

**LIVING  
FOR  
ANOTHER WORLD**





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ANOTHER WORLD**



AN OAKWOOD SMALL GROUP STUDY



# BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

## *How does one become a Christian?*

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone, not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

## *What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?*

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).



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# ■ ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 5, 2022 | Virtue

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven virtues found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter wrote, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of those who have received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibited one of these seven virtues. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these virtues for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine virtue in the lives Caleb and Joshua.

### GETTING READY

Why do people seldom speak of virtue anymore?

Read Numbers 13–14.

Ask God to help you recognize biblical virtue in the lives of Joshua and Caleb.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Virtue is recognizing and following God’s priorities for life.

### ■ ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

By confessing Jesus as Lord, you are committing yourself to a virtuous life.

### ■ ■ MEDITATE

*“But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it” (Numbers 14:24).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the concept of virtue and how tightly it is tied to a biblical view of God.

**Q:** *How would you define virtue?*

**Q:** *Who is the first person to come to mind when you think of virtue?*

The Greek word translated “virtue” in 2 Peter 1:5 is *aretê*. *Aretê* is used to refer to uncommon character worthy of praise. The concept of virtue rests on two foundations. The first is community. Virtue is always public. Apart from community, a person’s character cannot be praised. The second foundation is a shared understanding of what is praiseworthy.

Both of these foundations are crumbling in modern society. By rejecting absolute truths, we can no longer recognize what is praiseworthy. Instead, every matter is relegated to the sphere of personal preference. In distinguishing between private and public life, we have undercut the foundation of true community. We can be one person at home and another when everyone is looking.

Perhaps this is why the word “virtue” has fallen out of use. From 1770 to 2019, the use of “virtue” in books printed in the United States fell 86%. The most common usage of “virtue” today is in the phrase “virtue signaling,” which is used to describe people or corporations publicly expressing their opinions on an issue to gain moral credibility in society. But virtue signaling is mostly an empty gesture. Those who do it are only saying what they think society wants them to say. This demands little true character. Furthermore, virtue signaling rarely demands any commitment. It is hardly uncommon character worthy of praise.

**Q:** *Why are the foundations of virtue disappearing?*

**Q:** *What could be done to prioritize virtue in modern society?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The decline of virtue corresponds to a decline in belief and commitment to God. The mid- to late eighteenth century, when the word “virtue” began declining in use, was the middle of the period

known as the Age of Enlightenment. People had begun to value reason as the primary means by which truth could be known, even over divine revelation (such as the Bible). This was a major shift in how human beings thought. As divine revelation was devalued, belief in a personal God also diminished. It makes sense that a declining belief in God would correspond with a declining appreciation of virtue. Apart from God, there is no standard to which virtue can be tied. Thus, true virtue, the kind envisioned by 2 Peter 1:5, must begin with a commitment to God.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson will examine the lives of two Old Testament figures, Joshua and Caleb, to understand true virtue. These men were the only two Israelites of their generation willing to trust the promises of God. From their lives this lesson will identify six principles of virtue to follow as we seek to lead a virtuous life.

1. VIRTUE WILL NOT COMPROMISE TRUTH TO SATISFY THE MAJORITY OPINION.
2. VIRTUE DOES NOT FORGET THE TRUTH WHEN IT IS INCONVENIENT.
3. VIRTUE IS COSTLY.
4. VIRTUE LAMENTS OVER SIN BUT HOLDS IT ACCOUNTABLE.
5. VIRTUE RESTS ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.
6. VIRTUE LOOKS BEYOND THE SELF TO SOMETHING GREATER.

## GOING DEEPER

+ This lesson will use Numbers 13–14 as a base from which to examine the character of Joshua and Caleb and supplement these chapters with additional texts covering the lives of these two virtuous men.

### 1. VIRTUE WILL NOT COMPROMISE TRUTH TO SATISFY THE MAJORITY OPINION.

#### ■ NUMBERS 13:30–33

**Q:** *How were these men chosen to be spies (Num. 13:1–16)? What does this tell us about the purpose of their mission?*

**Q:** *Why did Moses want to send spies to examine the promised land?*

The people of Israel had left Egypt more than a year before. They were on their way to inherit the land of Canaan as God had promised, and before entering the land, they sent a representative from each of the twelve tribes on a reconnaissance mission to become familiar with the land and the challenges they would face in conquering its inhabitants. The mission was intended to affirm the goodness of God's promises (Numbers 13:17–20), and it did. The spies acknowledged that the land was everything God had promised it would be (Numbers 13:27). But the mission also revealed the frailty of the people's faith. Although He had promised to give Israel the land, they allowed themselves to become intimidated by the imposing stature of the land's inhabitants. Ten of the spies did not believe Israel was capable of occupying the land and argued against the people pursuing the fulfillment of God's promises.

They were not unanimous in their recommendation, however. Caleb opposed their unfaithfulness and urged Israel to move forward with God's plan (Numbers 13:30). We should infer that Joshua joined Caleb in opposition to the other spies (Numbers 14:6–7). Their opposition to the majority opinion revealed tremendous virtue. They were unwilling to go along with the crowd or fall in line with everyone else. They knew God had promised them this land, and they knew Israel must move forward to remain faithful to His plan. They were unwilling to compromise these truths to appease the majority.

The response of the ten spies is part of a larger biblical theme. Only a small number of these spies remained faithful to God's promises. The rest refused to believe and rebelled against God. These spies are a microcosm of the nation of Israel. Only a remnant of Israel will remain faithful to God and His promises (Isaiah 6:13). The rest will fall away. In a similar way, Israel is a microcosm for humanity. Only a small remnant of humanity will remain faithful to God. The rest will fall away (Matthew 7:13–14).

**Q:** *How are right and wrong moral actions determined in our society?*

**Q:** *What limits must be placed on majority rule?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Joshua and Caleb refused to compromise what they knew to be true in order to satisfy the opinion of other spies. They held to a higher standard of truth than majority opinion. God had promised Israel would inherit the land. His promises meant more to Joshua and Caleb than the opinion of a thousand others. If

we desire to live a virtuous life, we cannot determine right and wrong based simply on what the majority of people think. This is the reigning paradigm for how our culture evaluates morality. If most people say it is okay, then it must be okay. Virtuous Christians must hold to a higher standard for moral truth. They must stand on the truth of God's Word no matter how large a majority opposes it.

## 2. VIRTUE DOES NOT FORGET THE TRUTH WHEN IT IS INCONVENIENT.

### ▣ NUMBERS 13:30–33; JOSHUA 9–10

❓ *What did the spies mean when they said, “[It is] a land that devours its inhabitants”?*

❓ *Why did Joshua go to the Gibeonite's rescue when they were keeping Israel from fully inheriting the land [Joshua 10:6–7]?*

After Caleb refused to be dissuaded by the fears of the other spies, they tried a different route. Although they had already verified the goodness of the land (Numbers 13:27), they denied what they knew to be true and delivered a bad report on the land (Numbers 13:32). They knew the result they wanted, and they were willing to tell the people whatever it took to get them to agree. They claimed the land “devours its inhabitants,” meaning the land would be difficult to cultivate for the survival of the nation. This is a negative example of virtue. The spies were willing to tell a lie if it secured what they thought was the right decision.

In Joshua 9–10, Joshua provides a positive counter-example to the lack of virtue seen among the ten spies. This event occurred more than forty years after Numbers 13–14. The people had finally entered the land and were conquering its inhabitants. The Gibeonites, one of the peoples of the land, saw that they would be defeated by the Israelites, so they protected themselves by forming an alliance with Joshua and the Israelites on false pretenses. Claiming they were from a faraway land, they requested a treaty with the Israelites. Rather than consulting God's direction, Joshua and Israel engaged in the treaty with them. But the Gibeonites inhabited a nearby valley within the borders of what was to become their land. Now the Israelites were stuck with the Gibeonites within their borders. When a group of kings learn the Gibeonites had made a treaty with the Israelites, they joined forces and attacked the Gibeonites (Joshua 10). Joshua could have seen this as an opportunity to undo his unwise decision. He could have let the opposition dispose of Gibeon, then defeat the coalition of kings, and everything would have been back to the way it was supposed to be. But Joshua refused to forget the truth even when the truth was inconvenient for

him. Israel had made a pact to protect the Gibeonites, and Joshua was resolved to stand by his word. He refused to compromise what he knew was right even though it would have been convenient for him to do so. This is biblical virtue.

**Q:** *Describe a time you were tempted to compromise the truth to “make things easier.”*

**Q:** *Why must Christians be particularly concerned with truth?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Virtuous Christians cannot disregard the truth even when doing so would be advantageous. Our commitment to truth supersedes our personal comforts. It is important for us to remember we serve a Savior who proclaimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). If we compromise truth, we distort the identity of our Savior. Christian virtue demands an absolute commitment to what is true, no matter how difficult.

### 3. VIRTUE IS COSTLY.

#### ■ NUMBERS 14:6–10; JOSHUA 5

**Q:** *What was Israel’s response to Joshua and Caleb’s virtue?*

**Q:** *What tasks did Joshua need to accomplish before invading the land?*

The Israelites choose to believe the ten faithless spies and were deterred from entering the land. The scene is eerily similar to what is found in Genesis 3. The spies questioned the goodness of God’s promises (Genesis 3:1; Numbers 13:28–29, 31–33). When the people had to choose between holding fast to the Word of God and listening to the lie, they chose to listen to the lie (Genesis 3:6; Numbers 14:1–4). As a result, God’s land was no longer available to them (Genesis 3:23; 14:30). Furthermore, their actions created conflict between those who were faithful to God and those who believed the lie (Genesis 3:15; Numbers 14:10).

The conflict centered on Caleb and Joshua, who urged the Israelites to trust in God's provision, but the Israelites threaten to stone them instead. A virtuous life does not guarantee our safety. In fact, virtue is often costly. The Israelites threatened Caleb and Joshua's lives. Their commitment to truth put them in peril.

Another episode in the life of Joshua reminds us that virtue is costly. In Joshua 5, the Israelites had just crossed over the Jordan River. The entire land lay open before them, including the nearby city of Jericho. They would have been eager to begin conquering the land, but Joshua said they must wait. While they wandered in the desert, the Israelites had not kept up the pattern of circumcision, the sign of covenant membership. Before they could conquer the land, every male had to be circumcised in order to identify with the people of God. Furthermore, upon entering the land, the people celebrated the week-long festival of Passover. These delays allowed the enemies to prepare for their invasion and fortify their cities. As a military leader, Joshua must have cringed at the thought of giving the enemy time to prepare. But he dared not compromise the nation's fidelity to God. He maintained his virtue even when it was costly to him.

**Q:** *Describe a time when doing the right thing was costly.*

**Q:** *If virtue is costly, why do it?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Like Joshua and Caleb, we should not be surprised when virtue proves costly. Standing for truth will become more costly as our society becomes more opposed to it. But we should not suppose that abandoning the truth will ever lead to self-preservation, at least not in the long run. The Israelite spies who sought to save their lives ended up losing them (Numbers 14:36–38). Jesus recognized this as well. He called His disciples to “take up [their] cross.” The one who is only concerned with saving his life will lose it, but the one willingly gives up his life will find something far greater (Matthew 16:24–28).

#### 4. VIRTUE LAMENTS OVER SIN BUT HOLDS IT ACCOUNTABLE.

##### ■ NUMBERS 14:6–10; JOSHUA 7

**Q:** *How did Joshua and Caleb respond to the people's lack of faith?*

**Q:** *How did Joshua resolve the sin of Achan?*

When the Israelites lost faith in God and gave up on the hope of entering the land He had promised them, Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes, a sign of deep remorse and anguish in the ancient world. Notice that a virtuous life does not mean a hardness toward sin. These men were deeply grieved by Israel's actions.

Though they were broken over the people's sin, Joshua and Caleb knew it could not be ignored or defended. The price of Israel's disobedience was the promised land. Joshua and Caleb would be the only members of their generation to enter the land. It must have been difficult for Joshua and Caleb to see their contemporaries die one by one in the harsh desert climate over a forty-year period. But they did not reject God's actions. They understood that sin must be held accountable.

The same situation occurs in Joshua 7. After their miraculous victory at Jericho, the Israelites were routed by the next city in their conquest, the city of Ai, because an Israelite named Achan took some spoils of war during the battle of Jericho. God had explicitly forbidden this, and in response to Achan's sin, God made Israel fall in the battle against Ai. When Achan's sin came to light, Joshua oversaw his execution (Joshua 7:25). Although a virtuous person is brokenhearted over sin, virtue cannot be maintained where sin is ignored.

**Q:** *In what ways do you try to avoid accountability for your sins?*

**Q:** *How does a concern for community keep the virtuous person from ignoring sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We don't like to be held accountable for our mistakes. We like receiving recognition for our achievements, but we hope our failures will slip by unnoticed. In fact, we often attempt to wiggle out from under them by blame shifting or making excuses. Virtue will keep us from trying to escape accountability. When we make mistakes, moral or otherwise, we should be ready to own them. There is nothing virtuous about ignoring sin or pretending to be perfect. Furthermore, an unwillingness to acknowledge our own mistakes and shortcomings takes away our ability to lament over them. Joshua and Caleb were driven to virtuous lament over the people's unfaithfulness.

## 5. VIRTUE RESTS ON THE PROMISES OF GOD.

### ❏ NUMBERS 14:21–24; JOSHUA 1:1–9

Q: *Why were Joshua and Caleb confident that God would give them the land?*

Q: *Why could God command Joshua to be strong and courageous?*

In a final effort to keep Israel from rebelling against God, Joshua and Caleb appealed to the promises of God. They affirmed the goodness of the land in contradiction to what the other ten spies had said (Numbers 13:32). They affirmed the land as “exceedingly good” and flowing with milk and honey (Numbers 14:7–8), exactly how God described it to Moses in Exodus 3:8. Furthermore, Joshua and Caleb remained confident, despite the size of their opponents, that God was able to deliver the land to them. They were unsuccessful in persuading the Israelites, but they succeeded in proclaiming the promises of God for all to hear. Virtue is possible when we depend more on God’s promises than personal effort.

This idea also appears in the initial verses of Joshua. Twice in Joshua 1:1–9, God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. These qualities are closely connected with virtue. Around these commands to be strong and courageous are God’s promises. He promised not to forsake Joshua. He promised Joshua success. Joshua’s virtue rested on the promises God made to him.

Q: *What promises of God are most significant to you?*

Q: *What guarantee do we have that God will keep His promises?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Our virtue begins with believing the promises of God. If we base our life on anything else, we will only be disappointed. If we base our life on the promises of God, we can live with confidence in all things because God is sure to be faithful to His promises. God’s promises give us the freedom to confidently pursue virtue. God’s commitment to His promises is the same as His commitment to the Son (2 Corinthians 1:20).

