

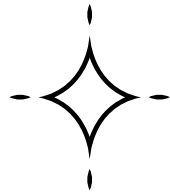


GOD'S

ETERNAL PURSUIT

STUDY GUIDE

 [WORLDCHALLENGE.ORG](https://www.worldchallenge.org)



GOD'S

ETERNAL PURSUIT

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No matter where you are in your Christian walk, the New Covenant is something you can never grow tired of studying. If you're a new believer, still trying to make sense of why the Old Testament and New Testament seem so different, the New Covenant is for you. If you're a mature believer who has served in church for years, especially if you teach the scriptures, the New Covenant is for you. It's at the heart of the promises God made from the Garden of Eden all the way to the Cross; it's at the center of so many of Paul's letters to the early church.

Perhaps the clearest definition of the New Covenant is found in the story of Jeremiah and his life. Israel, his homeland, had embraced a lot of sinful practices. They had turned their backs on God. Because of that, God would allow the Babylonians to come and destroy Jerusalem. In the middle of this tragic chapter of Israel's history, though, God gave his people an incredible promise.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (*Jeremiah 31:31-34, ESV*).

Jeremiah and the godly people of his day dreamed of when this promise would be fulfilled. They longed to see the relationship we now have in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, though, the New Covenant reveals who God is. As heirs of this covenant, our duty and our joy is to learn more about this great inheritance we have in Christ.


—John Bailey

The Weakness of Man

ACTS 9:1-22

- INTRODUCTION -

David Jackman, British evangelist and minister, told a curious story about the famous Charles Spurgeon in his book "[The Message of John's Letters](#)." He described how Spurgeon, who was renowned for his sermons calling people to repentance, was approached by a man who told Spurgeon that he had grown so close to God that he now lived without sin.

Spurgeon invited the man over for dinner. Over the meal, he asked questions, and the man's answers were punctuated over and over by his claim to have successfully 'crucified the old man' and achieved a sinless life. The dinner was winding towards its end. Suddenly, Spurgeon grabbed a glass of water and threw it in the man's face. His guest was shocked and insulted. He furiously demanded, using several decidedly unchristian terms, to know what Spurgeon meant by this outrageous act.

Spurgeon commented, "Ah, you see, the old man within you is not dead. He had simply fainted and could be revived with a glass of water."

Whether or not Jackman's story about Charles Spurgeon actually took place is unclear. Another account says that one of the ministers who worked under Spurgeon made a similar claim. One morning when all the church leaders gathered, Spurgeon came up behind the young man and emptied a bottle of milk over his head to elicit a similarly explosive response. Spurgeon was somewhat notorious for his quick wit and impish humor, so these tales would not be out of character for him.

Either way, we all fall into the same folly as the unnamed man. Scripture described a similar young man who approached Jesus and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: "Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother." And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." (*Mark 10:17-20, ESV*). How quick we are to trust in our own righteousness!

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- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. What is the difference between encountering God and having an experience with God? Describe how Paul portrayed each in his testimony, then offer an example from your own life.

2. What is the effect on our lives when we try to mix 'by grace with faith' and adherence to the law to gain Christ's approval?

3. Have you ever tried to live under the law? What kind of pressure does that put on you? During that time, what was your primary feeling toward God?

4. What did God save you from when the Savior first entered your life? What parts of your life changed right away? What areas do you know God is still working with in your heart?

5. Do you ever struggle with anxiousness or not feeling like you measure up to Christ's holy standard? Do you find it challenging to trust in Christ's grace?

6. How do you know when you have committed a sin? How do you respond?

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7. What happens when we define good or evil for ourselves? How does our definition of good and evil, apart from the Bible, affect our choices and view of the world? What changes when we allow God to define good and evil?

8. Why do people hide from God? In what ways do you still hide from God?

9. What does it mean to have God's law written on our hearts? If it doesn't mean the Old Testament law, what is this 'law' precisely?

- FURTHER READING -

Galatians 2:15-21 — Romans 3:9-20 — Ephesians 4:17-24

- PRAYER PROMPT -

C. S. Lewis wrote in *A Mind Awake*, "The idea of reaching 'a good life' without Christ is based on a double error. Firstly, we cannot do it; and secondly, in setting up 'a good life' as our final goal, we have missed the very point of our existence. Morality is a mountain which we cannot climb by our own efforts; and if we could, we should only perish in the ice and unbreathable air of the summit, lacking those wings with which the rest of the journey has to be accomplished."

