

# Abide

PRAYER PRACTICES FOR *TROUBLED TIMES*

**BIBLE STUDY**  
By Carolyn Bira





# ABIDE BIBLE STUDY

## Session #1 - Rest

*During the life of Jesus on earth, the word He chiefly used when speaking of the relations of the disciples to Himself was: "Follow me." When about to leave for heaven, He gave them a new word, in which their more intimate and spiritual union with Himself in glory should be expressed. That chosen word was: "Abide in me."*

©1895 Murray, Andrew. *Abide in Christ*.

### Open your study time with prayer.

Dear Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. First, You deserve all honor and praise and it is joy to join with all of creation, declaring Your greatness. Thank You for the gift of this time to study Your Word. Holy Spirit, You are welcome here. Please grant insight, inspiration, and enlighten my heart and mind. Thank You for everything that You will pour out. In Jesus' name, Amen.

<sup>1</sup>He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will **abide** in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup>I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." *Psalm 91:1-2*



*These are the Hebrew letters for the word for Abide. [Pronounced lin] On the following page, you will find a place to interact with these letters. Feel free to color them, write on them, or whatever helps you remember them during the study. At the end of the study are notes about each of these Hebrew characters. You are free to start at the end if that would enhance your study.*

In 1994, I was diagnosed with oral cancer. The story is long and filled with God's presence throughout a challenging journey. In the midst of the diagnosis, I was very clear with God that if He would just miraculously heal me, I would forever sing His praises to the world and tell the story of His divine deliverance. In my puny humanity, I thought I was making a pretty good offer. But He always has a better way and His choice for me was to endure that trial with Him by my side so that I could learn lessons about what it means to abide in Him.

On the day of my surgery, one thing stands out in my memory. After going through all of the prep for surgery, I remember laying on a gurney, being transported to the surgical unit. It was just like you see on TV. The overhead lights flashing by, one by one, the voices of the nurses, and the feel of blankets on my skin. And what was I hearing in my mind? "Well, I don't like this." That was it. Over and over, "I don't like this." Trust me when I say, abiding with Jesus was the last thing on my mind. But then, in the operating room, my surgeon looked into my eyes and said, "I always pray before surgery." And he began to say a short prayer, inviting Jesus to take care of me and guide his hands through the surgery. You see, Jesus was already there, abiding with me. I just needed someone to point it out. Graciously, God gave me a doctor who knew how to do that.

The Hebrew for the word *Abide* carries the idea of safety, security, and peace. In its purest sense, it's about being able to sleep through the night without a care in the world. It literally means, *to lodge, pass the night, abide*.

**What does a good night's sleep look like for you? What conditions need to be met in order for you to wake up refreshed?**

---

---

---

---

# ABIDE

*Lin*

לִינָה

Dr. Charles Stanley (Baptist minister from Atlanta, GA) tells the story of his sermon prep time and it is centered around – sleeping. He has a prayer closet and that was the place where he went to talk the message over with God. Deeply chagrined, he confessed he would go into his closet and spread his research out before the Lord, seeking God’s wisdom for that message. But many times, he would fall asleep in that closet, to awaken later filled with apologies to God for falling asleep in His presence. Then one day, he was struck (or perhaps instructed) by God, that what better place to fall asleep than in the arms of His Father.

**Have you ever fallen asleep during your prayer time? What were (are) your feelings about that?**

---

---

### Elijah and another Miraculous Encounter with God

In 1 Kings 18, we are told the miraculous story of Elijah and the Baal worshippers. That’s a story that needs to be read at least once a year, if not 3 or 4 times. God’s mercy, faithfulness, and magnificent power are on display in this recounting of one man against an evil world. But the true lessons of that event are made apparent in the next chapter, where Elijah experiences God up close and personal. While he was almost entertained by the antics of the prophets of Baal in chapter 18, he is overawed by the wonderful God He serves just a few hours later.

### Let’s Review

Elijah is a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, after God’s people have divided into two kingdoms; the Southern Kingdom of Judah (made up of 2 tribes) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel (made up of the other 10 tribes). Sometimes these two kingdoms came together against a common enemy and sometimes they fought with one another. Sadly, the Kingdom of Israel wanders far from the Lord on every occasion. Not one of their kings is a godly man and they all openly embrace pagan idols. The Kingdom of Judah does only slightly better.

Elijah has an uphill battle, trying to get the kings of Israel to worship the True God. In fact, he spends a great deal of time pronouncing God’s judgment on the people. He lives in the region of Samaria and serves God under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The conflict between this man of God and the prophets of Baal explodes in an epic battle between the two sides. You can read the whole story in 1 Kings 18 if you want. Needless to say, God (through Elijah) devastates the Baal worshippers, inciting the wrath of Jezebel and Ahab. Even after being part of miraculous events, Elijah is filled with fear over the death threats that come from the Queen.

Now, read **1 Kings 19:1-18** and find out what happens to Elijah.

<sup>1</sup>Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup>Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” <sup>3</sup>Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. <sup>4</sup>But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” <sup>5</sup>And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” <sup>6</sup>And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot



stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. <sup>7</sup>And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." <sup>8</sup>And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

<sup>9</sup>There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>10</sup>He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." <sup>11</sup>And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup>And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. <sup>13</sup>And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>14</sup>He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." <sup>15</sup>And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. <sup>16</sup>And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup>And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. <sup>18</sup>Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

**What are your initial reactions to this story? Would you have done anything differently?**

---

---

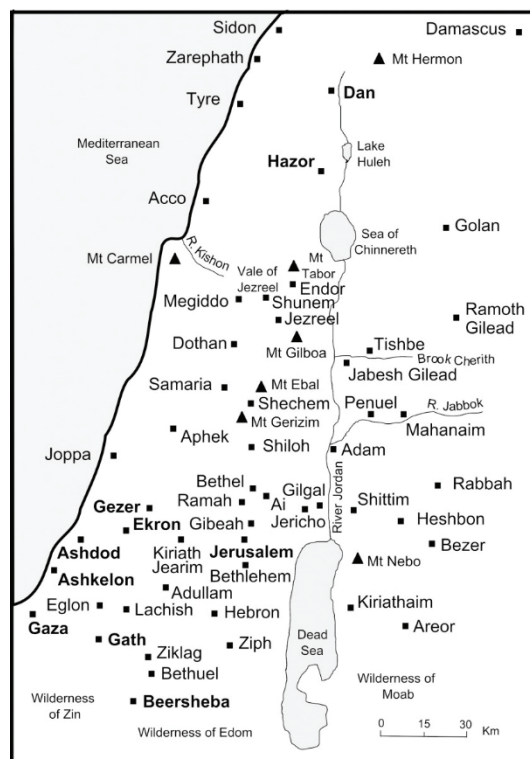
---

Just for some perspective, find the pertinent locations on the map provided.