## 6. VIRTUE LOOKS BEYOND THE SELF TO SOMETHING GREATER.

❏ NUMBERS 14:21–24; JOSHUA 15:16–19

Q: *On what did God base His determination to not let this unfaithful generation into the promised land?*

Q: *Why did Caleb give his daughter additional land blessings?*

In condemning the unfaithful generation of Israelites, God alluded to the earth being filled with the glory of God (Numbers 14:21). This is a programmatic vision in the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:14). God's glory will one day fill every inch of this globe. Joshua and Caleb were able to see this vision. They were also able to see the joys of living in the land God had promised them (Numbers 14:24). They were virtuous because they were able to look beyond themselves to something greater. They yearned for the day the earth would be filled with God's glory. This yearning created virtue within their character.

Caleb's virtue is also evident in his interaction with his daughter (Joshua 15:16–19). Caleb arranged for his daughter to marry Othniel because of Othniel's courage in battle. He then gave his daughter and her husband an allotment of land. Caleb's daughter, Achsah, knew the land would be barren for most of the year without an abundant water supply. When she asked her father to provide the water necessary to farm the arid land, he agreed and gave generously. He was willing to invest his land with his daughter and son-in-law because he looked beyond himself to the future of his family—his children, grandchildren, and the generations that would follow. Such a perspective created the capacity to act with virtue in regard to his daughter.

Q: *How do the ministries of Oakwood look beyond the church itself?*

Q: *What in your life shows that you believe in something more important than yourself?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Healthy churches understand that the mission of the church is greater than the church itself. God yearns for His glory to be evident in every part of the globe, and local churches are the mechanism

by which this mission will be achieved. Since this is the case, it is alarming when most of the budget in most American churches never has an impact beyond the four walls of the church. Churches need to constantly examine how they use the resources entrusted to them. Of course, it is necessary for a church to invest in itself. The church is part of God's mission. A church must invest in the discipleship and growth of its own members. It is right for a church to support its staff and the ministries they lead. At times, churches must invest in buildings and capital improvements. But churches must always be mindful that they are a part of a greater work God is doing that encompasses all of creation.

This is not a concern only for budget committees and leadership teams. Every church member has a part in helping the church look beyond itself to God's greater mission. For church members, it may mean dealing with a degree of discomfort. It may mean accepting inconveniences. Your willingness to make these sacrifices will encourage your leadership to invest the church's resources beyond itself in God's larger mission.

## NEXT STEPS

This lesson has discussed six principles of biblical virtue. Each one pertains to specific situations in which you could act with virtue or fail to do so. Identify an area of your life in which you are failing to act with biblical virtue. In college, I hung around a close knit group of guys. There was one guy we all tended to pick on. For some reason, he wanted to be part of our group even though he did so at his own expense. As you can imagine, a group of college boys can be quite ruthless. We were all trying to one up each other in how we picked on him. We could be quite emotionally abusive. I knew at the time that what I was doing was wrong, but I could not bring myself to go against the majority. I'm thankful some of the guys in our group did. Years later, I look back on my actions with utter shame. I completely lacked any godly virtue in my treatment of this young man. Nothing I do now will change what I did then. The opportunity for virtue in that situation has passed. Do not let the opportunity for virtue pass you by. What majorities do you need to resist? What truths are you compromising? What promises are you ignoring?

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, thank you for Joshua and Caleb. May you raise up men and women who are committed to godly virtue the way they were in Numbers 13–14.*



*-Lord Jesus, every promise God has made will be fulfilled in you. Hold me close to you so I may live with virtue.*

*-Father, show me the instances in my life in which I need to act with virtue.*

*-God, forgive me for the times I have failed to act with virtue. Convict me of sin, and make me rest on the all-sufficient grace of my Savior.*

# ■ ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 12, 2022 | Knowledge

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine knowledge in the life of Solomon.

### GETTING READY

Who is the most knowledgeable person you know? What makes him or her knowledgeable?

Read the Bible’s account of the life of Solomon either from 1 Kings (1–11) or 2 Chronicles (1–9). The construction of the temple can feel a bit monotonous at times for modern readers but try to read closely to notice important details scattered through these sections.

Pray that God continually transforms you into a knowledgeable person.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

A knowledgeable person is able to find and submit to truth.

### ■ ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

- If you want to be a knowledgeable person from a biblical perspective, you must learn truth and use it in life.

## ■ MEDITATE

*“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:9).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+This section introduces a key concept related to biblical knowledge and traces it throughout the life of Solomon.*

Q: *How would you define knowledge?*

Q: *Is knowledge more or less difficult to obtain today than in the past?*

The word knowledge in 2 Peter 1:5–6 could be defined as “comprehension or an intellectual grasp of something.” It often has additional implications in Scripture. In the Bible, “knowledge” is more than learning mere facts. For example, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” When Paul spoke of “the knowledge of God,” he had more in mind than facts or an intellectual understanding of God. The knowledge of God is something that can be opposed by arguments or opinions, implying an ideology or belief system. In Romans 2:17, Paul said, “Know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law.” His words imply a submission to God’s will, not a mere comprehension of it. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus said of those who do not do the will of his Father, “Then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” Jesus obviously was aware of the existence of these individuals. “Knowledge” in this instance implies a relationship. So, the word “knowledge” in Scripture often implies a submission to, a relationship with, and an investment in truth.

Solomon was the third king of Israel. He reigned during the eighth century BC. His name is more often associated with the term “wisdom” rather than “knowledge,” but there is quite an overlap between these terms when “knowledge” is understood as described above. This lesson examines the life of Solomon to see biblical knowledge in action and to illustrate the importance of this additional nuance of biblical knowledge. Solomon knew more about God’s creation than any other person of his time, yet his life at times was characterized by biblical knowledge and at other times merely by an assent to facts. Furthermore, Solomon shows us that knowledge is not reserved for modern societies who have the benefit of technology and years of scientific research. True knowledge is more than we can gain by looking through a microscope or discover in a library. True knowledge is ultimately found by understanding God and His Word.

**Q:** *How could you gain knowledge but fail to please God?*

**Q:** *Are faith and knowledge incompatible?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Many people consider faith and knowledge to be contrasting approaches to understanding the world. They believe that once knowledge comes, there is no longer any need for faith. Second Peter 1:5, however, indicates that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. We are to “supplement our faith ... with knowledge.” So, our faith needs to be informed, not blind. Christians have no reason to avoid knowledge or learning. We should never be simplistic in the sense of being unwilling or incapable of understanding complex arguments or difficulties. Nor should we believe that knowledge removes our need for faith. Faith and knowledge work together to make us fruitful Christians who are able to contend for what we believe.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Peter called believers to knowledge. What does a knowledgeable person look like? This lesson examines Solomon’s life to find out. In Solomon, we see someone who kept God at the center and used his gifts to help others prosper. Oh, that his entire life were committed to obtaining and using godly knowledge!

**1. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON KEEPS GOD AT THE CENTER.**

**2. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON IS A BLESSING TO OTHERS.**

## GOING DEEPER

+*This section provides an overview of Solomon’s life to see how these two principles are evident in him. Solomon was a complex character. His life was a mixture of successes and failures. But his wisdom and knowledge cannot be denied, and we have much to learn from him.*

**1. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON KEEPS GOD AT THE CENTER.**

■ **1 KINGS 3:1–15; 1 CHRONICLES 28:9–10; 2 CHRONICLES 1:1–13**

**Q:** *Why is knowledge better than much wealth, a long life, and victory in war?*

**Q:** *How did Solomon's request keep God at the center of his life?*

Perhaps the most widely known event from Solomon's life was an encounter he had with God in a dream during the initial months of his reign. This encounter is recorded in 1 Kings 3:1–15 and 2 Chronicles 1:1–13. In Solomon's exchange with God, we learn that he knew he needed God's help to effectively rule the nation. The encounter began with God asking, "What shall I give you?" (2 Chronicles 1:7). He placed no restrictions on His offer. As God Himself acknowledged, Solomon could have requested any number of things related to his personal prosperity and to securing his kingdom (2 Chronicles 1:11). But rather than asking for wealth, success, or victory over his enemies, Solomon asked for "wisdom and knowledge" to reign over God's people (2 Chronicles 1:10). With his request, Solomon showed a concern for those under his rule and an awareness of his need for consistent dependence on God throughout his reign. Asking for those other things would have shown that Solomon intended to rule over the people from his own power.

Solomon's request illustrates the kind of knowledge intended in 2 Peter 1:5. There would have been nothing commendable in asking for knowledge if Solomon were asking for facts he could use to gain an advantage over the surrounding nations or neutralize threats from within his kingdom. By asking God for wisdom and knowledge, Solomon revealed a desire to submit to God's will. He wanted a close relationship with God and made a commitment to living by God's revealed truth.

**Q:** *What do you rely on for success? Does this keep God at the center?*

**Q:** *What would you ask for if God were to offer you anything?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The first step to being a knowledgeable person in the 2 Peter 1:5 sense is seeing your need for God. No matter how extraordinary or talented you are, you need God's grace to recognize, submit, and invest in what is true. I have a hard time with this first step. My first instinct, which I believe to be sinful, is to see how much headway I can make on my own before acknowledging my need to depend on God in every situation. When I do this, regardless of whether I'm successful by the world's definition, I have failed to walk in knowledge. A knowledgeable person understands their need for God in every situation.

**Q:** *Who was Solomon's father? How does this prayer demonstrate the importance of God's promises to Solomon's father?*

**Q:** *Do you find Solomon's prayer optimistic or pessimistic?*

Solomon was also the builder of the first temple in Jerusalem. Upon the temple's completion, he dedicated it with a prayer and addressed the people of Israel. His remarkable words reveal his character and his knowledge of God more than any other part of his story. Rather than dwelling on the building's magnificence (1 Kings 8:13), Solomon's temple dedication kept God at the center. He began by acknowledging God's faithfulness. He declared that it was God who brought the people out of Egypt by His own power, not theirs (1 Kings 8:16, 21). He fulfilled all the promises He made to David (1 Kings 8:18–20, 24–26). Whatever God promises, He fulfills. Then Solomon proclaimed God's greatness (1 Kings 8:23, 27). No matter how splendid the temple was, it paled in comparison to God.

Solomon went on to intertwine God's grace, judgment, and deliverance. He prayed for God to condemn the guilty who sin against Him (1 Kings 8:32). He acknowledged that any defeats Israel might suffer could be because they had sinned against God (1 Kings 8:33). Later, Solomon even alluded to God's judgment and Israel's exile from the land (1 Kings 8:46). These words of judgment, however, are not the end. He also prayed for God to forgive the people if they turned their hearts toward Him (1 Kings 8:33–34). Even if they had been exiled from the land, Solomon prayed they would be brought back if they repented and turned their hearts to God (1 Kings 8:46–52). Solomon was pleading for, and expecting to receive, God's grace. Finally, he also interspersed his prayer by noting acts of deliverance. We have already mentioned the exodus. In addition, Solomon prayed for God's deliverance from famine (1 Kings 8:37) and from their enemies (1 Kings 8:44–45).

Perhaps the most remarkable part of Solomon's prayer is his appeal on behalf of foreigners. He asked when even a foreigner prayed toward the temple, that God would hear his prayers so all people might know God's great name and fear Him (1 Kings 8:41–43). All of this shows how Solomon kept God at the center of reality. There could be no greater evidence of his knowledge of God and of His will.

**Q:** *How is God's centrality questioned in our times?*

**Q:** *How can you appreciate God's hand in history while acknowledging that you do not understand His ways perfectly?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We live at a time when God's centrality in all things, including history, is being challenged. As Christians, we may think we are unaffected by the unbelief of our wider culture, but we may be surprised to see how much we have adapted to the worldviews of the modern age. As Solomon reflected on his nation's history and anticipated its future, he saw God at the center. He could not see it any other way. If you were asked to explain America's history to someone, would you describe it as placing God at the center or could you easily describe the major events of American history without any reference to God? There are some differences, of course. America is not a theocracy like ancient Israel. Furthermore, where Solomon had an inspired record of Israel's history, we should be cautious about assuming how God has acted in our history. Nevertheless, I think the ease with which most of us can speak of historical matters without any connection to God reveals a certain comfort with removing God from the center. This was not the case for the major figures of our nation's early history. Even the more unbelieving figures in our past saw evidence of God's providence everywhere they looked. American history is just an example. The point is that even Christians have become comfortable viewing reality without God at the center. We will never attain the knowledge described in 2 Peter 1:5–6 while this is the case.

## 2. A KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON IS A BLESSING TO OTHERS.

### ■ 1 KINGS 3:16–28; 4:24–25

**Q:** *What difficulty did Solomon encounter in the case of the two women?*

**Q:** *What hidden assumption did Solomon make in his judgment?*

Solomon requested and was granted the wisdom to lead his people in 1 Kings 3:1–15. The author of 1 Kings immediately offers examples of Solomon's great wisdom and knowledge. First Kings 3:16–28 contains another famous episode from his life. Two prostitutes came before the king, both claiming the same son. These women lived together and gave birth to sons just days apart, but one of them accidentally smothered her son while they were sleeping. When she awoke, she switched her dead son with the other woman's live son. Today, a DNA test

could settle the issue, but during Solomon's time, there was insufficient evidence to determine to whom the baby belonged. One of the women was lying, but there was no way to tell who. With his God-given wisdom, Solomon quickly discerned a way to ascertain the truth. He suggested the child be divided in two so each woman could have half a son. The child's true mother gave up her son so he might live. The lying woman was willing for the child to die. In this way Solomon learned who the child's mother was. When the people of Israel heard of Solomon's judgment in this matter, they were in awe of him (1 Kings 3:28) because he could discern what was just and unjust even when there was no corroborating evidence. Solomon used the knowledge God had given him to obtain justice for this mother and her son.

**Q:** *What is intuition? How can it be helpful? When can intuition be harmful?*

**Q:** *How do you think Solomon was able to conceive of his plan to determine the child's true mother?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Our capacity to help others is increased by our knowledge of God and His will. If Solomon had depended on his own intuition in this matter, he could have made a grave mistake. The same is true for us. We cannot be guided by our best guesses and intuitions. Doing so could just as easily bring others harm instead good. If we wish to help others, we must be guided by the knowledge and wisdom of God.