The essence of Adam and Eve's sin, however, was believing that they could do just that: be good without God. None of us is any better than them. Ask God if he will show you, just like he did with the rich young ruler, where you have become convinced of our own goodness. Ask God to convict you of an area of your heart that you need to hand over to him.

The Strength of Christ

JOHN 4:1-42

- INTRODUCTION -

A recent article came up with 41 ways that today's generation is extremely hypocritical. Here's a brief sampling of their examples to this point:

1. We condemn the labor laws in China but refuse to stop shopping at our favorite store where all the clothing is 'made in China.'
2. We complain about celebrity culture like the Kardashians, then we follow them on social media or watch TV shows about them.
3. We complain about our bad relationships, but we aren't willing to do the hard work to better those relationships, or we aren't willing to cut off damaging relationships.

While reflecting on the universal nature of people to be hypocritical, a counselor [wrote](#), "At the root of hypocrisy is fear and low self-esteem. We use hypocrisy to avoid looking at our shortcomings and figure out our part in it. It typically stems from a sincere belief that we should not be held to the same standards as others because we have better intentions. ...It feels good to be morally superior to someone else. It helps us to avoid humility, which is a very painful emotion."

Naturally, because this is a secular writer, their advise for how to solve hypocrisy within ourselves is to develop an objective morality, spend more time examining ourselves and our motivations as well as trying to avoid cognitive dissonance.

Basically, the advise is to develop an exhaustive and rigid framework of rules and then work really hard to follow those rules. This advice is nothing new, though. For centuries, Catholic monasteries and, before them, the Greek Stoics espoused the same route to becoming a better person. It's a tempting path because it leaves us in control. The only problem is that its complete success rate is zero percent.

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- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. Why do you serve God? Are there ways can we please God with our works? In what ways will our works always fall short?

2. Why did God give people the law if he knew that they would never be able to perfectly obey it? What scripture verses back up your answer?

3. What is a type of background or sin that you would quietly judge if you knew someone else came from that background?

4. In the story of the woman at the well, she argues with Jesus about theology, despite living a life of sin herself. Have you ever thought about how hypocritical that was? In what ways do we want to ignore our own sin when we talk about God or talk to God?

5. What particular situations make us start comparing ourselves against others so we feel better about ourselves?

6. Why does the simplicity of the gospel offend some people? Why do some people struggle to accept how easy it is to be saved? Why are we often tempted to add work or obedience as a precursor to salvation?

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7. How does grace interconnect with faith? Why are both important so that we don't live recklessly but also don't live under condemnation?

8. Why is our past or the transformation in our life not actually the most powerful part of our testimony? What is the central part of our testimony? Why are Jesus' words more powerful than our testimony?

9. How do we know if we're saved and truly have the Holy Spirit? How can we know that we're being transformed by the Spirit in us?

10. How would you share the gospel with someone who is convinced that they are already a Christian but believes extrabiblical things about God? How would you share the freedom of the gospel with someone who is hyper-legalistic?

- FURTHER READING -

Isaiah 44:1-8 — 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 — Revelation 7:9-17

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- PRAYER PROMPT -

In his book *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*, Ray Ortlund wrote, “But we do not change for the better by turning inward. We change as we turn outward and upward to the Lord with an awakened sense of this sheer reality, his moral beauty, his eternal grandeur, infinitely above us but relevant to us.”

We all more or less react like the woman at the well when Jesus pointed out her many failed relationships. Consider which part of God’s personality or nature frightens or offends you. Why does it bother you so much? Offer this up to him and ask him to reveal to you how he wants to bring life into this part of your heart.

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By Grace through Faith

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

- INTRODUCTION -

In September 1954, Yves Saint Laurent traveled to Paris at the age of 18. He would join Christian Dior's studio, which produced some of France and the world's most illustrious *haute couture*, less than a year after his arrival in the French capital.

Yves Saint Laurent would work alongside Christian Dior, sketching and creating new designs then shepherding them through the tailoring process. Dior, for his part, measured Saint Laurent's skills, challenged him and gradually began giving him more and more responsibilities with the various collections. Mere months before he died, Dior wrote a friend, "Yves Saint Laurent is young, but he is an immense talent. In my last collection, I consider him to be the father of 34 out of the 180 designs. I think the time has come to reveal it to the press. My prestige won't suffer from it."