- **Mt. Carmel** – where the battle with the Baal worshippers took place
  - o Look on the western coast by the Mediterranean Sea.
- **Beersheba** – where Elijah stops to rest under a broom tree
  - o Way at the bottom of the map, almost to Edom
- **Mt. Horeb** – isn't on this map, as it is located in the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula.
  - o You can just write it in under the map

What we know is that Elijah *ran* the 70 miles from Mt. Carmel to Beersheba! No wonder he was tired. And while he laid down beneath that broom tree out of despair, God comes to him anyway through a ministering angel. And what two things does that angel tell him to do? It may seem simple, but the answer is important. Write it down.

---



Has rest ever been a vital part of your ability to abide with or in the Lord? What was that experience like for you? Did it help?

---

---

---

Now let's examine the second half of Elijah's journey, for there he encounters God Himself. It took Elijah 40 days to journey into the Sinai and make his way to Mt. Horeb. (Most scholars believe Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai were one in the same. But there is not 100% agreement on that.) When he gets there, he finds a cave to camp in and it is there that God pays him a visit.

God asks Elijah just one question. (**verses 9 AND 13**) "What are you doing here?" That is when Elijah launches into a defense of his activity. He complains before the Lord. What is interesting here is God's response to Elijah's non-answer. Three events take place. What are they?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

But remarkably, God is not present in any of those cataclysmic events. How does God show up?

---

What does that tell you about God?

---

---

---

If you haven't watched the Abide video called "Abiding Despite Layers of Distraction" on lamenting prayers, this might be a great time to watch that!

As God comes to Elijah, it is in silence or at best a whisper. Just being in the presence of God gives Elijah the power to continue on his assigned tasks. Think about that just a moment longer. **Just abiding in God's presence gives us the power to continue – with our assigned tasks.**

Do you have any response to that truth? Does it inspire any kind of action on your part?



One cannot help but think of that very powerful and popular verse from Psalm 46:10.

*"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"*

That word "still" also means relax!

**What does it look like for you to RELAX into God's presence?**

**What does it look like for you to ABIDE with Him?**

**Do those two things look anything alike?**

---

---

You may decide to end the study at this point. Please remember to **close with prayer**. If not, you can go onto the more challenging portion of the study below.

---

---

## Something EXTRA about the Hebrew word for *Abide*

Hebrew is a pictorial alphabet. While English is made up of letters that form words, Hebrew is made up of characters that "look like" the things they stand for. As a result, each word lends itself to being a "picture" of what it means. The midrash (*This is an ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the biblical text.*

*The earliest Midrashim come from the 2nd century AD, although much of their content is older.* ©2021 Oxford University Press) teaches that God Himself taught Adam the Hebrew alphabet, who then passed that information onto his children and grandchildren. Examining this information can lead us to a deeper understanding of the word *abide*. The following gives you a small snapshot of what this 3-character word means – literally.



### Lamed

- The central character of the Hebrew alphabet. Also the largest and tallest.
- As this largest letter is in the center, it is known as the HEART of the alphabet
- Its literal meaning is "King of Kings"
- The character preceding lamed is Mem (מ). It means "throne of glory"
- The character following lamed is Kaf (כ). It means "kingdom".
- Those three characters, at the center of the Alphabet say *"The throne of glory for the King of kings."*
- As well as looking like a throne, the letter resembles a shepherd's staff or goad, which can lead us to think of the authority of God in our lives.
- Lamed has its root in teaching or learning.  
(*And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am **teaching** (lamed) you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Deuteronomy 4:1*)
- (The following information is given out of curiosity only. I am in no way suggesting we submit ourselves to Jewish mysticism.) The spelling of the word *Lamed* also has the same numerical value as "the heart of Eve". According to Jewish mysticism, this suggests that the woman's heart is essential for a complete understanding of reality.






## Yod

- Yod is the smallest of the Hebrew characters.
- It is also the first movement made with the pen for ALL of the letters.
- As the smallest letter, it has come to be associated with humility but also as the first mark made for all the letters, it has come to be associated with God's omnipresence.
- Since it is part of every letter, it has also come to symbolize the "spark of God's Spirit" in everything.
- Note that there is a serif (the little "hook") at the top of the letter. It points upwards to God. Should the person transcribing the Torah leave that serif off, it invalidates that entire copy of the Torah. There are no mistakes in God's Word.
- Pictographically, it looks like a hand reaching heavenward in prayer or a person kneeling in prayer.
- Yod literally means *arm* or *hand*.



## Vav

- Vav looks like a tent peg or hook – that which anchors a tent in place.
- It appears in Genesis 1:1, joining heaven and earth, especially in spiritual matters.
- Six is the number associated with Vav as 6 is the number for *man*, since we were created on the 6th day.
- While the Torah is to be transcribed with perfection, there is one exception, regarding the Vav. In Numbers 25:13, we learn of Phineas, (the grandson of Aaron) who kills a man and woman who are having a sinful sexual relationship. Because he was "jealous for God and made atonement" the word *shalom* is written with a broken Vav. 
- The Vav is restored in Ruth 4:18, when Perez is born, one of the ancestors of the Messiah, who would come and restore the broken relationship between God and man. The Vav is restored through the obedience of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ.

With all of the above information, we get a picture of *abide*. It leads us to an image of God, seated on His throne, and yet reaching down into our lives. He grants us an anchor, support, and strength. At the same time, on our knees, we reach up to that throne, knowing that He is firmly in control of our lives even to the point of securing our salvation.

