

## Journey Into God's Word



**Genesis 11-23**

**Psalms 11-23**

**Matthew 8-14**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is my third letter to you! In this one I want to remind you that true faith results in obedience. It is not an empty shallow response resulting in a simple verbal acknowledgement. James 2:19 says, "even the demons believe and tremble." Many who claim to believe have a faith that is even less than demonic faith. At least the demons have enough faith that they tremble because they know what a mighty God governs the universe. Some believe they are saved because they have verbalized a proclamation of faith. Yet a study of the scriptures reveals that much more is involved.

From our reading of Genesis 1-23, Psalms 1-23, and Matthew 1-14, we see that saving faith results in obedience to the living God. Noah heard the word of the Lord and he obeyed. In Genesis 6:22 and Genesis 7:5 we read, "And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him." Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness." True faith results in obedience to the directions of the Living God. Noah in obedience built an ark and he and his family were saved. Abram in obedience left his native country and moved under God's direction into a new area. God promises Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation only to have Abraham put his only son on the altar (Gen. 22). Why do you think He did this? In Isaac's case a ram in the thicket became his substitute sacrifice; how can the ram be compared to what Jesus did for all of us?

How did Lot's greedy desire for the best of everything lead him into captivity and the ultimate loss of everything he owned, including his wife? Some of those caught in the cult of prosperity theology use Abraham as an example of how faith always leads to riches. Cite the example when Abraham was willing to take the worst land so that he would not have to camp near Sodom. How does Jesus respond to the devil in Matthew 4:8 when Satan says, "All this I will give you, if you bow down and worship me?"

Jesus begins his ministry by declaring in Matthew 4:6, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." Why is repentance necessary in order for salvation to take place? After Jesus drove the demons out of the man into a herd of pigs in Matthew 8:25-34, we see the people in that town asking Jesus to leave their region. Why do you feel some people value possessions more than the human life that Jesus delivered? In Matthew 9:22 we see Jesus telling the woman who has been healed as a result of touching His cloak, "your faith has healed you" and in Matthew 9:29 Jesus says to the blind man, "According to your faith it will be done to you." What do you think faith is? In light of

Hebrews 11:35-39 does faith always produce wealth and worldly success? If not, then what does it do?

It is fact God cares deeply about the needs of the poor. In Psalms 12:5 we read, "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise, says the Lord." Read Genesis 21:15-19 and explain how it describes God's compassion for those in need. God promises in Psalms 19:18, "But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish." Jesus declares in Matthew 11:28, "come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Jesus knows; He cares and has experienced the hardship of life. He states in Matthew 8:20, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." Now He tells us to trust in Him, remembering that those, "who stand firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22) This means we must do more than just follow Jesus like those who hung around as he traveled. We must dedicate ourselves totally to Him. In Matthew 10:38, 39 he says, "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

You may be asking, but what about those doubts I find myself struggling with? In Genesis 17:22-27 we see that in spite of his doubts Abraham followed God's command. As Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" In Psalms 19 we see that God reveals Himself in two ways. In verses 1-6 we see God reveals Himself through His creation. In verses 7-11 we see God's revelation in His Word. The Bible reveals to us Jesus Christ the One who is the way, the truth and the life, (John 14:6). How do you see Christ, His life, death and resurrection spoken of in the following Psalms? Psalm 2:7, 16:8-10, 22:1-21, 22:15, 22:18, 22:22.

We see that God reveals Himself through the wonders of creation, and through His Word which introduces us to the one Mary was to call Jesus, "because He will save His people from their sins." Realizing this, why do you believe it is so important that we share the scriptures with those who are only relying on the wonders of creation to know God?

Sin involves rebelliousness against God's purpose and will for our lives. In Genesis 11:3-4 we see the people wanting to build a tower that will reach the sky and make them famous. People today are still making the same mistake of building "towers" to honor themselves. These towers may be big houses, a big name, a big bank account or anything that takes first place in their lives other than God. Abraham chose to make God number one in his life. As a result, God made three promises to Abraham, which included the Land of Canaan, many descendants and a promise to bless Abraham and make him a blessing to the world. Please contrast the results of those who built the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:8, 9) and Abraham's life of obedience to God.