Saint Laurent mused years later, "He taught me the essential. Then came other influences that, because he had taught me the essential, blended into this essential and found it to be a wonderful and prolific terrain, the necessary seeds that would allow me to assert myself, grow strong, blossom, and finally exude my own universe."

When Dior died, Saint Laurent became his successor and the world's youngest lead designer in a major house of fashion.

While being a believer is hardly the same as being a couturier, one principle is remarkably similar between the two: we all model our lives and work off of someone else. Perhaps it's our parents or another family member. Maybe this person is a mentor we deeply respect. We all find at our center the desire or need to echo another being because we have been created in the image of God. The one we're meant to imitate is Christ.

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- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. What is the difference between believers helping to hold one another accountable (see Matthew 18:15-20) and trying to be perfected by the law (see Galatians 3:1-5)?

2. What was the purpose of the law in the Old Testament? What is the purpose of it for modern believers who have been saved by grace?

3. In what ways do we still depend on our own goodness in our day-to-day life?

4. What is faith according to the scriptures? How is intellectually agreeing to something not the same as faith?

5. How does understanding grace connect to faith? How do faith and grace connect to good works?

6. What does the presence and power of the Holy Spirit do in our everyday lives?

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7. Even though we trust God for salvation, we often want to hold back certain areas of our lives from him. What are some things you struggle to trust that God will take care of or provide?

8. How does it make you feel to hear that it's impossible to please God without faith? If it bothers you, why?

9. What does it mean to become like Christ? What does Colossians 3:9-10 mean when it says, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator"? Does this mean we lose our personalities or unique abilities? Does it efface our personal histories or past experiences?

- FURTHER READING -

Galatians 5:16-26 — Colossians 3:5-17 — Romans 12:1-3

- PRAYER PROMPT -

Tony Evans, senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, once said, "God will meet you where you are in order to take you where he wants you to go." We all are in the process of being transformed by God's grace. Ask God what the next step is for you in the journey of conforming to the image of Christ.

The Unbreakable Covenant

ISAIAH 42:1-16

- INTRODUCTION -

It was a warm spring day in 1985. [Ruth Pelke](#) was 78 years old and a devoted Sunday school teacher; she was also about to die. Later that afternoon, her grandson Bill received a devastating call. He recalled, “Nana had been stabbed to death. The house had been ransacked. My father found the body.”

Four teen girls were arrested for the crime the next day. The ringleader, Paula, was sentenced to death on July 11, 1986. Bill went to Paula’s trial and witnessed her grandfather break down into tears during the court proceedings. Although hurt and angry, he became increasingly convinced that his grandmother, a devout Christian, would have loved this troubled, young teenager. He could only explain it as “When I was touched by compassion and forgiveness, I no longer pictured Nana dead but alive. Something terrific had happened inside of me.”

For the next eight years, he would fight Paula’s sentence and correspond with her weekly before he was finally allowed to meet her in person. In 2013, Paula was finally released, but Bill didn’t see this as the finish line on his marathon journey of forgiveness.

He explained, “She has never seen a cellphone or a computer. She has never written a cheque, applied for a job or had a bank account. It’s going to be very difficult for her; in fact, she told me she was scared.” Once she had transitioned from the safehouse and was allowed to meet him, Bill said he would like to take her out for lunch and then help her purchase a computer.

Because this rare tale, when it is told, often comes from the side of the forgiver, it’s easy for us to identify with them. In terms of Christianity, though, God is the one forgiving, saving us from the death penalty and helping us toward freedom.

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- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. When did your relationship with God really begin? What did the start of your relationship with God look like?

2. What comes to mind when you read “a bruised reed he will not break”? How does this description of God comfort you? How have you seen this truth in your own life?

3. Is life fair? What does the Bible mean then when it says that God will bring justice to the earth? Why does he allow grossly unfair situations to persist in the world? Did he bring justice when Jesus entered the world?

4. What do we make of the fact that God says all glory belongs to him? Doesn't that sound a bit...arrogant? If you feel that God sounds slightly egotistical sometimes, *why* do you feel this way? Why do you think God says he will not share his glory with another?