### Psalm 91:1

*<sup>1</sup>He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.*

As we ponder what it means to "abide in the shadow of the Almighty", perhaps this deeper knowledge of the Hebrew characters will enhance your understanding. Did you have any ah-ha moments as you thought about these characters? Does abiding come with more intensity?

### Close your study time with prayer.

Heavenly Father, I am comforted by the knowledge that You are ever present with me. Even when I'm afraid, stressed out, or over-worked. Help me to remember that in the harried moments of life and draw me back into a place of abiding with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# ABIDE BIBLE STUDY

## Session #2 - Obedience

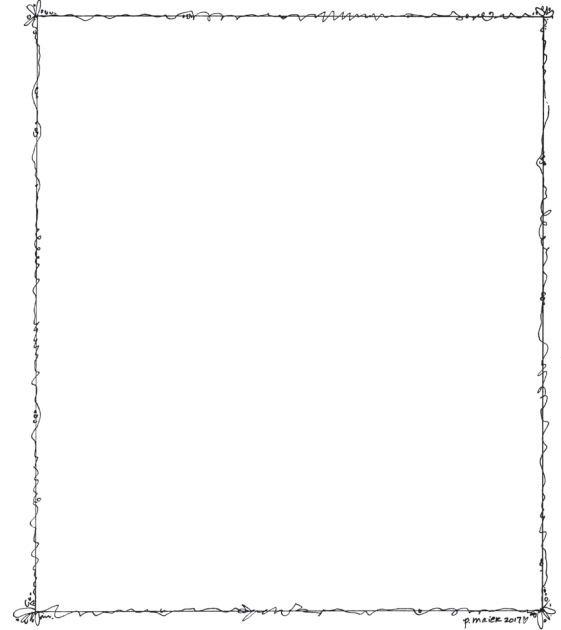
Open your Bible study with prayer and TWO readings of 1 John 2:26-28. (Before the prayer, select 2 people to read the passage aloud.)

As the opening prayer is spoken and the passage read.  
Allow some quiet space for reflections about the passage from 1 John.  
Write some thoughts or draw an image that occurs to you.

Dear Lord God. We praise Your name and worship at Your feet. This time is Your, dear God, and we are grateful to have it as a part of our day. Holy Spirit, we submit to Your presence and leading. Shape our thoughts and invigorate our spirits as we enjoy this time in Your Word. You are the Author of tremendous blessings and we give you thanks. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### 1 John 2:26–28

<sup>26</sup>I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. <sup>27</sup>But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. <sup>28</sup>And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.



After you've allowed several minutes for everyone to process the opening passage (which we will revisit at the end of the study) it is time to dig into the story for this study. The Book of Daniel, written about 600 years before the birth of Christ, contains a recounting of the very exciting lives of 4 men who were brought into Babylonian captivity during their teen years. What we read of their stories shows young men growing into adulthood knowing how to abide in the Lord. It was a matter of survival. The first 6 chapters of Daniel chronicle the lives of what I call the first "small group". Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are shown to gather for prayer, support, and godly wisdom as they face a life that was not of their choosing.

One of the most famous stories in the Bible is that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Fiery Furnace. This story is a part of my childhood, having heard it from a very early age on a repeated basis. Both my grandmother and father told it to me often. And I enjoyed it every time.

Read it aloud – even if you're alone!

### Daniel 3:1-30 ESV (selected verses)

<sup>1</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather ... all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>3</sup>Then ... all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>4</sup>And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup>that when you hear the sound of ... every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup>And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." <sup>7</sup>Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of ... every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

<sup>8</sup> ... at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. <sup>9</sup>They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup>You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of ... every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. <sup>11</sup>And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup>There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

<sup>13</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup>Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? <sup>15</sup>Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

<sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup>If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup>But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

<sup>19</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. <sup>20</sup>And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup>Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>22</sup>Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. <sup>23</sup>And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

<sup>24</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." <sup>25</sup>He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

<sup>26</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. <sup>27</sup>And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. <sup>28</sup>Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup>Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." <sup>30</sup>Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.



You may have been able to recount this story from memory. But reading it again and again never gets old, because the miraculous always builds our faith and puts us in touch with the mighty power of God.

**What’s your favorite part of this story? Why?**

---

---

Before the arrival of Jesus on the scene our three heroes face accusation, indictment, sentencing, and punishment; all in a very short amount of time. What we find is that the three never waver, no matter what faces them. And never once do they plead or beg for things to be different. Many times, when we face disaster, our prayers are more about asking God to make it all go away rather than facing it while abiding in Him.

Nebuchadnezzar sees himself as king of a very large kingdom (which was true) and as one of the gods of that kingdom (which was ridiculous). God’s servants face three charges against them – all of which were accurate!

- 1. They didn’t pay attention to the king’s authority in this matter
- 2. They didn’t serve Babylonian gods
- 3. They didn’t bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue

The first charge focuses on the civil authority of the king, and the second and third charges focus on his religious authority. In the ancient Near East, the king was expected to be the highest authority in both the realms of the government and the national religion, which were inseparably intertwined (the opposite of the modern Western idea of the separation of church and state). The second and third charges are coordinated and illustrate the first charge: by their religious disobedience, the Judeans disregard the king’s royal authority and decree. In order to emphasize the two particular religious infractions as affronts to the king, they place the direct objects at the beginning of the clauses: literally, “*your gods* they do not serve, and *the statue of gold that you set up* they do not worship” (3:12). Their appeal is directly to Nebuchadnezzar’s person and authority in order to ensure that their accusation would not be simply dismissed as politicking motivated by jealousy. This is reinforced by their appeal to the exact wording of the royal decree (3:10–11), so that they could show a basis for their accusation in royal law. The emphatic placement of “your gods” in the accusation in 3:12 highlights that what is at stake is not simply civil authority (the king’s royal power), but religious loyalty and theological belief.

Steinmann, A. E. (2008). Daniel (pp. 182–183). Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House.

