psalm 1 is the story of two men, two ways and two destinies. We see this also illustrated in the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 7:13-14). The Psalm says of the righteous man or woman who chooses to walk in His ways, *"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"* (Psalm 1:3).

When we are **the Lord's planting**, there is no uprooting, for He Himself has said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). The prophet Jeremiah wrote, *"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit"* (Jer. 17:7-8).

Believers have a faith **well planted**, with **deep roots** drawing from the streams of God's provision. If one stream fails there are others to draw from in the promises of God's word! When the Brook Cherith failed, God caused the ravens to feed Elijah, and then a poor widow woman of Zarephath (1 Kings Ch. 17).

He also brings forth fruit **suitable for all seasons**, living a godly life with words of wisdom to suit every situation. Such a believer will still be bearing the 'fruit of the Spirit' and usefulness in service even in old age. *"Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him"* (Psalm 92:13-15).

Those who profess but do not possess a saving faith **wither away** when the droughts and heat of life comes upon them (Matthew 13:1-9). But even in **the valley of weeping** true believers find refreshment from God's springs within: *"Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca (weeping), They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools"* (Psalm 84:5-6). Even in death, the believer is safe!

The Palm and Cedar Tree

The date Palm survives and is fruitful in desert places, its roots drawing water from underground. It bends with the desert sand storms, but does not break, because God has given it strength, and He is each believers strength! Lean on Him.

The Cedar Tree is magnificent, it is large and remains **evergreen** even when the snow falls in the bitter Lebanon winters. Its timber is beautiful and was used in building King David's house and also the Temple in Jerusalem.

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." (Psalm 92:12). *"Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver you"* (Isaiah 46:4).

The Olive Tree

From the Olive Tree comes oil, used for making the **holy anointing oil** (Exodus 30:23-28). No one was ever to make any like it, for it was sacred for the Lord's use in anointing Aaron and his sons for the priesthood as well as the Tabernacle and its vessels (Exodus 28:41; 29:1-9).

Israel's kings were anointed; Saul (1 Samuel 9:10); David (1 Samuel 16:13; Psalm 89:20) and Solomon (1 Kings 1:33-35). This is from a Psalm of David, *"But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever"* (Psalm 52:8).

From this word for **'anointing'** we get the words **'Holy'** and **'sanctified'**, meaning 'set apart for God's use'. Jesus is **'the Christ'** (**'the Messiah'**, meaning **'the Anointed One'**). He was **'anointed'** with the **Holy** or **'Anointing Spirit'** at His baptism and publicly revealed as the Father's beloved Son (Matthew 3:16-17).

Jesus went forth in the **power of the anointing of the Holy Spirit** to overcome the devil and preach the Gospel. He went about doing good, healing the sick, raising the dead and delivering all who were oppressed by the devil (Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-14).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians of their exalted position in Christ: *"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ*

Jesus, called to be saints (set apart ones), with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:1-2).

All who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ are 'sanctified', thus set apart for God's use, sealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Fig Tree and Grape Vine

The Fig and the **Grape Vine** (Isaiah 5:1-7) are used to **represent Israel planted in their land**. Along with the **Olive Tree** these were the most important cultivars for the children of Israel. *"The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit"* (Jeremiah 11:16). *"I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame (an idol); they became an abomination like the thing they loved"* (Hosea 9:10).

For this reason God sent them into captivity in Babylon where they learnt never to again worship idols. *"For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help"* (Isaiah 5:1-7).

Israel filled up the cup of their iniquity when they rejected their Saviour, Lord and King, saying, *"Crucify Him, crucify Him"*. *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him"* (John 1:11). So Jerusalem fell to the Roman general Titus in AD 70, and the Jews were scattered and have since suffered persecution among the nations. They said *"His blood be on us and on our children"* (Matthew 27:25).