## ■ 1 KINGS 10

**Q:** *How does this story relate to Genesis 12:1-3? How does this story relate to Matthew 12:42?*

**Q:** *Why did the queen give gifts to Solomon?*

Solomon's wisdom was known throughout the ancient world. Sheba was located in southwestern Arabia in what is present day Yemen. The queen of Sheba likely heard of Solomon's great wisdom from caravan traders. It is unlikely that these traders had become believers in Israel's God, but they could not deny Solomon's wisdom and knowledge and spread the report of him throughout the known world. The queen of Sheba could not believe the reports she had heard about Solomon and wanted to meet him to see for herself (1 Kings 10:6-7). When the queen

met Solomon, she was so impressed by his wisdom that she blessed the people and blessed Israel's God (1 Kings 10:9). Solomon's wisdom revealed God's glory to the nations. Of course, we have no idea what the queen's eternal state is, but we know that on at least one occasion she blessed the true God of the whole universe. Solomon's wisdom was a blessing to others, even among the nations. In blessing the nations through his wisdom, Solomon fulfilled the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. The nations of the earth are being blessed through Abraham's offspring. In Christ, who is greater than Solomon, we see a greater fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham (Matthew 1:1; 12:42). Christ will bring the blessing of salvation to all nations (Matthew 28:19–20).

**Q:** *How can Christians reveal the excellency of God through their own commitment to knowledge and excellence?*

**Q:** *How does satisfaction with mediocrity diminish our ability to glorify God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – There is nothing anti-intellectual about the Christian faith. With Solomon as our example, the clarity and rigor of our thinking should be appealing to unbelievers. We can never compromise on biblical truth. Some unbelievers will classify our theological convictions as unintelligent or naïve no matter how well understood they are. But apart from these unfair criticisms, there should be something appealing to unbelievers in the way believers pursue knowledge of how God has created His world. Since He created the world, acquisition of knowledge is discovering God's thoughts after Him. Nothing should be more enticing for true believers. Be wary of the simplistic Christian who is afraid to pursue knowledge about God Himself or the world around him.

#### ■ ■ 1 KINGS 5:1–18; 7:13–14

**Q:** *Why did Solomon request the help of the king of Tyre in building the temple?*

**Q:** *Could Solomon have constructed the temple with materials from Israel? Should he have?*

Sometimes the wisest course of action is to recognize and account for your own limitations. Solomon could do this. At the outset of building the temple, he contracted with Hiram king of Tyre to procure the timber needed to build the temple. The cedars of Lebanon were prized in the ancient world, and ancient kingdoms greatly desired

them for their construction projects. Furthermore, the laborers of Tyre had the experience necessary to harvest and transport the trees to wherever they were needed (1 Kings 5:6). Solomon could have constructed the temple with the resources available to him in Israel, but it would have diminished its architectural appeal. When the time to build the temple furnishings came, Solomon again secured the help of an expert from Tyre. He hired Hiram (a different Hiram), who was “full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze” (1 Kings 7:13–14). Again, he recognized his limitations and got the help he needed to create magnificent furniture for the temple. Surely there were bronze workers in Israel whom Solomon could have called on to make this furniture. But Solomon wanted the best, so he sought help from a neighboring country. Solomon’s willingness to recognize limitations and seek the help he needed is characteristic of one who is walking in the knowledge of God.

Q: *How is recognizing our limits central to the gospel?*

Q: *Is it better to recognize your strengths or your weaknesses?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Solomon’s willingness to acknowledge his limitations creates a connection between knowledge and the gospel. We have a problem we are unable to solve on our own. Our sin separates us from God and places us under God’s eternal judgment. There is nothing we can do to atone for our sins. Atonement is beyond our limitations. But nothing is beyond Christ. Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and restore our relationship with God. He accomplished what we could not. If Solomon’s willingness to recognize his limitations reflects the nature of knowledge, then there can be no doubt why Peter believed every Christian should be characterized by knowledge.

Q: *What book does the author of 1 Kings allude to in these verses?*

Q: *What other books in the Bible did Solomon write? How do these verses allude to them?*

Solomon acquired immense knowledge of nature (1 Kings 4:33). He was an expert in the fields of botany and zoology. The author of 1 Kings artfully crafted his statements to reveal how vast Solomon’s knowledge in these fields was. The cedars of Lebanon were the largest plants known in the ancient Near East. Hyssop was one of the smallest, especially when its growth was stunted by a wall. The author uses a literary device known as a merismus, which

refers to the entirety of something by referencing the extremes. The author was essentially saying that Solomon was familiar with every plant known throughout the territory.

The author also said Solomon “spoke” of beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish. An attentive Bible reader will recognize an allusion to Genesis 1 in this statement. For Solomon to speak of beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish indicated a vast knowledge of all the living creatures God has made. The use of “spoke,” however, points to a deeper significance than even just mere knowledge. In Genesis 1, God “spoke” creation into being. Solomon was following after God in this manner, not in the sense of creating new species out of nothing but in the speaking of created beings. As with Adam and Eve, he was made in God’s image and had been given dominion over the rest of creation (Genesis 1:26). Solomon exercised authority over the animal kingdom by speaking as God had also spoken. This is perhaps the most remarkable statement made about Solomon.

Q: *How can humans rule over the earth responsibly?*

Q: *How does learning about God’s creation glorify Him?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Humanity was made to have dominion over the rest of creation. Sin has made that dominion more challenging but has not taken it completely away. There are many people today who are concerned with humanity’s “footprint” in the world. They want to minimize or remove it, meaning they want to minimize any sign of humanity’s presence in nature. The idea is that people corrupt nature whenever and however they make their presence known. The Bible has a much different view of humanity’s role within God’s creation. In giving us dominion over nature, God authorized us to cultivate what He has made to make it better and to make it serve us. Our goal is not to minimize evidence of our presence but to use and develop what God has made for our benefit and for the benefit of others. We should look for raw materials in the earth and develop the technologies needed to use them for our benefit. We should scavenge the earth looking for new food supplies and medicines. Of course, when sin entered the picture, the possibility of abusing creation with our dominion became a possibility, and this is something Christians should take seriously. We need to consider whether our actions harm what God has made and create a less habitable place for us. Not taking these things into consideration would be a failure to have the dominion God intended. Like Solomon, Christians need to be knowledgeable of what God has made and rule it responsibly.

## NEXT STEPS

Peter called us to be knowledgeable, and by “knowledge,” he included the knowledge of God’s will. Many Christians struggle to understand God’s will for their lives because they fail to see a connection between His will for all of creation and His will for their individual lives. On the top half of a piece of paper, write down your understanding of God’s will. At the bottom of the paper write down His will for your life. In the middle, explain how God’s will for your life is connected to His will for all of creation. Seeing these connections will help you grow in the knowledge of God’s will.

## PRAY

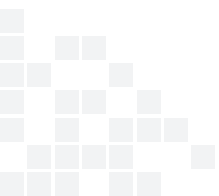
*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

*God, help me to grow in the knowledge of your will.*

*Lord Jesus, help me to know how deeply I depend on you for spiritual growth.*

*Father, give me a curiosity for the world you created. Help me to be knowledgeable of what you have done.*

*God, show me how all knowledge begins with you. Help me keep you at the center of all things.*



# ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 19, 2022 | Self-Control

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine self-control in the life of the prophet Elisha.

### GETTING READY

In what area of your life do you most lack self-control?

Pray that this lesson on Elisha’s life will make the need for self-control evident in your life.

Read 2 Kings 2–8.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

There is more joy to be found in repentance than in persisting in sin.

### ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Repent from sin instead of rebelling against God.

### ■ MEDITATE

*“Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord” (Psalm 32:10).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+This section will explain the importance of self-control within the context of 2 Peter.*

**Q:** *Why would self-control be considered a virtue?*

**Q:** *Was Peter known for self-control in the Gospels?*

In one sense, it should not be surprising to find self-control in Peter's list of Christian qualities or virtues. It was considered one of the four primary virtues in ancient Greece. Literature contemporaneous with the New Testament frequently references self-control. Not long after the completion of the New Testament, self-control was a central virtue among the Christian ascetics, monks who lived in the desert and deprived themselves of home, food, and comfort. Strangely enough, however, self-control is not a common New Testament theme even though it was so popular outside of the Bible. No biblical author makes self-control a central part of his theology or presentation of Christian doctrine. We cannot be entirely sure why this was the case. Perhaps the New Testament authors were concerned that an emphasis on self-effort could easily distract from the gospel of free grace in Christ. Whatever the case, self-control does appear in Peter's list and in Paul's writings (1 Corinthians 7:9; 9:25; Galatians 5:23), so the idea of self-control is certainly consistent with the gospel and Christian theology.

It is possible that Peter's appeal for self-control was an attempt to address false teaching among the community to whom he was writing. Although he did not give enough information to identify the false teaching, his frequent allusion to the false teachers and their followers paints a picture of over-indulgence and gratification (2 Peter 2:2, 10, 13–14, 19). It seems some members of the community had thrown off moral constraint and were teaching others to do so as well. Peter's call to self-control opposed the developing cultural trends in the community.

**Q:** *In what ways does the outlook of the false teachers that Peter was addressing parallel the outlook of our culture?*

**Q:** *How can we pursue self-control without compromising the grace that is central to the gospel?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We also live in a society that favors purging all restraints in pursuit of desire. Life is about what you want to do. Jettisoning cultural norms is praised. Pushing the bounds of decency will get you noticed. Yielding to your every want and pampering yourself is what you are entitled to. We need to hear Peter’s word—self-control. The gospel is not based on our own efforts, but Peter recognized that self-control is an essential characteristic of anyone who confesses Christ as Savior. Those who are pursuing godliness in Christ are able to restrain their desires and live according to biblical norms.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+To understand self-control, this week’s lesson will examine the life of Elisha. Elisha was a prophet to the nation of Israel in the ninth century BC. His life models self-control for us. Additionally, it offers a contrast to other characters in his story who failed at self-control.

1. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON HAS A GREATER LOVE FOR GOD THAN FOR SELF.
2. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON IS RESTRAINED BY GOD’S WORD.
3. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON PRIORITIZES GOD’S GLORY.
4. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON TRUSTS IN GOD’S PROVISION.
5. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON DOES NOT PLACE LIMITS ON GOD.

## GOING DEEPER

+Most of Elisha’s story can be found in 2 Kings 2–8. His calling is recorded in 1 Kings 19:19–21 and his death is found in 2 Kings 13. This lesson does not cover every episode of his ministry.

## 1. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON HAS A GREATER LOVE FOR GOD THAN FOR SELF.

### ■ 1 KINGS 19:19–21

**Q:** *What indicated the relative wealth of Elisha’s family?*

**Q:** *Why is Elisha's killing of the oxen described as a sacrifice?*

We first meet Elisha near the conclusion of 1 Kings. He was chosen to carry on the prophetic ministry of Elijah, Israel's premier prophet, who faithfully contended with King Ahab and the prophets of Baal. He had an incredible ministry, but his life was frequently endangered by those who opposed God.

Elisha was from a wealthy family. We know this because he was plowing his field with twelve yoke of oxen (1 Kings 19:19). Having this many oxen was a luxury few Israelites could have afforded. Upon meeting Elisha plowing in the field, Elijah cast his cloak upon him, an action that signaled the transfer of prophetic power. Elisha would have to leave his family and the life he had always known to become the prophet's apprentice. Elisha did not hesitate. He quickly returned home, killed the yoke of oxen he was working with to have a final meal with his family, and then followed Elijah.

Knowing Elisha's family background sheds light on how yielding to his prophetic call illustrates his self-control. Elisha's family wealth would have afforded him opportunities and benefits unavailable to those in prophetic ministry. Elisha, however, was not swayed by the promise of riches and an easier, safer life. The word used to describe how Elisha killed the yoke of oxen is the word for "sacrifice." The author is showing us how to understand Elisha's actions. He was sacrificing a symbol of his great wealth in order to receive God's prophetic call. Elisha demonstrated remarkable self-control in denying himself a life of relative ease in favor of a life of constant danger. He had a greater love for God than he did for himself.

We may notice some parallels between Elisha's story and Jesus's words in Matthew 8:21–22. When a disciple declared his intent to follow Jesus but only after burying his father, Jesus responded by saying "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." That is, following Jesus means leaving one's worldly concerns behind. While there are certain similarities between these passages, the details must lead us to conclude that something else was going on in Elisha's narrative. Elijah's response to Elisha's request to return is cryptic, but ultimately Elisha did return and was not excluded from prophetic ministry. The author wanted to show us how Elisha had forfeited his life of ease for a life of service.

**Q:** *Why does it make sense for Christians to surrender material wealth and worldly comforts to follow God?*

**Q:** *How would you explain to an unbeliever your willingness to give sacrificially of your time and money to the mission of God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Elisha’s calling helps us understand why self-control makes sense. Why would people deny themselves something that could make life easier or more comfortable? Because they are committed to something more important than their own ease and comfort. For Christians, that “something more important” is God and His glory in the earth. We are willing to make sacrifices to glorify God because we understand that His glory is more important than we are. Apart from this greater concern, self-denial would make no sense. It would either be a temporary preoccupation in order to gain something better for ourselves—which really is not self-denial at all— or a sign of a mental instability, such as masochism. We cannot separate self-control from a commitment to God.

## 2. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON IS RESTRAINED BY GOD’S WORD.

### ■ 2 KINGS 3

**Q:** *How did Elisha respond to the king of Israel?*

**Q:** *What did the armies of the three kings do when they realized their enemy was retreating?*

In the ancient Near East, it was common for one nation to become subject to another. Moab had been subject to Israel under King Ahab. When Ahab died, Moab rebelled against Ahab’s son, Jehoram, the newly crowned king over Israel. Jehoram was anxious to maintain his position among the surrounding nations, so he asked the king of Judah to join him in keeping Moab in line (it is possible that Moab was also subject to Judah). They were joined by the king of Edom. This coalition of kings planned to march into Moab and put down the rebellion. But the journey to Moab was harder than they anticipated. The lack of water began to diminish the armies’ capacity for battle, and the kings were uncertain of what to do. One of the servants suggested they go to Elisha for a word from God. These events took place fairly soon after Elijah had been taken to heaven and Elisha had assumed his prophetic role, so Elisha did not have the notoriety of his predecessor.

Elisha's reception of the kings, especially King Jehoram, was less than cordial and certainly not what they would have expected. When they approach him, Elisha initially declined to help them and rather caustically rebuffed Jehoram's request for help. Jehoram's parents, Ahab and Jezebel, were devoted followers of the god Baal and had led Israel away from God. Jehoram was not as evil as they were (2 Kings 3:2), but he still failed to worship God in the manner He demanded. Elisha suggested that Jehoram go to the false gods of his parents since he refused to worship the God of Israel. He then said he would have nothing to do with the coalition of kings if it were not for King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who had remained faithful to God (1 Kings 3:14). Elisha's reception of the three kings showed remarkable self-control. He was in the presence of royalty! They had the power to make him wealthy and advance his status in Israel if they were willing to aid them. But Elisha did not see an opportunity for personal advancement. He saw an opportunity to remind these kings of the one true God, who deserved their loyalty. Elisha was restrained by God's Word. He knew there was only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), that He prohibited idolatry (Deuteronomy 5:8–10), and that these kings had fallen short of what God's law demanded for kings (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). Elisha could not disregard God's Word in order to curry favor with the kings. He had to show self-control in order to maintain his faithfulness to God.