Interestingly, the three Hebrews were not falsely accused. They were guilty on all counts! So it is not surprising that they would not attempt a defense. Nebuchadnezzar turns the situation into a contest between their clearly inferior God, and himself and his more powerful gods. He did conquer their people after all – proof enough! They should bow down for that reason alone. He seeks to dissuade them from their faith. It does not work. Jesus faced a similar taunt as He hung on the cross. (Matthew 27:43)

One of the most outstanding aspects of this story is that the Hebrews chose not to answer the king’s accusations. They simply will not worship his idol. Jesus did the same thing as He stood mute before His accusers. Arguing in His own defense was a waste of time and did not match up with His plan of salvation. There was no need to waste words.

**How often are you able to hold in words of self-defense when they will achieve no purpose? Could you stand mute or declare you had “no need” to answer?**

---

---

In another bold move, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do not tell God what to do or even discuss it with Him. They simply hand themselves over to His will. "...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king." This is a powerful trust moment for God's people. None of us can truly predict what we would do, but would you have such faith?

---

---

---

### Understanding Theophany

There are numerous instances in the Old Testament where Jesus shows up in human form – *before His arrival as an infant*. These events are known as *Theophanies* or *Christophanies*. The appearance of a fourth person in the fire with our heroes is one such event. A theophany, by definition is *an appearance of the divine*. It is word that you will not find in the Scriptures. It is a term coined by the Greeks. *Theo* is "God" and *phany* is "appears". Some of those Old Testament appearances include:

- God walking with Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:8)
- God sharing His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham (Genesis 18:22-33)
- God wrestling with Jacob by the river (Genesis 32:22-32)
- God appearing to Gideon to spur him into action against their enemies (Judges 6:11-27)
- God appearing in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3)
- Can your group think of any more examples? Jot them below.

**If you know any of the stories that we consider Theophanies, recount the response of the people present. What did Abram do? Or Gideon? Or Jacob? Their responses were not identical. Give each of the above stories to different members of your group and have them read the story, then report back to the whole group.**

Also included as theophanies by most commentators are the Pillars of Fire and Cloud that led the Children of Israel through the desert (throughout Exodus) and the fire and torch that completed the Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Mentioned above are instances when the Preincarnate Christ came in human form to His people in times of struggle, to deliver a message, commission, or give instruction. Jesus, the human form that God takes for our salvation, is the part of the Trinity that shows up on these occasions. He stands in the fire that day when Nebuchadnezzar tossed God's people into the furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar is forced to acknowledge indirectly that they serve God first and that they [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] were right in placing God's commands (especially the First Commandment) above his demands. Moreover, his description of Yahweh, the God of Israel, as "the Most High God" is a way of referring to God that both the Judeans and the pagan Nebuchadnezzar can accept. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges this God as above all other gods, even though he himself has not become a monotheist. At the same time, the Judeans can agree with the title and understand it to mean that the one true and triune God is Most High because all other's gods are nothing.

Steinmann, A. E. (2008). Daniel (p. 196). Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House..

Even Nebuchadnezzar is forced to recognize there is something (or Someone) supernatural moving through the fire. This non-believer is allowed to experience the presence of Jesus in his midst. While we don't really know if Nebuchadnezzar ever totally embraces the One True God, he certainly had several chances.

**Do God's people experience Theophanies today? Why or why not?**

---

---

---

**(Note: Theophanies are not needed today, as we are post Pentecost. The Holy Spirit lives with and in His people. We are in a constant state of "theophany" even though we do not see the Human Jesus walking around with us.)**

God is in the business of saving His people. That was the work of Jesus in the New Testament for all of God's people. Why would He not do the same for His children in the Old Testament?

In thinking through this story again, with the goal of learning how to "abide in Jesus" it occurs to me that our three heroes were not the ones doing the "abiding". No, that role fell to Jesus Himself. While in the midst of the flames, there was Jesus with them. This theophany displayed God's constant attention to us, even and especially in our deepest need.

**When has God been there for you – attending to your deepest needs? Has He ridden the gurney down the halls of the hospital on your way to surgery? Or perhaps sat with you in the waiting room as you waited for a loved one? Has He held your hand through a long, lonely night after the death of a loved one? When have you known the presence of an abiding Savior?**

---

---

---

Looking for Jesus when the struggles come along is by definition *abiding in Him*, for He is always ready to be found by His children. In obedience, such as the remarkable strength of conviction found in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we are actively *abiding* with the Lord. Our three faith-filled heroes didn't promise Nebuchadnezzar they would survive. They simply said that God would take care of them. God made the choice to be truly miraculous by sending Jesus into the mix. Perhaps we too need to step aside and allow God the space to do something truly unexpected. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chose obedience, they certainly didn't expect Jesus to show up in person! That points us to reality – when we think we are *abiding* with the Lord, He is actually there doing all the work, abiding with us. His presence is manifested in our situation and we are blessed, comforted, strengthened, and loved.



## Revisit the Key Verse

### 1 John 2:26–28 (ESV)

*<sup>26</sup>I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. <sup>27</sup>But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. <sup>28</sup>And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.*

**Abiding in the Lord is a symbiotic arrangement. But God goes first. We must bear in mind that while it seems like we're doing all the work when it comes to abiding, we are not. God is the author and source of that strength. Obedience to His ways puts us in the middle of His will. But of course, we all struggle with obedience sometimes. Where can you draw strength from the remarkable obedience (and courage!) of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abenego?**

---

---

---

**Close your time together in silent prayer. You may write out your prayer below or draw something that remains in your memory of a time when God was certainly there for you in the fire.**



# ABIDE BIBLE STUDY

## Session #3 - Surrender

Facebook Live 4/21/21 8 pm

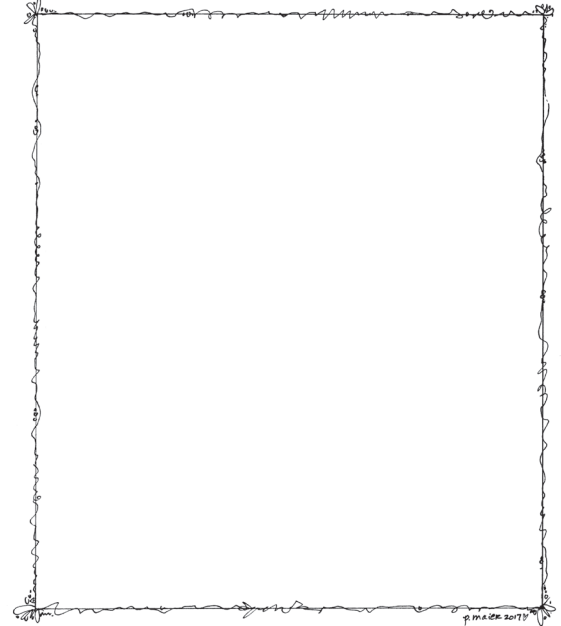
**Open your Bible study with prayer and TWO readings of John 15:4-7.** (Before the prayer, select 2 people to read the passage aloud.)