To live a life of faith is to move into the unknown. It involves surrendering that which is closest to us, as Abraham did in Genesis 22 as he placed Isaac on the alter. A life of faith is resting in the knowledge that God is Love and He has everything under control. "I trust your love; and I feel like celebrating because you rescued me. You have been good to me, Lord, and I will sing about you." (Psalm 13:5,6)

The tensions I often experience as I try to live a life of faith are expressed in Psalm 22. When I don't see answers to my prayers right away, I feel like crying out, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me? Why are you so far away? Won't you listen to my groans and come to my rescue? I cry out day and night, but you don't answer, and I can never rest." (Psalm 22:1, 2) For over ten weeks now, I have been praying about something close to my heart that I have not seen answered. Yet I know that faith is the evidence of that not seen. Therefore I can keep on going knowing that, "The Lord doesn't hate or despise the helpless in all of their troubles. When I cried out, he listened and did not turn away." (Psalm 22:24) Now I must be patient remaining steadfast in the work of the Lord as I await His answer. But, it seems so hard to wait. To halt particularly when I am hungry for change, angry, lonely, or tired seems almost impossible at times. Yet, how essential it is that we stop in the moment of need and consider our own inadequacy, in the midst of the Lord's all-sufficiency and find our hope in Him. (Psalms 33:20-22) When we don't wait for God by trusting Him we forfeit the blessing of His divine provisions.

Prayer is the essential activity of waiting for God. It is the acknowledgement of our helplessness and the need for His powerful divine intervention. Prayer is the antidote for the disease of self-confidence and self control which opposes God receiving the glory for His miraculous provisions.

In Matthew 7:7, 8, Jesus tells us, "Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who searches will find. And the door will be opened for everyone who knocks." What does this verse mean to you? Please also read verses 9, 10, and 11 and explain what you believe Jesus is trying to tell you at this time.

Faith is absolutely essential when it comes to powerful praying. As Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would. 'And his servant was healed at that very hour.'" (Matthew 8:13) Yet when the storms of life arise I know its easy to react as the disciples did when they went and woke Jesus as He slept in the boat declaring, "Lord save us! We're going to drown!" Jesus, "replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm." (Matthew 8:25, 26) Jesus says, "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:34) If Jesus says this, then why do you think we worry so much? "Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' He said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed from that moment!" (Matthew 9:22) "Then He touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith will it be done to you,' and their sight was restored!" (Matthew 9:29) Faith calls for absolute obedience. Such obedience can

result in even members of our own family opposing us. What does Matthew 10:32-39 have to say about this?

In the midst of rejection by not only the world but even those from our families Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) How does Matthew 12:18-21 describe the ministry of Jesus? What a joy it is to know that as I come to him like a bruised reed carrying a heavy burden I am told in verse 20, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Jesus is our burden carrier.

Please look at the parables in Matthew 13, which describe the Kingdom of God. After reading them please put into your own words what you think the Kingdom of God is.

Jesus gets word that his cousin and close friend John the Baptist has been killed. He tries to get alone but a big crowd follows Him. Even though Jesus is grieving what does He do in Matthew 14:15-21? After this happens we read, "immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray." (Matthew 14:22, 23) What happens next? What did the disciples do when they saw Jesus walking on the lake in verse 26? Look at what Jesus said. It is the same words He is saying to you and me every time we start to panic. "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Peter responds by getting out of the boat to walk to Jesus on the water. Everything is all right as long as he keeps his eyes on Jesus. "But when he saw the wave, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord save me!'" (Matthew 14:30) What does this tell you about where we need to focus our eyes and mind when we are walking on the "waters" of life by faith? As Peter cried out "Lord save me," we read immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "'You of little faith.' He said, 'why did you doubt?'" (Matthew 14:31)

Let us now continue to journey throughout the Bible by reading this next week. Genesis 24-38, Psalms 24-38, and Matthew 15-21. My prayer is that God will continue to guide you and direct you as you faithfully read His Word. May the Holy Spirit grant to you wisdom as you read to recognize God's special calling on your life.

Yours in Christ,

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