Elisha did prophesy for the kings. He revealed that God would provide water for their armies. Furthermore, God's provision for the armies would also lead to the demise of Moab. The Moabites mistook the water for blood. The water likely reflected the red stones common throughout the region. The Moabites assumed the coalition of kings had fought with one another. They raided the Israelite camp to plunder their supplies and kill any remaining soldiers. In doing so, they left themselves vulnerable to attack from the full strength of the combined armies. They fled as quickly as they had rushed upon the camp. Israel routed the Moabites and pursued them throughout their own territory. As Elisha had predicted, however, the armies went too far in their attack. They destroyed the land by throwing stones into the fields, stopping up streams, and chopping down fruit-bearing trees. Deuteronomy 20:19 prohibited the Israelites from cutting down fruit-bearing trees during war. The principle behind this prohibition could be broadened to address the rest of the actions taken by the invading armies. They were not to inflict punishment on the land they were attacking. Furthermore, they were to remember that the land must be able to sustain those who survived their attack. The coalition of armies was unrestrained by Scripture and out of control. When the king of Moab saw that he was losing the battle, he sacrificed his oldest son. Somehow—the text does not clearly tell us how—this act ignited a great wrath against Israel, and the Moabite army fled to its own land. Strangely, Elisha's prophetic ministry was validated, the armies of Israel were sustained and routed the foe, but the king of Israel did not win back the tribute from Moab.

**Q:** *How does the Bible guide and restrain your natural inclinations?*

**Q:** *Why are we tempted to compromise biblical truth when it does not allow us to have our way?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The Bible is God’s Word, given to us for our instruction (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Part of living in self-control is learning to live according to biblical principles and conviction. The temptation we face is to either neglect the Bible’s teaching when it contradicts what we think should be right or explain it away. Falling to this temptation is a sure sign that we are not living under self-control, because we are prioritizing our point of view over God’s Word. If we are truly living under the authority of Scripture, there may be some convictions we follow not because we fully understand them but because it is what the Bible clearly teaches. A life lived under biblical authority is a life of self-control.

### 3. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON PRIORITIZES GOD’S GLORY.

#### ■ 2 KINGS 5

**Q:** *Why didn’t Elisha accept a gift from Naaman?*

**Q:** *How did Gehazi’s actions distort God’s grace?*

During Elisha’s time, Syria, a country to the north of Israel, was one of the major superpowers of the ancient Near East. Naaman was a commander in the Syrian army. He had won many victories, including over Israel. But Naaman was a leper, and his leprosy endangered everything he had secured in life. One of Naaman’s captives was a young girl from Israel who knew of Elisha. She convinced him to visit Elisha in hopes of being cured from his leprosy. Naaman was cured from his leprosy by washing in the Jordan river seven times, as Elisha commanded. And his story is a wonderful illustration of the gospel. Naaman was rotting away, but he was made whole again by the grace of God.

In response to being healed, Naaman wanted to give Elisha a gift. But Elisha refused to even entertain the idea, revealing again his remarkable self-control. Naaman could have made Elisha wealthy. He could have given him status or prestige. But Elisha knew that receiving a gift from Naaman would distort God’s grace. Naaman was not healed because of anything he could provide Elisha. He was healed because of God’s grace alone. Elisha would not allow his personal comfort or prosperity to distract from God’s glory in the grace He showed Naaman.

But Elisha's servant, Gehazi, could not live with his master's decision. After Naaman departed, Gehazi ran after him. He concocted a story about the unexpected arrival of two prophets and requested silver and clothing for them. Gehazi could not let an opportunity for gain pass him by. But his actions made a mockery of God's grace revealed in the healing of Naaman. Elisha was fully aware of Gehazi's actions and condemned him with leprosy, the very disease from which Naaman was healed. Gehazi's lack of self-control did not secure him the riches he desired but rather the disease he feared.

❓ *In what area of your life could practicing self-control reveal God's glory to others?*

❓ *Why does the absence of self-control diminish the glory other people see in the God we worship?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Those who bear Christ's name are His representatives among those who do not know Him. When we fail to show self-control, we distort the glory of the God we claim to serve in the eyes of those who do not know Him. When unbelievers see us living only for ourselves and as if we are accountable to no one but ourselves, they can only conclude that our God must not be all that important or that He must not make much of a difference to us. God's glory does not rest on us. There is nothing we can do to detract from God. We may, however, distort His glory in the eyes of unbelievers if we fail to prioritize His glory in our lives and exercise self-control.

#### 4. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON TRUSTS IN GOD'S PROVISION.

##### ❏ 2 KINGS 6:8-23

❓ *How did Elisha show self-control in this passage?*

❓ *How did Elisha's servant and the king struggle to trust in God's provision?*

During Elisha's life, Syria was one of Israel's main rivals. Second Kings 6 records an episode in the struggle

between Israel and Syria. The Syrians had been making small incursions into Israel, trying to catch Israel's armies off-guard and gain easy victories. Perhaps they would even seize the unsuspecting king without much of a struggle. But the Syrians had not counted on Elisha the prophet. By divine revelation, the prophet tipped off the king of Israel concerning the Syrian's whereabouts, and he was able to plan appropriately. The Syrian king assumed there must be a spy among his leadership. When he was told there was a prophet in Israel who could discern the hishis every move, he sent an army to capture the prophet. His strategy is rather amusing. We can't be sure how he planned to catch a prophet who knew in advance everything he would do. Nevertheless, the army succeeded in learning of Elisha's whereabouts and surrounded the city. Elisha once again showed remarkable self-control, and the author of 2 Kings once again contrasts his self-control with the lack of self-control on the part of his servant. While Elisha was unconcerned with the Syrian army surrounding the city, his servant was panicking over the imminent attack. Elisha asked the Lord to open his servant's spiritual eyes. And in answer to his prayer, the servant was able to see a vast angelic army surrounding the Syrians. Elisha could show self-control because he trusted in God's provision. He knew that since God was on his side, there was no need to fear any army, no matter the size.

Elisha did not call on angelic armies to destroy the approaching Syrians. Instead, he asked God to strike them with blindness. Elisha then led the Syrians into Samaria where they were surrounded by the armies of Israel. The king of Israel wanted to kill them, which would have provided a small victory over the Syrians, but Elisha had a greater victory in mind. Since they were his prisoners of war, Elisha fed them and sent them back to Syria unharmed. Elisha had been saved by God's provision, and he extended that provision by showing grace to the Syrians. In response, the Syrians from their region stopped raiding Israel. Again, Elisha showed remarkable self-control. The enemy was in his hands. He had the opportunity to win a decisive victory, which was exactly what the king of Israel wanted to do. Instead, Elisha restrained himself and the king and allowed God's grace to win a greater victory.

**Q:** *What is the link between trusting in God's provision and practicing self-control?*

**Q:** *Do you feel as though you have to say yes to every opportunity that comes along? How can you find freedom from the tyranny of opportunity?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – When you trust in God's provision, you have the freedom to practice self-control. Elisha could show grace to his enemies because he trusted in God's provision in the midst of every dangerous circumstance. He did not have to take every opportunity to advance his cause or care for himself. Instead, he could restrain these natural impulses and demonstrate the glory of God's grace instead. If you will trust in God's

provision, you will have the confidence you need to practice self-control. Apart from trusting in God's provision, you will be taken captive by every opportunity that comes along.

## 5. A SELF-CONTROLLED PERSON DOES NOT PLACE LIMITS ON GOD.

### ■ 2 KINGS 6:24–7:20; 13:14–25

Q: *How did the captain question God's power?*

Q: *How did King Joash doubt God's power?*

So far, this lesson has focused on identifying godly qualities of self-control as exemplified in the life of Elisha. Elisha has shown that self-control revolves around prioritizing God's glory and saying no to natural impulses. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that self-control demands that we say no when our impulse is to expect great things from God. This is evident from Elisha's rebuke of a captain and a king who placed limits on what they expected from God.

The captain's story is found in 2 Kings 6:24–7:20. This story does not center on him but on God's miraculous deliverance of Israel. The foe once again was Syria. The entire Syrian army had laid siege to the capital city of Samaria. The inhabitants were trapped in the walled city and food supplies had run out. The fall of the city appeared imminent. The author does not explain why, but the king of Israel placed the blame for the siege on Elisha and was determined to execute him. Perhaps he felt Elisha had neglected his prophetic duty by failing to warn the people in time. Whatever the case, the king sent his captain to kill Elisha. When the captain arrived at Elisha's house, Elisha predicted that in one day's time, the siege would be over, and bread would be so plentiful in the city that it would basically be worthless. The captain questioned God's ability to provide in this manner. Elisha responded by saying that he would see it happen but die before tasting God's deliverance. God upheld Elisha's prophecy. He confused the Syrians and caused them to flee from their fully stocked camp. When the Israelites heard, they rushed out of the city to plunder the vacant Syrian camp. The captain was caught in the gate and trampled by the mass running to receive the food God had provided. At first, it may seem as though the captain's measured response to Elisha's prediction came from being in control of his emotions. His death, however, reveals the dangers of placing limits on what God can do. This was not a man practicing self-control but one too afraid to trust God.

King Joash's story is found in 2 Kings 13:14–25. When Joash heard that Elisha dying, he went to receive a final word from the great prophet. Elisha offered him a series of signs pertaining to his military successes. For one sign, Elisha told the king to strike the ground with a bundle of arrows. Joash struck the ground three times, which he likely assumed was a reasonable response. But Elisha chastised him for not striking the ground five or six times, because each strike represented the victories the king would win over Syria. At first, we may think the king showed self-control in his measured response, but his hesitancy had nothing to do with self-control but with limiting his expectations of what God could do.

**Q:** *How do you see doubt masquerading as self-control in your church?*

**Q:** *Why would someone in need place limits on what God could do?*

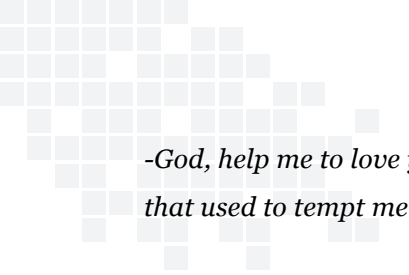
**APPLICATION POINT** – Peter admonished Christians to act with self-control. We should never make the mistake, however, of confusing self-control with placing limits on what God can do on our behalf. There is no need to restrain ourselves when we seek God's goodness. This does not mean God is obligated to fulfill our every expectation. It does mean self-control pertains to restraining our character, not God's power.

## NEXT STEPS

Identify an area of your life in which you need to practice more self-control. What do you always say yes to when the opportunity arrives? How is this lack of self-control disrupting your walk of faith? What steps do you need to take to say no when the next opportunity arrives? Saying no to yourself is extremely hard at first. You are battling years of unrestraint. But every time you show self-control, the easier it becomes. In God's grace your life can be defined by self-control and an unrestrained love for His glory.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*



*-God, help me to love you more than anything else in this world. Make it easy for me to say no to the things that used to tempt me. Give me more self-control*

*-Jesus, thank you for being the ultimate example of self-control.*

*-Father, show me where I need to practice more self-control.*

*-God, help me to prioritize your glory over my personal comfort.*

# ■ ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

June 26, 2022 | Steadfastness

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week’s lesson will examine steadfastness in the life of Nehemiah.

### GETTING READY

How would you describe a steadfast person?

Read Nehemiah 1–6, 13.

Ask God to use Nehemiah to give you insights into steadfastness.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Nehemiah endured many challenges as he continued on the mission God gave him.

### ■ ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

If you are serious about serving God, you will encounter challenges that you must persevere through.

### ■ ■ MEDITATE

*“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the main idea of the lesson.

Q: *Who is the most steadfast person you know? Why?*

Q: *Why does the Christian faith demand steadfastness?*

The word “steadfast” in 2 Peter 1:6 translates the Greek word *hypomonē*. *Hypomonē* means the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty. It could also be translated as patience, endurance, fortitude, or perseverance. It is remarkable that one Greek word could contain all these nuances. Think about “patience” and “endurance.” These words could be defined with opposite terms. “Patience” refers to non-action over a period of time when you would rather be acting. “Endurance” refers to continued action over a period of time when you would rather not be acting. “Fortitude” has the nuance of standing firm against opposition. “Perseverance” has the nuance of continuing on against opposition. Thus, *hypomonē* is a very elastic term when translated into English. One easily overlooked component of it is “difficulty.” For there to be steadfastness, there must be difficulty. Peter knew his audience would experience difficult times, and he desired to see steadfastness of character when those difficulties arrived.

Q: *Why would someone choose the more difficult of two options?*

Q: *What sacrifices are you making that will bring difficulties into your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Showing steadfastness of character may require you to recalibrate how you understand difficulties that come into your life. Some difficulties in life are unavoidable. Think of poor eyesight or hearing loss. You would not choose these conditions, but most people will experience them even if only as a part of growing older. Or consider the death of a family member. This brings unexpected and unwanted difficulties. Peter calls us to remain steadfast in the midst of these unwanted challenges.

Christians must also consider the idea of sacrifice when thinking of steadfast character. Making a sacrifice invites hardship or difficulty into your life in order to serve a greater purpose. When a person in the Old Testament made

a literal sacrifice, they were deprived of the slain animal. They suffered loss and willingly accepted the difficulties that loss entailed. Christians do not sacrifice animals, but we still make sacrifices because of our beliefs. We invite difficulties into our lives for the sake of a greater purpose. Peter called us to remain steadfast as we endure the difficulties that come with sacrifice.

To unbelievers this sounds crazy! Why would anyone invite difficulties into their lives? They do not understand sacrifice because they do not share our understanding of God, His glory, Christ, or sin. My fear is that far too many Christians have adopted the mindset of unbelievers, seeing difficulty as something to be avoided at all costs rather than willingly accepted for the glory of God. This outlook diminishes our ability to show steadfastness in character because our goal becomes avoiding difficulty rather than remaining steadfast through it for the sake of the gospel. At the outset of this lesson, it is crucial for us to consider the relationship between steadfastness and sacrifice. Give yourself the opportunity to show steadfast character! Invite difficulties into your life through sacrifices made for the sake of the gospel and remain steadfast.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Nehemiah lived during the fifth century, B.C. He was a servant of Artaxerxes, the Persian king, until being made the governor tasked with overseeing the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Jewish culture. The book of Nehemiah is a conglomeration of his memoirs and some additional material. It reveals the many struggles he faced as well as the steadfastness of his character. Nehemiah is clearly an example of steadfastness for us to emulate.