As the opening prayer is spoken and the passage read.  
Allow some quiet space for reflections about the passage from 1 John.  
Write some thoughts or draw an image that occurs to you.

Dear Lord God. We praise Your name and worship at Your feet. This time is Your, dear God, and we are grateful to have it as a part of our day. Holy Spirit, we submit to Your presence and leading. Shape our thoughts and invigorate our spirits as we enjoy this time in Your Word. You are the Author of tremendous blessings and we give you thanks. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### John 15:4-7

*<sup>4</sup>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*



The Bible is filled with stories of God's people and the way they interact with Him. Some of the stories are long, some are short, and most carry far fewer details than students of the Bible would like. One of the most important figures in God's story is Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Her life is filled with miracles, beauty, and the most excruciating pain of all – the death of a Child. And her story begins in a moment of total surrender to the will of God.

### Luke 1:38

*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*

## Mary, the Mother of Jesus - a LIFETIME of Abiding

The exercise below is meant to be experienced in 3 parts.

1. Look up each of the passages that describe a scene from Mary's life – done as a group  
[Stages 2 & 3 will come at the end of this session and the beginning of Session #4]
2. Build a similar timeline for your own life – done individually
3. Share your timeline (as much or little as you want) with the group

Look up each of the Bible passages below. Write a brief description of that event in her life. Then (if you want) draw a small icon or drawing of that event in the box provided. In doing so, you will create a timeline of Mary's life as it is chronicled in the Gospels.

❖ Luke 1:26-38 -----



❖ Luke 1:39-56 -----



❖ Luke 2:1-20 & Matthew 1:18-25 -----



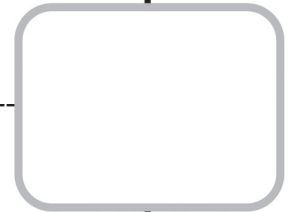
❖ Luke 2:22-39 -----



❖ Matthew 2:1-12 -----



❖ Matthew 2:13-18 -----



❖ Matthew 2:19-23 -----



❖ Luke 2:41-52 -----



❖ John 2:1-12 -----

❖ Matthew 12:46-50 -----

❖ John 19:25 -----

As we examine Mary's life, we must be in a place of admiration for this young woman, most likely in her mid-teens yet so incredibly surrendered to the Lord's will for her life. The story of The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) is nothing short of miraculous. She surrenders her whole life into service to the Lord. Those of you who are parents know that this is a lifetime commitment. Once you bear a child, you're a parent forever! That's what Mary agrees to when she utters the words, *"may it be to me as you have said."*

Throughout her life, we find that she continues to be subject to the will of the Father. Jesus' birth, while miraculously begun, is just a simple human birth. I'm sure there was moaning, pain, and tears. But then the little Family is pursued by King Herod and greeted by Wise Men from the east. A short stint in Egypt is followed by a regular life in Nazareth. But, while Mary is indeed surrendered, we do find her rise up a couple of times. She searches desperately for an adolescent Jesus who chooses not to inform her that he's going to stay in Jerusalem – alone – for a few days. We see her instruct Jesus to make a few gallons of wine for a friend's wedding. And we mourn with her as she watches her firstborn Son die a horrible death. But we never see her slip from the faith. We never see her refuse to surrender her life into God's hands. She abides with Him throughout.

**As you think about what we know of Mary's life, what is the most surprising or remarkable for you? Why?**

---

---

---

In the end, Mary embraces God's plan for her life. Could you easily admit that God has a perfect plan and are you willing to embrace it?

---

---

---

No discussion of Abiding with the Lord would be complete without looking at John, chapter 15. There, we find the *purpose* in abiding with the Lord – for indeed there is a purpose.

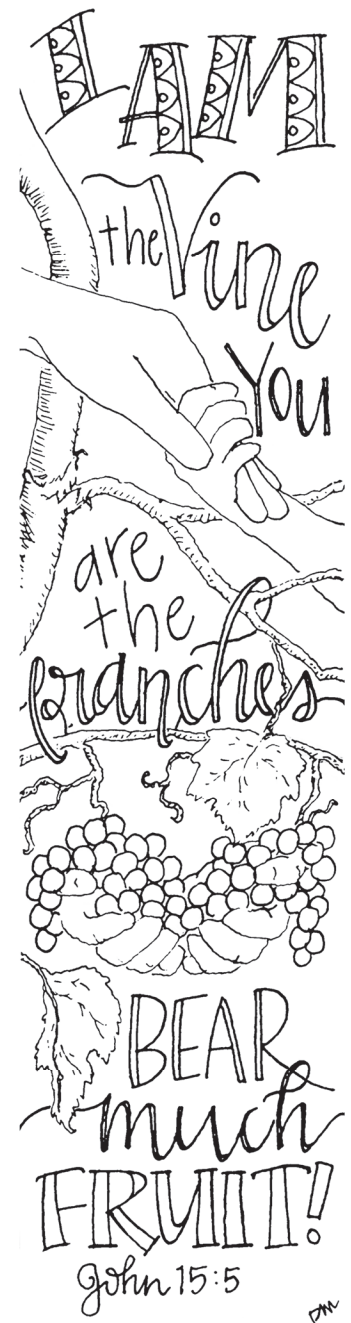
### John 15:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Let's pull this passage apart just a bit.