But now Israel, typified by **a fig tree without leaves in winter**, has begun to **put forth leaves** (Read Matthew 24:32:35). They are back in their land in **unbelief** and again a nation since 1948. They have drained the swamps, planted trees from many lands, but, *"Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, therefore you will plant pleasant plants and set out foreign seedlings; In the day you will make your plant to grow, and in the morning you will make your seed to flourish; but the harvest will be a heap of ruins in the day of grief and desperate sorrow"* (Isaiah 17:10-11).

This prophesy sets forth Israel's worst hour yet to come in the time of **'great tribulation'** that Jesus warned about (Matthew 24:21). All the nations will suffer terrible judgement, and only the return of Christ as King of kings will end this, for then will be fulfilled: *"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob"* (Roman 11:26 and Revelation Chapter 19). This is a huge subject, but please read Matthew Ch. 24; Romans Chapters 9 to 11, the book of Daniel; all of Isaiah marking God's promises to Jacob and Israel, and Zechariah Chapters 11 to 14.

In that day, not only will Israel be restored to the Land promised to Abraham, but the Land itself will be restored almost to Edenic beauty: *"The wilderness and the*

wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1).

God has also promised: “I will open rivers in desolate heights, And fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, And the dry land springs of water. I will **plant** in the wilderness **the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree**; I will set in the desert the **cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together**, that they may see and know, and consider and understand together, That the hand of the LORD has done this, And the Holy One of Israel has created it” (Isaiah 41:18-20). “Instead of the thorn shall come up **the cypress tree**. And instead of the brier shall come up **the myrtle tree**; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” (Isa 55:13) Unquote.

We are living in momentous times and the coming of the Lord is near, when He will ‘rapture’ (catch up) His redeemed people as He has promised (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Jesus said in John 14:1-3:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. “In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”.

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Conclusion - Lord, Increase our Faith

It is not the amount of our faith, but the greatness of the God of our faith!

We are not the only ones who feel the need for more faith! ‘And the apostles said to the Lord, **“Increase our faith”** (Luke 17:5). In reply the Lord said to them; **““If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you”** (Luke 17:6).

I believe the Lord was teaching His disciples and us, that even when we only have a very small faith, He can still do great things through us.

‘Faith’ is not something easy to measure: We should not always be looking within to try to measure our faith. For, **‘if you plant a tree, you do not keep digging it up to see how the roots are growing’!** Many Christians are limited because they are looking inward instead of upward. You will not find anything good within!

We must look up to God who gave us faith to believe: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Faith grows under blows: Peter said that a true faith will even be tested by fiery trials to prove it is genuine (1 Peter 1:7). Job **endured** this testing: **“Though He**

slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). And again: **“When He turns to the right Shand, I cannot see Him. But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside”** (Job 23:9-11). Job was greatly tested, but he held to God’s ways, and his trust or faith in God did not waver.

We can nurture our faith: Paul wrote: **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). When we first heard God’s word we believed it and were saved. As we continue to read His word all through our lives, our faith is nurtured by its truths, but we **must apply** these to our lives.

A true faith will grow: Peter tells us, **“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious”** (1 Peter 2:1-3).

Faith is also works in action: James taught a practical faith: **“But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”** (James 2:18). James then gave the examples of how Abraham offered up Isaac, and Rahab hid the spies. **Their works proved their faith.** Abraham would never have taken the knife to kill his son, or Rahab risked her life to hide Israel’s spies, unless they had a faith that trusted God! James completes his teaching by saying: **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”** (James 2:26).

Faith is obedient: When we know God’s will (from reading God’s word), then if we have faith we will obey it: **“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”** (Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:8-10).

Paul knew this in his life: **“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ”** (Romans 1:5-6). God’s Spirit is in believers hearts, and through prayer He leads us to discern what is the right or wrong way: **“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left”** (Isaiah 30:21).

‘A true faith then not only believes that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, but is fully committed to follow Him in the way, in truth, into eternal life’.

A quote: ‘Little faith will get your soul to heaven; great faith will bring heaven to your soul!’

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