1. STEADFASTNESS STEMS FROM CONFIDENCE IN GOD.
2. STEADFASTNESS IS READY TO ACT.
3. STEADFASTNESS STANDS UP TO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL OPPOSITION.
4. STEADFASTNESS IS NOT DISTRACTED.
5. STEADFASTNESS ENDURES.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will overview the book of Nehemiah to see his steadfastness in action. It will also draw application points to encourage steadfastness in your character.*

## 1. STEADFASTNESS STEMS FROM CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

### ■ NEHEMIAH 1

**Q:** *What report did Nehemiah receive from Jerusalem?*

**Q:** *How did Nehemiah respond to the report from Jerusalem?*

The book of Nehemiah opens with Nehemiah receiving a report concerning the returned exiles in his homeland (Nehemiah 1:1–3). The report was devastating to Nehemiah. The hope of the returning exiles had disappeared. The rebuilding projects had stalled, and the people were languishing in their failure. In response to this report, Nehemiah immediately prayed. His prayer reveals why he was able to remain steadfast during the events reported later in the book. It reveals a heart completely committed to God’s Word and completely confident in God’s promises. Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people and his personal sins against God (Nehemiah 1:6) and acknowledged that God was just in sending the nation into exile. But then Nehemiah reminded God of His promise to restore His people to the land if they repented. God had brought the people back into the land, but the restoration was far from complete. Nehemiah recognized that God still had more to accomplish among His people, and He called on God to act (Nehemiah 1:8–11). Every action Nehemiah took can be traced back to the promises of God mentioned in Nehemiah’s prayer. Nehemiah could remain steadfast because he was confident that God would fulfill His promises.

**Q:** *Are you rooted enough in God’s Word to trust in His promises?*

**Q:** *How does the beginning of Nehemiah limit our expectations concerning steadfastness?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Don’t miss the importance of the beginning of the book of Nehemiah. Everything you encounter in the rest of the book stems from Nehemiah’s prayer in this opening chapter. If he were driven only by personal convictions and ambition, his steadfastness could not be attributed to God, no matter how successful he was. If you desire to glorify God through your steadfastness of character, you must begin with God’s Word and the promises He has made in it. This is what distinguishes Nehemiah from the self-help gurus and those proclaiming the false gospel of prosperity. Biblical steadfastness does not “name it and claim it.” Biblical steadfastness finds God’s promises in His Word and believes in His power to bring them to fruition.

## 2. STEADFASTNESS IS READY TO ACT.

### NEHEMIAH 2

**Q:** *What drove Nehemiah to speak to King Artaxerxes on behalf of Jerusalem?*

**Q:** *Why did Nehemiah not make his intentions public when he arrived in Jerusalem?*

Although he was heartbroken over the situation in Jerusalem, Nehemiah could not rush to the king and immediately intercede on behalf of the city. The Persian kings were not known for their self-control, and their ego did not tolerate any matter to be of greater importance than themselves. If Nehemiah had rushed to him, the king would likely have rushed Nehemiah to the executioner (see Esther 4:11). Nehemiah received the report in the month of Chislev (Nehemiah 1:1), which is mid-November to mid-December. He did not make his request until Artaxerxes questioned him in the month of Nisan (Nehemiah 2:1), during the month of April. So for more than four months, Nehemiah patiently waited to make his concerns known to the king. When Artaxerxes asked, Nehemiah was ready. He skillfully presented the conditions in Jerusalem as a personal concern (Nehemiah 2:3) and appealed to the king's altruism to obtain the verdict he desired. Nehemiah's interaction with the king reveals his steadfast character. He did not rush to make his demands known or give up hope that anything could be done for his city. He patiently waited and was ready to act when the opportunity presented itself.

**Q:** *How can steadfastness strengthen your faith?*

**Q:** *Why is patience difficult?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Nehemiah showed a remarkable balance between patience and readiness to act. Each of these elements describes one side of what it means to be steadfast. If you are ready to act but not patient, you risk having your efforts blow up in your face. If you are patient but not ready to act, you risk having the opportunity pass you by. Being steadfast means being ready but not rushing ahead before it is time.

### 3. STEADFASTNESS STANDS UP TO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL OPPOSITION.

■ NEHEMIAH 2:9–10; 4:1–23; 5:1–19

Q: *Why did Sanballat and Tobiah oppose Nehemiah?*

Q: *In what ways did Sanballat and Tobiah oppose Nehemiah?*

We know from extra-biblical sources that Sanballat was a governor of Samaria, and Tobiah was from a powerful family in nearby Ammon. Both leaders were content with the status quo that existed before Nehemiah arrived to rebuild Jerusalem. They likely saw Nehemiah as a competitor for local rule. Their opposition began with ridiculing Nehemiah's efforts. Sanballat jeered at the Jews and openly questioned whether they could complete the task they had started (Nehemiah 4:1–2). Tobiah mocked the rebuilt wall. A city's walls were supposed to be its primary defense in case of an attack. Breaching a city's wall should require enormous effort by an opposing army and cost many lives. But Tobiah suggested a mere fox could push over the wall being reconstructed around Jerusalem.

When Sanballat and Tobiah failed to discourage Nehemiah and his workers, they threatened him with military violence (Nehemiah 4:7–8, 11). This time, their efforts succeeded in discouraging Nehemiah's men (Nehemiah 4:10), but Nehemiah rallied them (Nehemiah 4:15–23). Each day, they dressed for battle but went to work building the wall. They continued the construction even as they stood ready to drop what they were doing to defend the city. The opposition may have made things harder or slowed them down, but it did not defeat their purpose. Nehemiah and his workers remained steadfast even under threat of battle.

Q: *Should Christians ever be surprised when their faith raises opposition? Why or why not?*

Q: *Why should you be encouraged when you meet external opposition confronting your faith?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus warned His followers that the world would hate

them (John 15:18–25). He reasoned that since the world hated Him, it would also hate His followers. In fact, the disciples should be alarmed if the world didn't hate them. If they got along great with the world, it was a sure sign they were of the world (John 15:19). Therefore, we should not be surprised when we face opposition to our faith. Neither should we despair. First John 4:4 says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Those who oppose us oppose God, and they are no match for Him. We do not have to earn the victory because God already has it in hand. Our calling is to remain steadfast even while enduring tremendous opposition, just like Nehemiah and his men did.

**Q:** *What was the cause of poverty among the returned exiles?*

**Q:** *How did Nehemiah respond to the needs of the poor?*

Nehemiah's opposition was internal as well as external. The first group of returning exiles had arrived sixty to eighty years before Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judea. In this time, the rich within the community began exploiting the poor. The poor had to borrow the money to pay their taxes. The rich let them borrow the money but made them pay it back with interest. If a debtor could not repay his debt, the rich would seize his children as slave labor. While the walls were being reconstructed, the poor made their struggles known to Nehemiah. Nehemiah was angry when he heard the report (Nehemiah 5:6). Not only were the wealthy not acting in love toward the poor, but their sin also endangered the rebuilding of the wall. How could the poor be expected to work on a wall when they could not keep food on their tables (5:2)? Nehemiah again showed steadfastness under pressure. He did not lead an uprising against the elite. Instead, he confronted them by exposing their sin (Nehemiah 5:9) and called them to cease their heartless practices (Nehemiah 5:10–11). His confrontational yet gentle approach won the approval of the Jewish elites. They agreed to stop exploiting the poor for their own gain (Nehemiah 5:12–13). Although Nehemiah was not part of the problem, he led by example, sacrificing his own food allowance as governor (Nehemiah 5:14–19).

**Q:** *Why is internal opposition (opposition from brothers and sisters in Christ) often more challenging than external opposition?*

**Q:** *What are some temptations we must avoid when confronting internal opposition?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – When we face opposition, our natural reaction is to overcome it by any means necessary. But this creates problems when the opposition comes from fellow believers. We cannot be concerned merely with vindicating ourselves. We must seek restoration in the body of Christ. If we take a no-prisoners approach, we may achieve vindication, but we get it at the cost of the restoration the offender needs. To meet internal opposition with steadfastness, you must defend yourself and the unity of the body of Christ.

A few weeks ago, I noticed a troubling issue within the children’s ministry in our church. I decided to bring it up during a deacons meeting, but I did not discuss the matter with our children’s minister ahead of time. After the meeting, I recognized I had erred in not at least informing our children’s minister. He was taken off guard during the meeting and felt a little embarrassed. When I later apologized to him, he admitted being resentful of my actions but resolved that I just had the best interest of his ministry at heart. I believe our children’s minister showed steadfast character in this matter. He faced internal opposition from a brother in Christ. Rather than allowing it to create dissention between us, he acted with humility and sought reconciliation at a later time. That is the way to handle internal opposition as a Christian.

## 4. STEADFASTNESS IS NOT DISTRACTED.

### ■ NEHEMIAH 6:1-14

**Q:** *Why did Sanballat request a meeting with Nehemiah?*

**Q:** *How did Sanballat attempt to deter him after Nehemiah refused his meeting?*

As the wall neared completion, Sanballat appeared again. He still intended to oppose Nehemiah, but rather than relying on an army, this time he relied on cunning. He requested a meeting with Nehemiah as a pretense for a chance to do him harm (Nehemiah 6:2–3), but Nehemiah saw through the scheme. His response reveals his steadfastness (Nehemiah 6:3). He was completely devoted to the task God had called him to. Even had the meeting been legitimate, Nehemiah would not deviate from building the walls.

When he discovered he could not deceive Nehemiah, Sanballat threatened to blackmail him by spreading rumors that the Jews intended to revolt and anoint Nehemiah as king once their walls were completed. Rumors of this nature could bring swift retribution from their Persian overlords, regardless of their validity. Nehemiah again saw through Sanballat’s threats and remained steadfast. He refused to allow threats to distract the people from God’s purpose.

Sanballat and Tobiah were as resilient as Nehemiah was steadfast. Their final plot was to hire Judah's own prophets to deceive him (Nehemiah 6:10–14). The prophets warned Nehemiah that a threat had been made on his life and begged him to take sanctuary in the temple. But he saw through their treachery and refused their warning. He remained steadfast, no matter what situation arose.

**Q:** *How did Nehemiah avoid the distractions Sanballat created?*

**Q:** *How can you avoid distraction in pursuing God's purposes for your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – A failure to remain steadfast does not always entail abandoning God's purposes and denying His calling on our life. Sometimes we fail to remain steadfast because we get distracted from what God has called us to do. We get wrapped up in a sporting event or TV show and neglect our obligation to read the Bible with our children. We get consumed with our phones at night and neglect to pray with our spouse before bed. We have not abandoned our family responsibilities, but we have allowed ourselves to be distracted from them. We have failed to prioritize God's purposes, and in doing so we have not remained steadfast. The key to fighting distractions is learning to recognize them, prioritizing what God wants, and leaving distractions behind, as Nehemiah did.

## 5. STEADFASTNESS ENDURES.

### ■ NEHEMIAH 13

**Q:** *Why didn't Nehemiah stop Eliashib from preparing a space for Tobiah in the temple?*

**Q:** *Why didn't Nehemiah ensure that the Levites received the support they needed?*

Nehemiah completed the walls and successfully governed Judea for several years, but then he was called back to Persia to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 13:6). When he was able to secure his leave from the king, he returned to find Judea in a complete mess. One of the priests, Eliashib, had granted Tobiah—the same Tobiah who had opposed him during the rebuilding of the wall—a space in the temple to store his personal furniture (Nehemiah 13:4–9). The temple supplies had been removed to make room for it. Nehemiah also discovered that the priests had

been neglected and therefore forced to abandon their duties at the temple to return to their own fields (Nehemiah 13:10–14). Nehemiah also observed the people violating the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15–22). What was supposed to be a day of rest had become like any other day of the week. Finally, Nehemiah saw that the people were marrying non-believing foreigners (Nehemiah 13:23–27). Just as foreign women had led King Solomon astray so many years before so now the people were being led away from God by foreign marriages. One wonders if Nehemiah felt like quitting and returning to Persia. He had sacrificed so much, and the people had turned their backs on him and their God. But he did not quit. Nehemiah remained steadfast and addressed each issue in turn.

Q: *Why is it easy to become a victim of your own success?*

Q: *Why is it impossible for Christians to trust in their previous good deeds as evidence of their present faith?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –People often become victims of their own success. People in the business world fight their way into a premier position in the company. When they get to the top, they finally feel at ease and rest on their previous accomplishments, but in doing so, they fail at the very job they had been striving for all that time. Athletes train year after year to win the championship and sign a lucrative contract. Soon afterwards, they become a shell of the superstar they once were. If we are to remain steadfast in our faith, we cannot rest in what we have accomplished in the past. Nehemiah never did this. When he returned to Jerusalem and discovered the mess waiting for him, he resolved to address each situation. He remained steadfast. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to God, no matter how long we have been following Him or how far we have come from our lives before Christ. Our current faithfulness says more than our past deeds ever will.

## NEXT STEPS

Make a list of the main things God has called you to. Describe what it would look like to remain steadfast in each of these areas. If you have failed to remain steadfast in anything God has called you to, commit to starting again in God's grace and continuing in steadfast resolve.

## PRAY

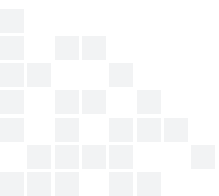
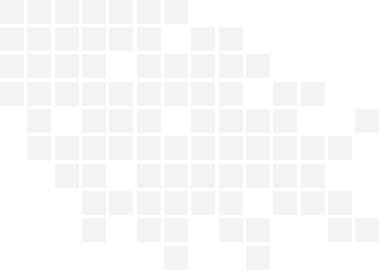
*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, my steadfastness depends on you and your promises. Help me to trust in you.*

*-Lord Jesus, you remained steadfast even in the most trying circumstances. And you did it so that I might have everlasting life. Help me to look to you as the ultimate model of steadfastness.*

*-Father, make me aware of what distracts me from what you have called me to. Help me to put distractions aside so I may pursue your purposes with steadfastness.*

*-God, help me to deal with opposition, whether external or internal, and remain steadfast to the calling you have placed on my life.*



# ■ ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

July 10, 2022 | Godliness

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week, we will look at godliness in the life of Josiah, perhaps Judah’s most godly king.

### GETTING READY

Do you feel able to lead a godly life? Why or why not?

Read 2 Kings 22–23.

Ask God to help you understand what it means to be “godly.”

## THIS WEEK

### ■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Josiah’s godly character stemmed from his commitment to God’s Word and the priority he placed on worship.

### ■ ■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Godliness does not begin with you.

### ■ ■ MEDITATE

*“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the quality of godliness by discussing ways people misunderstand it.