1. Jesus is saying these words to His disciples during the week before His Crucifixion. So these words are some of the last He will share with them. He wants to leave them with some crucial information before His death and resurrection.
2. As we learned in the study of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, abiding is a two-way street. Yes, we abide with the Lord (as best we can) but He also abides with us. Jesus starts out with this information. *Abide in me, and I in you.*
3. He brilliantly uses the idea of a grapevine to support this idea. This object lesson is multifaceted. Jesus Himself is the Vine – the strength and the source of all things. We hang onto the Vine as branches. Should we be separated from the Vine, we dry up and die. I have long thought of the sap that flows through the Vine as similar to the Holy Spirit. He is the One who provided the power for the branches to even bear the grapes. Fruit is only possible if you are attached to the Vine.
4. Abiding has a PURPOSE and that is to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.
5. The Greek word for *abide* in this passage is μένω *menō*; which means *to stay, abide, remain, await*. Notice in this definition we don't find any other action other than staying (remaining) with the Lord. When that is placed first, our fruit grows, such as God decides it should.

As you read these 5 points, what emerges as significant for your life? What kinds of changes might need to be made, with the help of God, to draw you into a deeper place of surrender?



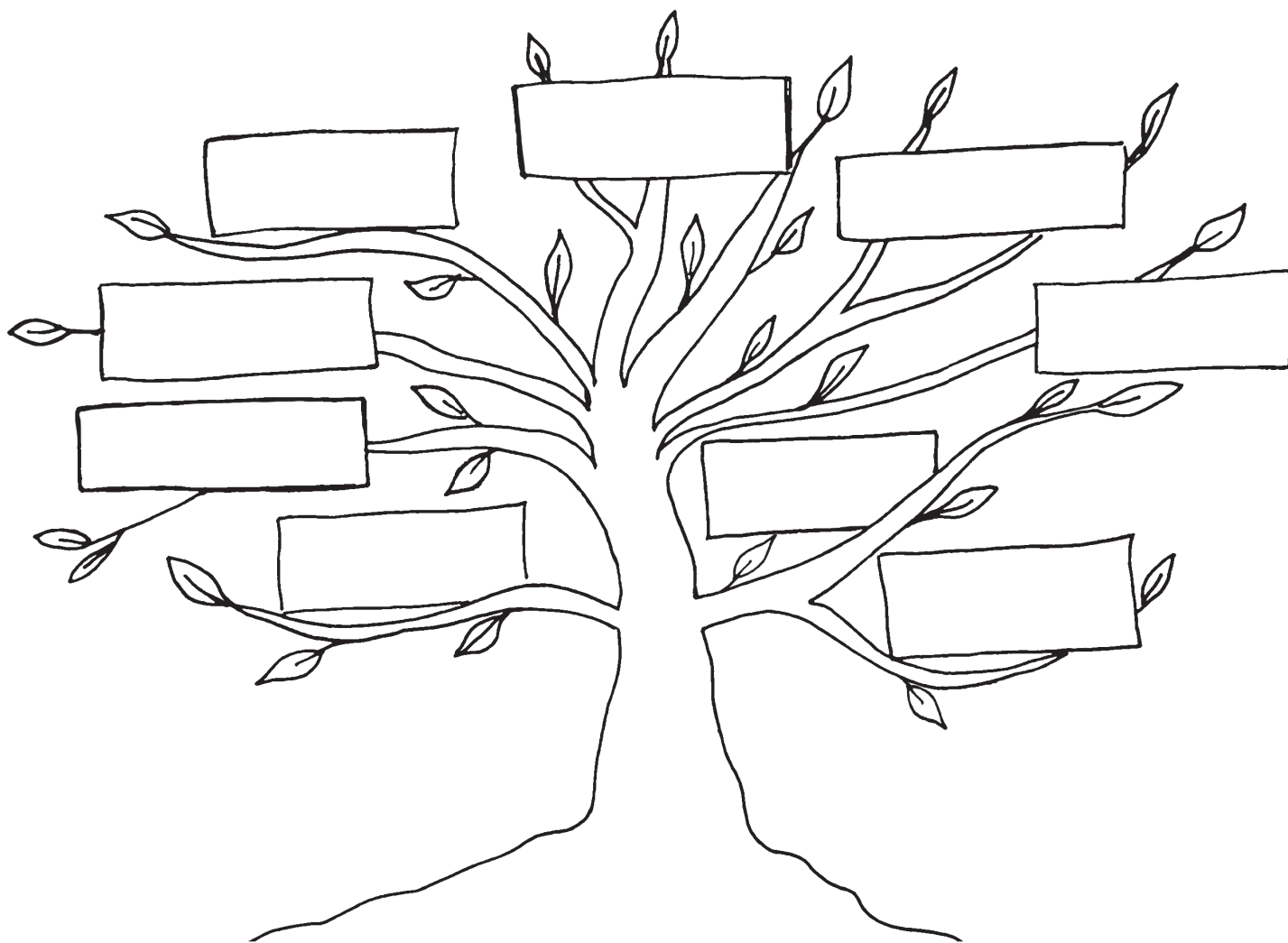
Often, we are caught up in the idea that we must go out and make something happen; we need to do something for God. We wrest the work from God's hands and make it our own. That is the antithesis of *abiding*. Now that doesn't mean we sit around and do nothing. So here's the tension. What do we do if we are going to be found in a place of *abiding*? What does that look like in your own life?

### Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Most of us know this passage as it declares the fruits that come with being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. These characteristics are indeed a part of every Christian's life. They are slightly less tangible than some of the other fruits that hang from the branches on the Vine. And while we include them, we must also remember that fruit includes things that have great impact on the Kingdom, like a life lived in witness to the saving work of Jesus Christ. Or a life lived in dedicated service to your family. Or perhaps you serve the Lord in ministry within your church (and that doesn't only apply to professional church workers). Or maybe you live each day "as unto the Lord." All of these are examples of the fruit born of the faith.

Take a moment to write the 9 fruits onto the tree. As you think about that question, remember – you are NOT the one who creates or generates these fruits. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Your job is simply to display the fruit. So, how do these spiritual characteristics (fruits) manifest in your life?



Have you surrendered any parts of your life to the Lord? Have you withheld any of your life from the Lord? To answer that question, you may have to dive a little deeper. Try not to give a flippant “sure I’ve surrendered” answer, because it probably isn’t entirely accurate. We all hold on to some things more tightly than others.