5. Why did God choose to make the New Covenant between himself and Jesus? Why didn't he include us in this covenant? Why did Jesus need to be our mediator in the covenant?

6. How often do we think of the disciples as the best that humanity had to offer prior to the gift of the Holy Spirit? Why do we perhaps struggle with that idea? Do we sometimes think that we could've done better than them?

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7. What are the seven sayings of the cross? Why are each one of them significant?

8. What did Jesus mean when he said, "It is finished"? Clearly, sin was still in the world. Obviously, Jesus still has to come back and enact the final judgment. So what was he talking about when he spoke that famous line?

9. What kind of hope does Jesus' resurrection give us? Why is it important for those of us who are still alive? Why is it important for those who have died?

- FURTHER READING -

Romans 5:1-11 — Ephesians 2:11-22 — Philemon 1:8-20

- PRAYER PROMPT -

When you feel broken and like a 'bruised reed,' how do you approach God? Do you view him as a loving father, waiting for you at home? Or do you see him like a college professor of a huge lecture, waiting to grade your performance? Does your view of God line up with how he is described in scripture and his covenant promises to you? If not, tell him about the version of him you still hold in your heart.

Choose a passage of scripture that describes God's promise to protect and provide for you. Read over the promises, then ask God to align your heart and view of him with his Word.

More than Conquerors

ROMANS 8:28-39

- INTRODUCTION -

The Harvard Gazette recently wrote an article titled “Good genes are nice, but joy is better” that explored one of the [longest human studies](#) still ongoing. “When scientists began tracking the health of 268 Harvard sophomores in 1938 during the Great Depression, they hoped the longitudinal study would reveal clues to leading healthy and happy lives.

“They got more than they wanted. ...Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives, the study revealed. Those ties protect people from life’s discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. That finding proved true across the board among both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants.”

The director of the study, Robert Waldinger noted, “The people who were the most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80.”

In a [TED Talk](#), he discussed the team’s findings thus far. “Those who kept warm relationships got to live longer and happier, said Waldinger, and the loners often died earlier. ‘Loneliness kills,’ he said. ‘It’s as powerful as smoking or alcoholism.’” He added, “It’s easy to get isolated, to get caught up in work and not remembering, ‘Oh, I haven’t seen these friends in a long time,’ So I try to pay more attention to my relationships than I used to.”

There is great comfort and even healing in the experience of being loved by someone else. Positive human relationships do us great good, but a right relationship with God does far more. Knowing that we are made right with God and experiencing a relationship with him heals our hearts and transforms our lives.

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- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. How does the law fit into the New Covenant? How does Christ work within and alongside his own law?

2. How does belonging to the family of God differ from Israel's status as the people of God? Why does one transform us and the other doesn't?

3. What are some potential pitfalls of the viewpoint that Christians can never lose their salvation? (Hint: Paul discussed this in Romans 6:1-11.)

4. What are some potential pitfalls of the viewpoint that believers may lose their salvation if they sin badly enough? (Hint: Paul discussed this in Galatians 3:1-5.)

5. How can the question "Am I going to heaven?" start to make you focus on the wrong things? What question might you ask instead?

6. What should you focus on in your walk with God? How does that focus change your behavior?

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7. Like Paul, many of us have struggled with legalism. In the past, what ideas did you struggle with being legalistic about? What eventually changed your mind? In what areas do you find that legalism still lingers in your life?

8. What happens to you when you lose sight of who Jesus truly is? Have you experienced a situation that was stressful but you felt calm or focused because you trusted that God would take care of you? Describe it.

9. We're told that one of the fruits of the Spirit is joy. Do you think there's a difference between happiness and joy?

- FURTHER READING -

Galatians 3:19-29 — 1 John 5:1-5 — 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

- PRAYER PROMPT -

“The worst moment for an atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank,” G. K. Chesterton wrote, going on to say, “I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

What are the sorts of things you thank God for? Why do you thank him for some parts of your life but not others? (For example, many believers say grace over their daily meals but not over the fact they can walk each day.) How often do you thank God for things like salvation or the mercy of listening to all of your prayers? Make a list of 10 things you don't typically thank God for but would really miss if they were gone. Talk to God about these things (at least once, preferably more often).



Transforming Lives Through the Message and Mission of Jesus Christ

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