**Q:** *What makes godliness different from the qualities covered thus far in this series?*

**Q:** *What is the difference between a godly person and a religious person?*

Of all the qualities mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5–7, godliness probably seems the most demanding because the center of focus is God Himself. How could we, even on our best days, be compared in any sense with God? Peter, however, began his second epistle by saying “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Godliness is also probably the most misunderstood quality in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Some people see godliness as a means by which God can be manipulated toward one’s own ends. This misunderstanding is present even in the Bible. When Peter and John healed a lame beggar, Peter had to clarify that their piety or godliness was not the reason the man was healed (Acts 3:12). The witnesses assumed Peter and John were so godly that they could entice God to heal the lame on their behalf.

People also frequently think godliness is a natural disposition. You either act with godliness or you do not. But Paul viewed godliness as something we can train ourselves to be (1 Timothy 4:7). Others mistake any religious act for godliness. In fact, the word Peter used here for “godliness,” *eusebeia*, was the word the wider culture used to refer to “religion.” But true godliness is more than mere religiosity. Godliness is the respect a person accords to God and the resulting adoption of God’s character. This lesson will examine the life of King Josiah, who was perhaps the most godly king in the Old Testament. His story shows how loving God’s Word and loving to worship Him are central to godliness.

**Q:** *How does godliness relate to our salvation in Jesus Christ?*

**Q:** *Why is it crucial for us to understand the proper role of godliness in the Christian faith?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Although the world may misunderstand godliness, believers must be sure we do not. We must remember that godliness grows out of our relationship with God. It is not a means of obtaining a relationship with Him. Our relationship with God comes when we confess our sin and trust in Jesus for salvation. This is the very core of the gospel. We can never view godliness as a replacement for faith in Christ. No amount of godliness will ever save us. Nevertheless, true believers will to some extent exhibit the character of the God they serve. Paul spoke of an accord between faith in Christ and godliness (Titus 1:1). Thus godliness, is a crucial Christian quality.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Josiah was the most godly king in the Old Testament, even more so than David, who was described as a man after God's own heart (2 Kings 23:25). This lesson will examine his life as an example of godliness for us to follow. Two things stand out in Josiah's life that led to his godly character. He prioritized worship, and he submitted to God's Word.

### 1. GODLINESS PRIORITIZES WORSHIP.

### 2. GODLINESS SUBMITS TO GOD'S WORD.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will explore Josiah's attitudes toward worship and God's Word to provide an example of godliness for us. Josiah's story is found in 2 Kings 22–23.*

### 1. GODLINESS PRIORITIZES WORSHIP.

#### ■ 2 KINGS 22:3–7

**Q:** *What was the significance of the temple for the nation of Judah?*

**Q:** *Why would the people have allowed the temple to fall into disrepair?*

First and 2 Kings divide Israel and Judah's kings between those who were faithful to God and those who were unfaithful. The phrases repeated throughout these books are "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" and

“he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Josiah was a faithful king who did right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 22:2). Amon and Manasseh, the previous two kings of Judah, were two of the wickedest kings in the nation’s history. Manasseh, Josiah’s grandfather, was particularly evil. Because of his wickedness, God determined to send the nation into exile (2 Kings 21:10–16; 23:26–27).

Josiah’s reign, however, offered the nation a momentary reprieve from God’s judgement. Second Kings begins Josiah’s story by recording the repairs he authorized to the temple (2 Kings 22:3–7). The temple was the center of Israel’s worship. Every ceremony and sacrifice were oriented around the temple. As the place where God’s presence resided among His people (1 Kings 8:1–11), it stood at the center of every festival and sacred occasion. The fact that Josiah’s forefathers allowed the temple to fall into disrepair illustrates their lack of concern for Israel’s God. But Josiah understood that the state of the temple reflected the state of the people’s hearts toward God. He prioritized worship by restoring the temple to its former glory.

❓: *Why do Christians not worship at a temple?*

❓: *How can we emulate Josiah’s godliness in this manner without a temple to restore?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Josiah’s godliness led him to restore the temple and make it the center of Judah’s religious activity. The temple’s restoration was all about returning Judah’s worship to the one true God. Christians do not have a temple at the center of our worship. Whereas in the Old Testament, God indwelt a temple made of stones, in the New Testament, God indwells every believer. In 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul said to Timothy, “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” What is true of Timothy is true of every believer in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:11). Paul even referred to individual Christians as temples. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Although we do not worship at a temple like Josiah did, we can still emulate the godliness he showed in restoring the temple in at least two ways. First, since we are each in one sense a temple in which God dwells, we can emulate Josiah by keeping ourselves from sin that would defile our bodies and by growing in holiness. This was Paul’s concern in 1 Corinthians 6:18. The Corinthians had emphasized their spiritual existence to such an extent that they believed it did not matter if their bodies participated in immorality. Paul wrote to tell them it did matter because God dwelled within their bodies. For them to grow in godliness, they had to keep themselves from sin. The same is true for us. For the Spirit dwelling within us to help us grow in godliness (Galatians 5:22), we must

focus on keeping ourselves from sin.

Second, we can emulate Josiah's godliness by emphasizing corporate worship in our local church body. In his first letter, Peter referred to believers as "living stones ... being built up as a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Peter was likely creating a metaphor between the church and the temple. When the church gathers for worship, we function like the temple in the Old Testament. When we gather, we form a "temple" within which the worship of God is carried out. We emulate the godliness of Josiah when we commit to a local church body and gather with them in worship.

## ■ ■ 2 KINGS 23:4-20

Q: *Who were Baal and Asherah [2 Kings 23:4]?*

Q: *The ESV places 2 Kings 23:1-20 under the heading "Josiah's Reforms." How did Josiah's reforms prioritize worship?*

Although the people were not worshipping the true God, they were still worshipping. The previous Judean kings had promoted the worship of foreign gods within Judah. Second Kings 23:4 refers to the gods Baal and Asherah. These were the gods of the nations surrounding Judah. Idols of these gods and articles used to worship them were even placed in the temple. These foreign gods came with their own priesthood to rival the priesthood of God. During his reign, Josiah resolved to remove from Judah every trace of the worship of foreign gods. He had the idols and vessels of Baal and Asherah removed from the temple and burned. He ridded every city in Judah of the priesthoods dedicated to the foreign gods. He tore down every building associated with the worship of foreign gods and leveled every high place and altar used to worship them.

Josiah did not even stop at the borders of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel, sometimes referred to as "Samaria," originally formed with Judah the united kingdom of Israel. Ten tribes from the united kingdom broke off from Judah after the reign of Solomon. The ten northern tribes were never faithful to God, and they were defeated in the eighth century B.C. The inhabitants were exiled from the land, and exiles from other nations were brought in. During Josiah's time, this area remained in shambles, but Josiah knew that God should be worshipped there as well. Just as he removed every sign of foreign worship from Judah, he also did so in Samaria (2 Kings 23:15-20). His actions demonstrated his zeal for God's worship and his own godliness. He could not tolerate idolatry within the land that was supposed to be reserved for worshipping the one true God.

**Q:** *How is idolatry present in your life?*

**Q:** *Why does idolatry impede our growth in godliness?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – To grow in godliness, you need to be passionate about getting rid of false worship in your own life and in the community around you. If you are a committed follower of Christ, you may think you have nothing to worry about on this issue. You don't worship other gods or bow down to idols. But worship covers a wider context than we often consider. Worship is ultimately an expression of our allegiance. You may not sing to foreign gods or bow down to idols, but if anything overtakes your allegiance to God, you are a false worshipper. I grew up in a rural community where people enjoyed hunting and fishing. To my knowledge, no one ever sang a worship song to a deer or bowed down to a fish, but I saw plenty of false worship of these things growing up. When I went to college and entered the workplace, I saw people worshipping vacations, homes, automobiles, and 401ks. I never heard anyone singing to their Audi or bowing down to their 401k statement, but I saw plenty of false worship. None of these things is sinful in itself, but it is amazing how easily they can begin to infringe on our allegiance to God. If you want to grow in godliness, you need to continually scan your life for things taking the place of God and be ready to rid yourself of the false worship you have given to them.

## ■ 2 KINGS 23:21–27

**Q:** *What was the Passover celebration [Exodus 12]?*

**Q:** *Why had Israel and Judah failed to celebrate Passover?*

The Passover was a memorial supper celebrating Israel's exodus from Egypt. It was an occasion for the entire nation to reflect on the goodness and power of their God. Passover was supposed to be celebrated on a yearly basis (Exodus 12:1–14, 17–18; 13:10), but it seems ancient Israel rarely followed this ordinance or, at least, it was not the nation-wide celebration that was intended. Hezekiah, Josiah's great-grandfather, celebrated the Passover (2 Chronicles 30), but apparently only those who journeyed to Jerusalem kept the celebration. Although Hezekiah desired for the northern tribes to participate (2 Chronicles 30:1), it is uncertain how many of them did. Josiah,

however, commanded the entire nation to celebrate the Passover. Josiah's celebration of Passover, however, exceeded anything that had been seen in Israel or Judah since the days of the judges, hundreds of years earlier. Josiah prioritized worshipping God, both for himself and for those under his reign.

❓: *How are the ordinances of the church an act of worship?*

❓: *How can you prioritize worshipping God through the church's ordinances?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Ancient Israel had multiple feasts and celebrations to worship God throughout the year. Under the new covenant, the church does not observe these festivals, but we do observe two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are symbols of key elements of the Christian faith, and observing them is an important part of our worship. Witnessing a baptism and participating in the Lord's Supper are acts of worship. They express our allegiance to God. It is sad that so many Christians neglect these ordinances today. A few years ago, the church I was attending did not have a place to baptize people, so after the regular service, we went to another church's facility to use theirs. Less than a quarter of my church made the five-minute journey to witness this baptism. It is discouraging to think some believers see baptism and the Lord's Supper as something that adds time to a church service than as an act of worship. This viewpoint will hardly help you grow in godliness.

## 2. GODLINESS SUBMITS TO GOD'S WORD.

### ❏ 2 KINGS 22:8-13

❓: *Why did the discovery of the Book of the Law lead to Josiah's reforms?*

❓: *What was Josiah's reaction to hearing from the Book of the Law?*

During Josiah's project to repair the temple, the high priest discovered the Book of the Law. The Book of the Law refers to either all or part of what we know as the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Old Testament. We cannot be certain if these books had completely faded from memory or if the priest located a particularly significant copy of these books. Whatever the case, the book was read in Josiah's presence, and it impacted him significantly. He

tore his cloths (2 Kings 22:11), which is symbolic of deep remorse and brokenness over sin. Josiah recognized that neither he nor the people were obeying God's Word, and he desired to change that. The desire to submit to God's Word reveals Josiah's godly character.

Q: *Why does God's Word convict us of sin?*

Q: *What are some other godly responses to God's Word?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – It is nearly impossible to grow in godliness apart from God's Word. Without regular time in His Word, you will struggle to understand His will, identify areas of sin in your life, and find the encouragement you need to pursue godliness. Find ways to increase your exposure to God's Word. Make sure you are keeping up with your regular devotional times. Consider turning off the radio on your commute to work and listening to an audio version of the Bible instead. Whatever it takes, allow yourself to submit to God's Word by taking in more of it.

## ■ 2 KINGS 22:13–20

Q: *Why did Josiah's servants go to a prophetess after hearing from the Word of God?*

Q: *How did the prophetess encourage Josiah?*

Josiah was convicted by God's Word, but he also had questions. He wanted to know if the punishments mentioned in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 were a certainty or whether they could be avoided. So, he sent his servants to a prophetess named Huldah. Huldah gave them a mixed message. God had determined to judge Judah by sending it into exile. The sins of the previous kings and the previous generations had made it unavoidable (2 Kings 22:15–17). But Josiah would not have to witness the coming destruction. His godly response to the Word of God ensured that it would not happen until after his death.

Q: *How can reading the Bible with others encourage you to grow in godliness?*

**Q:** *What are the dangers of only reading God's Word on your own?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Josiah sought help in understanding the Word of God and its implications for his lifetime. The men and women God called to prophesy in the Old Testament served as an extension of God's Word. They revealed His will to the people. Today, we do not look to prophets to help us understand God's Word or to receive an extra word from Him. We believe His revelation is completed in the New Testament, which is the testimony of Jesus's associates and one or two others (Hebrews 1:1–3). We should, however, seek help in understanding God's Word by reading and discussing it in community. This helps keep us from reading it in error because other believers can correct us through discussion and prayer. Reading the Bible in community can also help us draw more inspiration from God's Word because we are able to gain from the insights of others. Reading God's Word in community will help you grow in godliness.

## ■ 2 KINGS 23:1–3

**Q:** *Why did the king read God's Word to the people?*

**Q:** *If judgment was certain, why did Josiah carry out his religious reforms?*

Josiah must have been disappointed after hearing Huldah's words from his servants. Nevertheless, he understood that impending doom could not be an excuse for him or anyone else to disregard God's Word. He gathered all the leaders of Judah and read God's Word to them. He also covenanted in their presence to keep the commandments in it. Even though God's judgment was coming, Josiah's love for God drove him to remain as faithful as possible to God's Word and to lead the people in doing so as well.

**Q:** *How can you use God's Word to encourage others in godliness?*

**Q:** *How can you ensure your devotion to God's Word has implications beyond yourself?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Just as Josiah wanted to lead others to obey God’s Word, Christians should want to use God’s Word to help others grow in godliness. You do not have to be a pastor or a small group leader/teacher to do this. Be willing to share with others how God is speaking to you through His Word. Your words may encourage others to grow in godliness.

## NEXT STEPS

*Josiah was Judah’s most godly king. He prioritized worship and submitted to God’s Word. In which of these areas do you have the most room to grow in godliness? After reflecting on the principles covered in this lesson, write down some steps you can take to grow in godliness.*

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

*-Father, help me to become more like you. Convict me of sin. Spur me on to Christ-likeness.*

*-Jesus, I cannot grow in godliness apart from your grace shown to me in your death and resurrection. Help me to focus on your grace so that I may grow in godliness.*

*-Father, make me humble enough to learn about you from others. Help me use what I learn to grow in godliness.*

*-God, forgive me for not prioritizing worship. Renew my heart so that I always long to show my allegiance to you.*

# ■ ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

July 17, 2022 | *Brotherly Affection*

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week, we will look at brotherly affection in Epaphroditus, a Philippian who brought a gift from the Philippian church to Paul while he was in prison. While his actions may not seem noteworthy, Paul used Epaphroditus as an example of valuing the needs of others above your own, which is one of the key ways we show brotherly affection.

### GETTING READY

Do you have a good relationship with your siblings? If so, how can this relationship help you understand the love you must have for other believers? If not, or if you do not have siblings, how could this make it more difficult for you to understand the main point of this week’s lesson?

Read Philippians 2:25–30.

Ask God to use this lesson to grow your affection for other believers.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Believers must have a familial affection for one another based on our mutual confession in Jesus Christ as Savior.

## THEOLOGY APPLIED

Every believer is part of the one family of God.