As you examine Mary’s timeline, perhaps you have begun to think about your own. Now, take a few minutes and place your life in a similar setting. You are, of course, free to focus on whatever you want, but this might be the time to think in terms of a spiritual timeline. What are the high points – and perhaps more importantly – the low points in your own life.

In the spaces below, write in the events that emerge as important for you and if a Bible passage was instrumental during that time, jot that down as well. You can even provide an icon or small drawing to go along with that event. Also, you can also write down what you may have learned along the way. Work on this throughout the upcoming week and share what you want to share next time.

Include moments of:

1. Importance – big events that had a spiritual impact
2. Surrender – when did you have to surrender into God’s hands?
3. Fruit – when did God use you to impact His Kingdom with the Gospel – think outside the box

### My Timeline (so far)

❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	

❖	_____	
❖	_____	
❖	_____	
❖	_____	
❖	_____	
❖	_____	

**[please feel free to add more paper if you need more spaces]**

**Next time you meet, you will have the opportunity to share what you may have learned about your own faith life you thought back through your life with the Lord.**

**Close your study time with prayer.**

Dear Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thank You for the numerous examples of people who surrendered themselves into Your will that we find in the Bible. Holy Spirit, enable in me a similar response to God's will and teach me how to experience You in that place of surrender. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



# ABIDE BIBLE STUDY

## Session #4 - Worship

### Open your time of Bible study with prayer.

Dear Lord, Praise and honor be to You alone, O God of all Creation. Thank You for Your Word and the time to spend read learning of Your great love and grace. Please fill this time with Your presence. Holy Spirit, bring inspiration and insight. Challenge my understanding and lead me deeper into You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

In the last session, you were invited to think through the spiritual journey you've had so far, giving attention to the high points, and the low. This may prove to be a long process and perhaps you've only noted a few events or insights. That's okay. Please tell your group whatever you're comfortable sharing from what you have so far.

### My Timeline

❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	
❖ _____	

Integral to life as a Christ follower is worship. Abiding in the Lord is experienced at its deepest sense when we take the time to worship God. Worship experiences are vast in number and content. Something that brings me into a place of worship may be boring in the eyes of another. And things that I used to disparage as a part of worship hold great value for me today. When I was a child, the sermon was a time to be bored – that isn't the case today.

**What is your favorite type / part of a worship service? Why?**

---

---

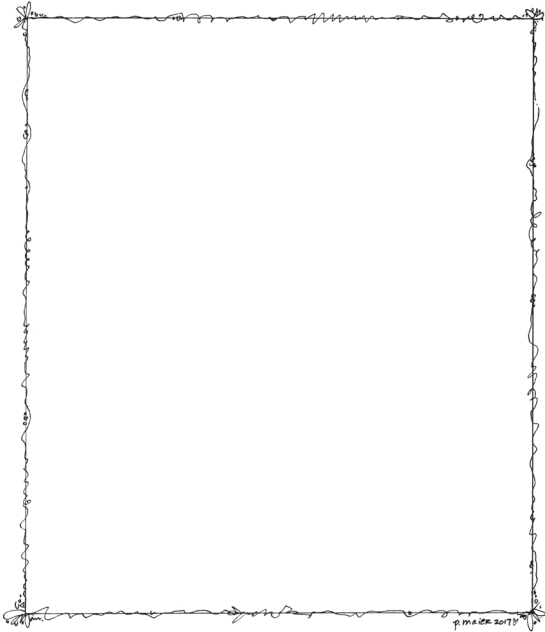
---

Worship is so important to the life of the believer that God uses one the Ten Commandment to impress that practice upon us.

*<sup>8</sup>Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.  
<sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)*

The command to worship is so specific as to even have time parameters placed around it. One seventh of our time is to be dedicated to God; to remembering who He is and what He has done. Also built into worship is rest. And it is not lost on me that a great many practitioners of Visual Faith exercises find the experience to be quite restful. For God, that is a place of holiness.

**What practices fall into the category of worship for you? Singing? Praying? Walking in nature? Reading a book about the Lord (other than the Bible)? Bible Study? When are you drawn into the presence of God and moved to fall before Him in praise? Write or draw something that displays that practice.**



Certainly one of the most unique places of worship we find in the Bible is that of a Roman prison. Paul and Silas find themselves incarcerated for working a miracle; they freed a slave girl from a demon. Read the story on the next page TWICE. Pay attention to the details and jot any questions or thoughts into the margin space provided.

## Acts 16:16-40

<sup>16</sup>As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." <sup>18</sup>And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. <sup>19</sup>But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. <sup>20</sup>And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. <sup>21</sup>They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." <sup>22</sup>The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup>And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup>Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup>About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup>and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. <sup>27</sup>When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup>But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup>And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup>Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup>And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup>And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup>And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup>Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

<sup>35</sup>But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." <sup>36</sup>And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." <sup>37</sup>But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." <sup>38</sup>The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. <sup>39</sup>So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup>So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

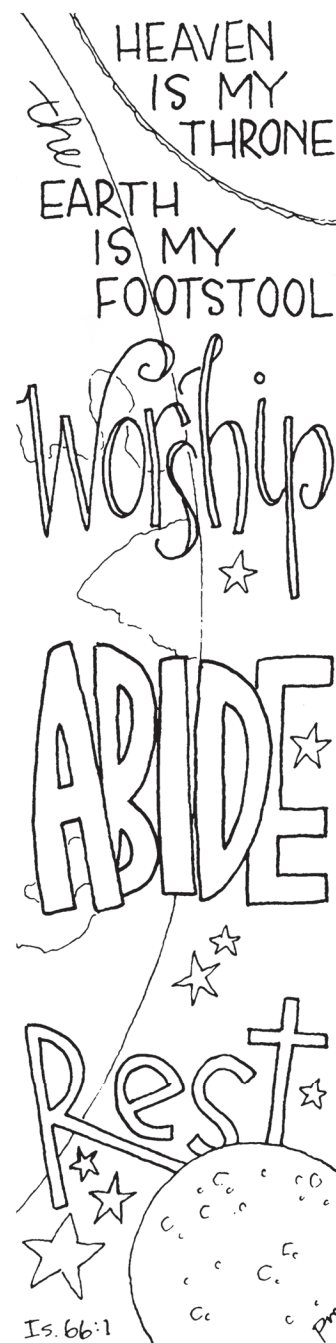
Oddly enough, sometimes when you do the right thing for the right reason the consequences are less than pleasant. Maybe you tap someone's car in the parking lot and bravely leave a note claiming responsibility only to be socked with a large bill for repairs. Maybe you speak truthfully to a friend about some behaviors that are negatively affecting those around them, and you lose your friend. Maybe you free a slave girl from an evil demon and then you get thrown into jail.