## MEDITATE

*“Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:9).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ This section introduces the lesson by asking why we should love other believers like brothers and sisters.

Q: How would you define “brotherly affection”?

Q: How are brotherly affection and love different from the preceding qualities in 2 Peter 1:5–7?

The concept of brotherly affection is easy to understand. It refers to the affection that should exist between brothers and/or sisters. It is more difficult to understand when it is applied beyond the immediate family to all believers in Christ. How can we show this kind of affection to other believers, and why should we? This lesson examines Paul’s comments concerning Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:35–30 to understand how brotherly affection can be extended to other believers. It also considers how Epaphroditus modeled brotherly affection in his concern for Paul and for the Philippians. Epaphroditus is one of the most unassuming characters in the New Testament. He was only a messenger! But Paul’s comments reveal that we have much to learn from him.

Some scholars have argued that with brotherly affection, 2 Peter 1:5–7 transitions from qualities focused on our relationship with God to qualities focused on our relationship with other believers. This distinction is not absolute. Virtue, for example, certainly focuses on our relationship with God but must be played out among others. Nevertheless, the shift in the qualities Peter mentions is observable. As we look at these two remaining qualities this week and next, consider how they will influence your interaction with others believers.

Q: What is the relationship between brotherly affection and truth?

**Q:** *Why is it important to maintain this relationship?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Before moving into the lesson, it is important to notice the link between brotherly affection, sometimes translated as brotherly love, and truth. First Peter 1:22 says, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” In this verse, Peter indicated that sincere brotherly love comes from obedience to truth and a purified soul. We cannot truly show brotherly love apart from being obedient to truth. Paul made a similar point in Romans 12:9–10, which states, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.” At the same time that Paul commanded brotherly affection, he also commanded that we abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. Distinguishing between evil and good insinuates making a truth claim about what is evil and what is good. It is important to maintain this link between truth and love because some people believe that love transcends truth in importance. That is why love today is often treated as unconditional acceptance even if it means ignoring what is true. It is the idea that if you love someone, you will affirm whatever he or she believes even if it is untrue or harmful because love matters more than truth. Christians cannot separate love and truth this way. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul said, “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Sometimes the most loving thing we can do for someone is to tell them the truth. As you consider brotherly affection in this lesson, remember that the New Testament sees truth and love as mutual goods that must both be maintained.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Philippians is about valuing the needs of others above your own for the sake of the gospel. Throughout this letter, Paul provided one illustration after another of this theme, including himself (Philippians 1:12–30; 3:1–11), Timothy (Philippians 2:19–24), and Jesus (Philippians 2:1–11). Epaphroditus is another example of this theme.

1. **BROTHERLY AFFECTION IS CREATED BY THE GOSPEL.**
2. **BROTHERLY AFFECTION IS BASED ON A COMMON COMMITMENT.**
3. **BROTHERLY AFFECTION IS AUTHENTIC.**
4. **BROTHERLY AFFECTION VALUES THE NEEDS OF OTHERS BEFORE ITS OWN.**
5. **BROTHERLY AFFECTION DEPENDS ON GRACE.**

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section examines in more detail Paul's comments concerning Epaphroditus and draws applications from these observations concerning brotherly affection.*

### 1. BROTHERLY AFFECTION IS CREATED BY THE GOSPEL.

#### ■ PHILIPPIANS 2:25

Q: *Why did Paul refer to Epaphroditus as a brother?*

Q: *Why does the New Testament use familial language to describe those who believe the gospel?*

In Philippians 2:25, Paul referred to Epaphroditus as “brother.” Since they were not physically brothers, Paul had in mind a greater truth than mere physical descent—the familial bond between all believers that is created by the gospel. The New Testament teaches that every believer belongs to the family of God. John referred to his audience as “God’s children” (1 John 3:2). He believed that becoming part of God’s family is the perfect demonstration of God’s love for us (1 John 3:1). According to Paul, when we believe the gospel, we are no longer strangers to one another but members of the same household of God (Ephesians 2:19). God has adopted us into His family, and we now have all the rights and privileges of an heir (Romans 8:15–17). Since every believer is now part of God’s family, it makes sense that 2 Peter 1:7 calls us to brotherly affection. Our fellow believers in Christ are brothers and sisters, and the New Testament authors anticipated that we would love each other as such.

Q: *How does the family of God highlight the issue of disunity among the body of Christ, both locally and beyond?*

Q: *In what ways do we fail to appreciate, intentionally or not, the full significance of the family of God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The gospel knows no bounds. It saves regardless of gender, race, national identity,

and socio-economic status. Since the gospel is for everyone, anyone who receives it is adopted into God's family and becomes our brother or sister in Christ. We cannot allow these distinctions or any others to create a barrier between us and anyone else who confesses Christ as Savior. Our familial bond in the gospel is stronger than anything that could tear us apart.

## 2. BROTHERLY AFFECTION IS BASED ON A COMMON COMMITMENT.

### ■ PHILIPPIANS 2:25

**Q:** *Why did Paul call Epaphroditus a fellow worker and a fellow soldier?*

**Q:** *What common purpose unites soldiers on a battlefield or workers in a factory?*

In addition to calling Epaphroditus a brother, Paul also called him a fellow worker and a fellow soldier. These words strengthen what was already a strong bond between them. Soldiers on a battlefield are united by a common goal to win the battle. They protect one another. They are driven to fulfill the duties assigned to them because if they fail, they endanger everyone else and the mission. Their common goal creates a comradery between soldiers that Paul used to explain the brotherhood of all believers. The same is true for employees of a company. The company I work for has more than ten departments—production, material handling; supply chain; security, purchasing, maintenance, etc. Even though we do vastly different things, we are all fellow workers in the production of our products. Our product is the goal, and we work together to make the best product we can. For believers, having a common commitment strengthens the ties that bind the family of God together. This is why Paul called Epaphroditus a fellow worker and fellow soldier. They shared a common mission and common purpose. Our brotherly affection is based on a common purpose that is greater than any of us. That common purpose is the mission of God—to make God's redemption known in the lives of others (2 Corinthians 5:18–20) and in creation itself (Romans 8:18–25).

**Q:** *Does fellowshiping with others in your church ever feel like a duty? Why do you think this is the case?*

**Q:** *How does a common purpose tie the body of Christ together in a way that transcends even friendship?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – For there to be brotherly affection among the body of Christ, we need to maintain a commitment to God’s mission of reconciliation. Apart from this mission, brotherly affection will seem like a duty. A common commitment to pursuing God’s mission, however, will give us the resolve we need to overlook personality differences and differences of opinion. If we ever give up on a common commitment to God’s mission, the familial ties that bind us will slowly dissolve or transform to the point that brotherly affection is no longer a reality. We may still like one another, but our relationship will be more like a social club than a family with brotherly affection.

### 3. BROTHERLY AFFECTION IS AUTHENTIC.

#### ■ PHILIPPIANS 2:27

**Q:** *Why was God’s mercy on Epaphroditus also a mercy for Paul?*

**Q:** *What other elements in this passage highlight the authenticity of Paul and Epaphroditus’s brotherly affection?*

Epaphroditus was a delegate from the Philippian church to deliver a financial gift to Paul and to minister to his other needs while he was in prison. Either while he was traveling to Paul or while he was with him, Epaphroditus became seriously ill. We do not know any details concerning his sickness except that he was near death. By God’s grace, however, Epaphroditus recovered. Paul had become so bound to him that he saw Epaphroditus’ recovery an equal measure of God’s grace on his own life, revealing the authenticity of Paul’s affection for him. Epaphroditus was not just a messenger to Paul. He was not just the means to the gift the Philippians had arranged for him. He was a brother in Christ for whom Paul felt a deep kinship.

Q: *How can you move beyond trite cordiality to authentic brotherly affection with the members of your church?*

Q: *Why do the relationships you form at church feel inauthentic?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – To gain brotherly affection for others in your church, you need to acquire an authentic concern for them. There is a difference between just getting along with others in your church and the kind of brotherly affection Peter urged followers of Christ to demonstrate in 2 Peter 1:7. You can get along with others without any authentic concern for them, but brotherly affection requires more. Building an authentic concern for others requires an investment. You have to invest time in creating this kind of relationship. You have to invest energy in having the kind of conversations that create authenticity. You have to be willing to participate in the body of Christ outside of normal worship services. Authentic brotherly affection is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in just an hour or two on a Sunday morning.

#### 4. BROTHERLY AFFECTION VALUES THE NEEDS OF OTHERS BEFORE ITS OWN.

##### ■ PHILIPPIANS 2:30

Q: *How did Epaphroditus value Paul's needs above his own?*

Q: *How does this attitude build brotherly affection?*

Epaphroditus nearly died traveling to Paul to deliver the Philippians' gift and to minister to his needs. In doing so, Epaphroditus became an example of the overall message of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul wrote Philippians to encourage the church there to value the needs of others above their own for the sake of the gospel. Two women in the Philippian church, Euodia and Syntyche, could not agree with one another. For Paul to address their disagreement in his letter means it must have been a serious threat to the unity of the church. Paul filled Philippians with examples of valuing the needs of others above your own for the sake of the gospel.

Paul himself is the first example. Apparently there were some people proclaiming Christ with the wrong motives. We cannot be sure how, but they apparently thought they were bringing affliction upon Paul by proclaiming

the gospel (Philippians 1:17). What was his response? He said he rejoiced if Christ was proclaimed, even if it endangered him (Philippians 1:18). He sacrificed his own wellbeing for the sake of those proclaiming the gospel. He also used Jesus as an example of one who laid aside His own interests for the sake of others. Though He was in the form of God, He instead became a servant in the likeness of men and even died a cruel death on the cross. Why? So that we might be reconciled to God. Jesus, for our sake and for the sake of the gospel, put aside His own interests. This is what Epaphroditus did in coming to minister to Paul, even at the risk of his own life. There is no reason to wonder why Paul felt such affection for him. Epaphroditus illustrated the kind of brother affection called for in 2 Peter 1:7.

**Q:** *How can you lay aside your interests for the sake of others and for the sake of the gospel?*

**Q:** *What is keeping you from doing this?*

**APPLICATION POINT:** The message of Philippians is the most unnatural thing any of us could ever do. We are accustomed to putting our own interests above every other concern. We want to ensure that our needs are met. We want our point of view to be heard. We want our preferences to be prioritized. Nothing destroys brotherly affection and creates disunity within the body of Christ more quickly than following our natural impulse to look after number one. Brotherly affection requires that we follow the model set by Epaphroditus, that we learn to think of ourselves as being of secondary importance. It requires our willingness to sacrifice ourselves for others and for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## 5. BROTHERLY AFFECTION DEPENDS ON GRACE.

### ■ PHILIPPIANS 2:28

**Q:** *Why were the Philippians eager to receive Epaphroditus back?*

**Q:** *Do you think Epaphroditus always displayed the kind of character Paul praised him for?*

Brotherly affection depends on grace. It depends on us showing grace to others. Paul knew the Philippians would rejoice at seeing Epaphroditus again. A man of his character would have been clearly missed in Philippi. Do you think the Philippians would have rejoiced at receiving Epaphroditus back if he were challenging to get along with? Or if he were someone who regularly stirred up dissension within the church? Epaphroditus was the kind of person who was ready to be gracious to others. That is why he was filled with brotherly affection. That is why the Philippians were eager to receive him back.

Brotherly affection also depends on others showing grace to us. Although the Bible does not say so explicitly, I'm quite certain Epaphroditus faltered on occasion. I'm sure there were times when he wanted things to be done his way. But that did not keep the Philippians from being eager for him to return. Just as he was a gracious person, others were willing to show him grace. This is what it takes to maintain brotherly affection.

**Q:** *Can you describe a time when someone was gracious with you?*

**Q:** *Can you think of a time when you were not gracious with someone although you should have been?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Receiving grace is easier than giving it. We have all received more grace from our Lord Jesus Christ than we could ever show to others. Therefore, we should all be ready to show grace to others. If we cannot show grace to others, it is a good indication we have not truly received the grace of Christ ourselves (Matthew 18:21–35). Learning to show grace to others is a crucial step for creating and maintaining brotherly affection.

## NEXT STEPS

This lesson has provided five applications needed to create and maintain brotherly affection in your church. Choose one of these applications over each of the next five weeks and focus on implementing it. Be strategic. If you know an upcoming meeting will make it challenging for you to maintain brotherly affection, choose that week to focus on being gracious to others or putting the interests of others above your own. If there are people visiting your church who seem to not be fitting in, make the next week you see them the week you emphasize extending brotherly affection as far as the gospel is extended to those who need it. If your church has an upcoming ministry project in the community, make that the week you emphasize creating a common purpose with other church members or getting to know others in an authentic way.



## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, keep me from ever separating truth and brotherly affection. If I cannot speak the truth, I cannot love with brotherly affection.*

*-Lord Jesus, thank you for the grace I have in you. Help me to show that same grace to others.*

*-God, convict me of the occasions when I have destroyed brotherly affection by placing my own interests first.*

*-Father, help me to have an authentic concern and affection for those who make up my local body of Christ.*

# ■ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

July 24, 2022 | Love

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week, we conclude our study by considering love in the book of Ruth. We will see how Ruth exemplifies genuine love.

### GETTING READY

How would you define love in your own words?

Read the book of Ruth (only four short chapters).

Ask God to use the book of Ruth to show you how love works in conjunction with His grace to make the gospel known to us.

## THIS WEEK

### ■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Genuine love testifies to the goodness of God in the gospel.

## THEOLOGY APPLIED

Your capacity for love reflects how well you understand the gospel.

## MEDITATE

*“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments” (1 John 5:1–2).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the lesson by discussing the need for genuine love instead of what is often mistaken for love in our culture.

Q: Why would love be considered the ultimate Christian virtue?

Q: Why do even secular cultures find the idea of love appealing?

The final word in Peter’s list of qualities is “love.” The Bible frequently presents love as the ultimate Christian virtue. Peter likely alludes to the primacy of love by concluding his series of virtues with it. Elsewhere, Peter said, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly” (1 Peter 4:8). Paul repeatedly emphasized the importance of love when discussing Christian behavior. He admonished the Colossian Christians to have love “above all [else]” (Colossians 3:14). He considered love to be greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13).

This biblical focus on love is seemingly matched by current cultural sentiments. Our culture loves love. People say love is the key to resolving all the world’s problems. It is the secret to finding physical, spiritual, and emotional fulfillment. It is universally affirmed as good, and everyone would be happier if there were more love in the world.

Taking a critical step back, however, reveals enormous gaps in the world’s thinking about love. How can love be the solution to world conflict when loving one’s country, religion, or people is often the source of the conflict? How can we think love leads to personal happiness when nearly half of all marriages, presumably founded on love, end in divorce? How can love save us from physical illnesses or pandemics? The apostles called believers to love, but the world’s understanding of love is often confused. How can believers follow the apostle’s command in a world where there is so much confusion surrounding love? This lesson will look to Ruth as an example to guide us through the fog.