The owners of the slave girl who was rescued by Paul are not impressed. Their source of income has been freed of her demon. So they drag Paul and Silas into the town square and press charges. It is interesting that Paul and Silas are accused with trying to convert people. Proselytizing for Judaism was legal because it was a religion recognized and sanctioned by the Roman government. This was not the case for Christianity. It was still considered an illegal, unsanctioned sect. After soundly beating Paul and Silas (along with Timothy and Luke who were also there), they are all put under strict guard and chained to a wall in the guard's house. Then another curious thing happens. The imprisoned men choose to spend their incarceration in worship and praise. Instead of worrying about what the next day will bring - like an execution - they spend the time praising God and singing songs. I might have been able to sing a praise song - but it would have been pretty shaky! For me there are two miracles in this passage. Yes, there is that earthquake that frees Paul and his entourage from the chains. But there is also a bravery and boldness given to the missionaries that leads to singing in the face of death. That is the work of the Holy Spirit right there.

As is always the case with Scripture we get to see God's grace in action. As a result of all of these events, the jailer and his entire family are saved by the blood Jesus. The jailer is made ready to hear the Gospel as he listens to the worship songs sung in the face of death. Then, Paul quickly and simply proclaims the Gospel. The missionaries show mercy by not leaving the jail, thus sparing the life of the guard. [Being a Roman prison guard was dangerous duty. If your captives escaped, your life was forfeited.] That mercy, and probably several hours of hearing Paul and his friends worshiping and praying, moves his heart. He wants to know Jesus. God uses everything when it comes to reaching people with His love, including an unjust imprisonment.

**What would be your response should you find yourself in jail for doing something that was the right thing? Would you have had the bravery of faith to pray out loud and to sing joyously as you are chained to the wall and surrounded by guards?**

**Are there any moments of levity or joy in this story for you? Does this story move you to a place of worship?**



What it meant to be in a Roman prison during Bible times:

- Roman prisons were not meant for punishment. You were either awaiting trial or execution. If you were declared innocent at your trial, you were free to go. If you were declared guilty, the sentence was always death.
- If you escaped, your guards would be executed in your place.
- Food was not provided by the prison but if you had friends or family on the outside, they could bring you food and clothing.
- The wealthy were often allowed to be under house arrest (in their own home) until trial.
- The poor usually met their fate quickly and it generally proved to be fatal.
- Sometimes, those awaiting trial could choose voluntary exile instead.
- Roman imprisonment was generally preceded by being stripped naked and flogged – guilty or innocent. The wounds would then go untreated.

As you can see, being sent to a Roman prison was a terrible circumstance, and yet Paul and his companions find reason to worship. They knew how to abide in the presence of the Lord, despite hardship. People tend to go to one end of this spectrum or the other when struggle arises. They press into worship, or they avoid it. What direction do you go? Put a mark on the line that best represents your inclination.

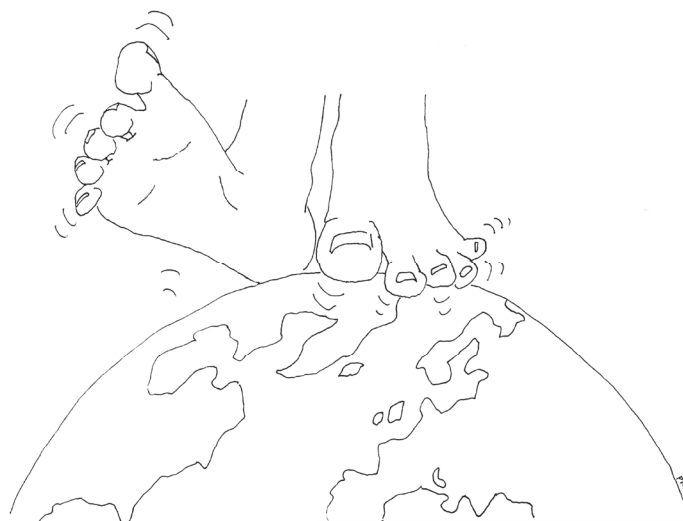


**What would be a similar circumstance in 2021? Your chances of being thrown into a prison to await death are probably (hopefully!) fairly slim. But life is not always pleasant. What could disrupt your worship life?**

### Isaiah 66:1

Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

Imagine with me, as Isaiah so aptly describes, the Lord residing on His throne, with the earth as His footstool. And He suddenly hears the singing of Paul and his companions as they languish in a Roman prison. The worship of His people delights the Lord, and he begins to tap his toes to the sound of their praises. This creates a little earthquake, and shackles fall off! I know – it's a flight of fancy born of a sanctified imagination. But God's miracles are rather like that sometimes. His people have come to a place of restful worship in a difficult situation. In the midst of this story, Paul and Silas have seen a flurry of miracles:



- Hundreds hear the Gospel
- A girl is freed from a demon
- God grants peace and rest in a time of trial
- Shackles are miraculously removed
- A guard and his entire family are saved

**These miracles provide ample reason for worship and rest in the presence of God. What reasons do you have for worship and rest in the presence of God?**

### Close your time of Bible study with prayer

Dear Lord, we bow at Your feet in worship of Your Holy Name. There is none beside You. Cause us to remember that You are sovereign God over every part of our lives, even when we are in times of struggle. We are forever in the grip of your Love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



**Visual Faith™ Ministry**  
*Telling the Story of HIS Faithfulness*

**Abide Retreat 2021**

[www.visualfaithmin.org](http://www.visualfaithmin.org)