Q: *Why is the world's "love talk" so appealing?*

Q: *Do you think people who speak so highly of love in our culture would appreciate the Bible's vision of love in the same way? Why or why not?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Although this lesson will look to Ruth as an example of genuine love, we must begin by recognizing that the greatest example of love we could ever have is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice so that we may be forgiven of our sins and have a renewed relationship with the Father. Jesus's death for us was the ultimate demonstration of love. Furthermore, Jesus commanded us, to the degree that we carry on the ministry of His disciples, to love one another just as He has loved us (John 13:34). What is amazing is that Jesus referred to this as a new commandment even though the people of God have been told to love one another before (Leviticus 19:18). What was new about this commandment? The key rests in Jesus's sacrificial demonstration of His love. The world had never seen love like that before, so Jesus's command to love one another as He has loved us must be a new commandment. When the apostles hold up love as the ultimate Christian virtue, they do so because Jesus's act of love resides at the center of our faith.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson surveys the book of Ruth and presents six principles concerning genuine love as exemplified by Ruth.

1. GENUINE LOVE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY OR CLEAR.
2. GENUINE LOVE PRIORITIZES GOD.
3. GENUINE LOVE IS SACRIFICIAL.
4. GENUINE LOVE DOES NOT TAKE BREAKS.
5. GENUINE LOVE TRANSFORMS.
6. GENUINE LOVE SHOWS SELF-RESTRAINT.

## GOING DEEPER

+This section examines passages from the book of Ruth in which Ruth demonstrates genuine love. Not every passage in Ruth will be discussed nor will every example of genuine love be covered. Nevertheless, the six principles drawn from Ruth give us an example of genuine love to follow.

## 1. GENUINE LOVE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY OR CLEAR.

### ■ RUTH 1:1-18

Q: *How were Ruth and Orpah related to Naomi?*

Q: *Was Naomi's reasoning in verses 8-13 sound?*

The setting and plot of the first chapter of Ruth are well known. Naomi's husband, Elimelech, had moved his family from Bethlehem to the foreign country of Moab because of a severe famine in Bethlehem. Elimelech and Naomi's two sons married Moabite women but had no children. Elimelech and his sons died, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, widowed. Later, Naomi learned that the famine in Bethlehem had subsided and made plans to return. Ruth and Orpah planned to move with her to Bethlehem, but Naomi discouraged them from doing so.

Naomi and Orpah give us examples of divided loves. Naomi argued that Ruth and Orpah would face bleak futures in Bethlehem. Even though they wished to remain loyal to her, there was no hope of Naomi ever producing another son for them to marry within her family. She thought it would be best for them to remain in Moab, find new husbands, and forget about her. From a standpoint of their physical needs, Naomi's reasoning seems sound. Ruth and Orpah stood a greater chance of being cared for and starting a family if they remained in Moab. Staying, however, meant staying in a land that worshipped pagan gods. Naomi's plan would have met their physical needs, but their spiritual needs would have suffered. Orpah prioritized her physical needs over her spiritual needs. She remained in a land of idolatry in hopes of starting over and having the family life she yearned for. Ruth, on the other hand, refused to be divided. She was committed to Naomi's welfare and to Naomi's God, no matter the cost (Ruth 1:16-17). This was not an easy decision. As we will see, returning with Naomi placed Ruth in a vulnerable situation. We will also see how God provided for Ruth even when all hope seemed lost.

Q: *What commitments can divide your loves?*

Q: *How do you decide what the most loving thing to do is when the answer is not clear?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In a fallen world, it is not always clear what the most loving action is. Sometimes we must weigh competing interests and make the best decision we can. In such situations, it is important to go to an authority outside of ourselves to understand what the most loving thing to do is. We need to go to Scripture for guidance. God’s Word can help us cut through the cultural expectations and confusion that make the decisions we face in a fallen world uncertain.

## 2. GENUINE LOVE PRIORITIZES GOD.

### ■ RUTH 1:19–22

Q: *Why did Naomi ask to be called Mara?*

Q: *Why did Naomi say she had returned empty even when she had returned with Ruth?*

Naomi’s return created quite a stir among the townspeople. She and Elimelech were obviously notable people in Bethlehem. Her return would have been an occasion for joy. Not only was a friend and neighbor returning, but Naomi’s return was a reminder of God’s goodness in the land despite the earlier famine. But Naomi refused to appear joyful. She refused to be called Naomi, which means “pleasant,” and instead demanded to be called Mara, which means “bitter.” In her mind, God had only dealt bitterly with her in Moab. She had no joy left even though the famine had relented, she had returned to her homeland, and had Ruth to help care for her. Naomi’s bitterness kept her from seeing Ruth’s love for her and, more importantly, God’s love for her.

Q: *Why couldn’t Naomi find joy when she returned home after the famine?*

Q: *How could someone count trials as “joy” (James 1:2)?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Naomi is a perfect example of what happens when our loves become disordered. Naomi was consumed with loss, so much so that she did not even regard Ruth as worthy of mention. She would have preferred to remain in Moab with her family but without her God than to return to the land where her God was known but without her family. When we cannot correctly prioritize our loves, which always means loving God

above all else, our love becomes disordered. Correctly prioritized love is why James was able to tell his readers to consider it a joy when they face trials. How can someone joyfully face a spiritual or physical trial? Only by prioritizing God over everything else. Prioritizing God helps us maintain genuine love. Prioritizing God helps us to endure when we receive a bad health diagnosis or suffer the death of a family member. Prioritizing God helps us maintain genuine love even when nothing else is going the way we want.

### 3. GENUINE LOVE IS SACRIFICIAL.

#### ■ RUTH 2:1–13

Q: *How did Ruth love Naomi sacrificially in these verses?*

Q: *What were the dangers of Ruth gathering wheat in the field?*

Although the famine in Bethlehem had subsided, Naomi and Ruth had not planted a crop, so they still had to find food for themselves. The Old Testament law made provision for the poor and sojourners in Israel. Landowners were not allowed to harvest the edges of their crops, which yielded the weakest produce, or to go back over their fields to collect what was missed during the initial harvest (Leviticus 23:22). This part of the harvest was left for those in need. In order to provide food for herself and Naomi, Ruth joined the poor and sojourners in gathering what remained of the crops after the harvest.

The text of Ruth does not go into much detail, but apparently Ruth's actions placed her in a certain amount of danger. It doesn't take much imagination to realize how a group of people foraging the same land for a small portion of leftover crops could create a contentious situation. No doubt arguments frequently erupted between them. The text of Ruth hints that the men employed to harvest the fields would have posed a certain amount of danger to Ruth as well (Ruth 2:9, 22). Whatever the case, Ruth's actions placed her in danger. Her willingness to face this danger on behalf of Naomi was an act of sacrificial love. Ruth took upon herself the danger Naomi would have been exposed to.

Ruth's is not the only example of sacrificial love in this chapter. Boaz allowed Ruth to gather from his primary crop (Ruth 2:15–16) and even instructed the harvesters to intentionally leave behind some grain for her to easily gather. Boaz sacrificed part of his crop and his livelihood for Ruth's sake.

Q: *Why must genuine love at least be willing to sacrifice?*

Q: *Why does the sacrificial nature of love make it the supreme Christian virtue?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Genuine love is not about what you can get for yourself. Genuine love drives you to sacrifice your dreams, your money, even your wellbeing for the sake of others. This is what Christ did for us in His sacrificial death on the cross. This is why genuine love is the greatest virtue. Peter and the other New Testament writers call you to love sacrificially. They call you to value the object of your love more than yourself.

#### 4. GENUINE LOVE DOES NOT TAKE BREAKS.

##### ■ RUTH 2:14, 18

Q: *What did Ruth do with the leftover lunch she received from Boaz?*

Q: *What did this show about Ruth?*

Boaz's generosity included allowing Ruth to share in the meal prepared for the harvesters. Ruth was given more than she could eat. Rather than discard the rest, she took it home to Naomi with the rest of her gatherings. Ruth never stopped thinking of Naomi, even in the smallest ways. Ruth's thoughtfulness allowed Naomi to eat as soon as Ruth returned home rather than having to wait for a portion of the day's harvest to be prepared. Who knows how long it had been since Naomi had eaten? Since Ruth left with no food and could not have expected to have received any during the day, this would have been a completely unexpected grace for Naomi.

Q: *How does Ruth's thoughtfulness compare to the way we often love others?*

Q: *Why must genuine love persevere through absence? Sickness? Disagreements?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Ruth’s thoughtfulness contrasts with the way many people love today. When love is only an emotion or feeling, you can love more strongly at some times than others. An extended or even sometimes momentary absence is enough to diminish feelings but not genuine love. An argument can quickly transform a feeling from love to hate, but genuine love sustains through arguments. Familiarity can diminish emotions, but genuine love can never become too familiar with its object. Genuine love is more than mere convenience.

## 5. GENUINE LOVE TRANSFORMS.

### ■ RUTH 2:20–23; 4:13–17

**Q:** *How did Naomi’s outlook change when Ruth returned with a bountiful harvest?*

**Q:** *How do the words of the women [4:14–15] contrast with Naomi’s words upon her return [1:20–21]?*

Naomi returned from Moab with only bitterness. Although Ruth has shown tremendous love and concern for her, she did not even acknowledge Ruth at her return (1:21). Naomi’s outlook transformed throughout the book as she encountered one example of genuine love after another. Ruth returned with food ready for her to eat. This was a demonstration of genuine love she had not expected. Furthermore, Ruth returned with far more gleanings from a single day’s labor than could have reasonably been expected. After Ruth beat out the wheat from the husks, she had about an ephah of barley, which was at least fifty pounds. Naomi knew someone had to have been extraordinarily generous to Ruth for her to have gathered that much. When she learned that person was Boaz, who was a kinsman redeemer for her and Ruth, she recognized the hand of God at work (Ruth 2:20). Genuine love began to transform Naomi from bitter to hopeful.

The transformation was complete by the end of the book. Naomi contrived a rather uncertain plan to suggest to Boaz that he redeem Ruth (3:1–5). Her plan had more pitfalls than even she was aware of (3:12), but by God’s providence and the genuine love of Ruth and Boaz, her plan succeeded. Boaz redeemed Ruth, Naomi and Ruth obtained the security they needed, and Boaz and Ruth had a child who was as much Naomi’s as theirs (4:17). The woman who had returned from Moab empty and bitter was now full of joy. She had been transformed by the genuine love of others, even the genuine love of a providential God who never stopped providing for her.

- Q:** *How have you witnessed others being transformed by genuine love?*
- Q:** *Why do some people need to see a demonstration of genuine love before they are convinced of the love of God in the gospel?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Life in a sinful and broken world takes a toll on people. Some people, like Naomi, have endured such heartache and disappointment they have become hardened to the possibility of genuine love, even from God. Christians want the genuine love of God to penetrate even the hardest hearts. We cannot be resentful of people who are hardened to the love of God. Instead, we have to be willing to show them genuine love. Sometimes people, like Naomi, need to witness a demonstration of genuine love before they are willing to love others or open their hearts to the gospel. Sometimes they need to see three or four or ten demonstrations of genuine love. When we encounter such people, it is important for us to remember that genuine love is sacrificial. We cannot demand a reciprocal response when we demonstrate genuine love for others, and since genuine love is sacrificial, demonstrations of genuine love cannot lead to bitterness on our part.

## 6. GENUINE LOVE SHOWS SELF-RESTRAINT.

### ■ RUTH 3:6–13

- Q:** *How did Boaz show self-restraint in Ruth 3:6–13?*
- Q:** *How does Boaz's self-restraint show genuine love for Ruth, the nearer kinsman, and God?*

The final example of genuine love we will consider comes from Boaz. Scholars disagree about the merits of Naomi's plan (Ruth 3:1–5). Some people believe Naomi was trying to trick Boaz into having sex with Ruth, forcing his hand as a redeemer. The weight of the evidence, however, suggests that Naomi simply wanted to get Boaz and Ruth together in a way that would suggest to Boaz that he should redeem Ruth. Naomi's plan, however, was quite clumsy and could have gone disastrously wrong in several ways. Even if Naomi did not intend it, Boaz could have taken advantage of Ruth sexually in this situation. It seems this kind of behavior was common during the harvest season, and prostitutes even made themselves available for such occasions.

But Boaz restrained himself when he could have taken advantage with little consequence. He showed genuine love to Ruth by restraining any sexual urge he had and treating her honorably.

Boaz also showed restraint in redeeming Ruth. Although Naomi and Ruth had made their desires clear and Boaz also desired to redeem Ruth (Ruth 4:10), Boaz knew it was another man's right to redeem Ruth if he chose. The cultural practice alluded to here is called levirate marriage. In ancient cultures, when a married man died with no children, one of his brothers was responsible to marry his widow and raise children on his behalf. When no brothers were available, it appears that this responsibility was extended to the nearest kin, though it could be declined. Boaz was aware that another man was a nearer redeemer for Ruth than he was. Rather than being led by desire or emotion, Boaz determined to resolve the claim of the nearer redeemer before acting himself. Boaz's restraint showed genuine love for the nearer redeemer, for Ruth, and for God. He would not disregard the existence of the nearer redeemer and his right to redeem Ruth. He would not place Ruth in the middle of a dispute. He would not work against God's providence in the whole situation. Boaz showed genuine love by showing self-restraint. In God's providence, he was able to marry Ruth with honor.

❖: *How does our culture prioritize desire over self-restraint in love?*

❖: *Why is important to understand that love is more than just an emotion?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Boaz's self-restraint shows us that genuine love is not driven only by emotion or passion. Genuine love rests on the character of God and is defined by His goodness. This means we cannot define love in terms of what we want to do or how we feel. Genuine love is restrained by God's perfect plan for His creation. Failing to acknowledge the restraints God has placed on genuine love is not love at all.

## NEXT STEPS

Who do you need to show genuine love to? Although the story of Ruth addresses genuine love between a man and a woman, it also demonstrates genuine love in many other types of relationships. Whether it be a romantic interest, a spouse, a family member, a brother or sister in Christ, or an unbeliever, find who God is calling you to show genuine love toward. Consider how these principles from the book of Ruth can help you love this person in a manner that would glorify God.



## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, you are the author of love. Help me define love the way you define it. Help me to love genuinely.*

*-God, I have not always loved others sacrificially. I have loved selfishly. Forgive me. Renew my heart so I know how to love like you do.*

*-Jesus, you have provided the greatest example of love that could ever be shown. Thank you for my salvation. Thank you for loving me when I was unlovable.*

*-God, help me to demonstrate your love for others. Help me to transform others by loving them genuinely.*

