

Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,



William P. Campbell
Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings—individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups—virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at ScriptureAwakening.com. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at info@scriptureawakening.com.



But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18a

Introduction

Christ called Peter. When the Lord placed His directive hand on the life of Peter, there was not an area left untouched. There would be no room for half-hearted service, no reason for compromise. Peter was called to excellence.

Peter, writing his last will and testament to the Christian Church (2 Peter), urges believers everywhere to strive for the same moral excellence that Christ had expected of him. Peter could say of the Lord, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Goodness Explained

The last word of 2 Peter 1:3, *goodness*, is translated “virtue” in the KJV, and “moral excellence” in the NASB. Derived from the Greek word *arete*, the Biblical meaning is essentially “the application of God’s power to our lives, enabling us to live for Him with moral and spiritual excellence.” Peter explains that our call to excellence is only realized through the power of God as we trust in the promises of God (2 Peter 1:3-4). We have been called by God’s glory and goodness. Peter thus urges his readers, “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness” (2 Peter 1:5a).

Goodness Sought

God, who is full of goodness and excellence, empowers us to be like Him. Thus, we are obligated to make every personal effort to draw upon God’s Divine power. Literally, we must “exert ourselves zealously.” Our great effort is to add goodness to the already laid foundation of faith in Christ.

The word *add* here is translated from the Greek term *chorgusate*, from which comes the English words “chorus,” and “choreography.” In ancient Greece, the state established a chorus and expected the director (the *choregys*) to pay the expenses for training its members. Thus, the word came to be used of one who supplies or supports others in abundance. We as believers are to make every effort to supply abundantly the spiritual virtue of goodness or excellence, along with all the other qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, to our own spiritual lives. Our worship in church, or work in the office or on the field, our thought life as we rest, our personal decisions when we are alone...yes every area of our life is to be marked by goodness, virtue, and spiritual excellence. This is a calling so high that any person who thinks he or she can embrace it without the guiding and empowering hand of God has not yet heard or understood the Word of God.

Goodness Revealed

What might have been in Peter’s mind as he thoughtfully exhorted his readers to supplement the common faith with the uncommon virtue of excellence? As Peter watched young Christians struggle with their newfound faith in a world of trials and challenges, the Apostle no doubt

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer...

Psalm 18:2a

drew from the deep wells of his own experience. He could easily remember his first encounter with the Lord, where he was enamored with Christ's person. He was drawn, with his brother Andrew, to visit the Lord's home so that he might, through personal interview, find some explanation for the unusual spiritual qualities of goodness exemplified in Christ (John 1:35-42).

It was here that the Lord assigned Simon the name *Peter*, meaning "rock." In so doing, our Lord was saying in essence, "You follow me and I will call forth the best in you." Simon, who tended to be wayward, was being challenged to believe that God would meet him at his point of weakness and make him to be a mighty vessel of honor. The very qualities that attracted him to Christ would become the bedrock foundation of his own character.

Goodness Applied

Now we turn to the Luke 5 account. It has been almost 18 months since Simon Peter's first encounter with the Lord. He has seen the Lord's goodness demonstrated through acts of grace and power (Luke 5:1-26). But now Peter is likely contemplating his own lack of ability.

The stars were fading in the autumn's early morning sun. A whole night of fruitless fishing found Peter and crew washing their empty seine nets on the rocky shore. Suddenly a crowd approached, pressing toward the beloved Teacher and Lord. Christ requested use of Peter's boat as a floating pulpit and proceeded with His discourse. When the Lord was finished teaching He looked at Peter and said, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:46).

There comes a moment in time for each living soul when the call of God becomes a crisis of opportunity. Notice that our Lord did not at first say, "Go tell others about Me," or "Go work for Me where the needs are greatest," but "Let My divine goodness and power operate in your everyday affairs." Just as a baby is expected to learn to crawl before he can walk, a spiritual child of God must learn to exercise moral goodness in his or her personal everyday life before God will lead him or her into further realms of ministry.

Goodness Realized

Peter, tired of his failure, was being commanded to go back to his trade again, but with a new confidence that God was in his business. He would soon be pulling at a bursting net and turn toward the Lord with a bursting heart. After filling the boat to capacity, Peter pushed through the heaps of slippery silver cargo and fell at the Lord's feet exclaiming, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"(Luke 5:8b). The realization that our human natures are sinful to the core and not naturally good is proof that we are moving into right relationship with God who is good through and through. Building on this profound realization and adding to the already assigned name, "Peter," Christ said, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10b).

After God's power filled Peter on the day of Pentecost, the rugged fisherman would be called upon to cast forth the spiritual nets of the Gospel. The promise for divine excellence would be realized through the power of God's Spirit and the conviction of God's Word again and again,

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

from Pentecost (Acts 2) to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) where new souls were caught for the kingdom with hardly an effort. Peter could not deny that the virtues of God found their source in God.

Final Thought

Tradition tells us that Michelangelo accepted huge blocks of marble that other artisans discarded. The great sculptor saw in each slab a potential form, and his genius called it into being. In the same way, Scripture tells us that God recognizes the very potential for Christ's life to be manifest in us and through us, and He has planned for it to happen (Romans 8:29). God will continue shaping us into the fullness of His excellence until the day we are brought into His glory (Philippians 1:6).

Spending Time With God

This study series, "A Call to Excellence," based on the life and letters of Peter is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read 2 Peter 1:1-11. What is the main point of this text? Assign a title to this passage.

2. Meditate on 2 Peter 1:3-4. Record one or two significant truths you can draw from this text.

3. List the seven qualities of spiritual excellence found in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Which do you think is most difficult to embrace and emulate? Why?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. Tell of one insight from your personal study, from the commentary, or from the sermon that was most helpful or challenging for you.

5. a. What promises are given to those who grow in the seven qualities of spiritual excellence described in 2 Peter 1: 5-8?

b. Which of these qualities are missing in your life?

c. How can you develop them?

6. What warnings are given to people who are not developing these same virtues (2 Peter 1:9)? Take time to pray that God would help you grow in understanding of this Scriptural text through this seven week study, and that He would help you grow spiritually as you apply what you learn.
7. Turn to John 1:35-42. Why do you think John's disciples were so attracted to Jesus?
8. Now imagine yourself being in Simon's place when Jesus gave him a new name (John 1:42). What does this tell you about Simon? About Christ?
9. Read Luke 5:1-11. As a group, find a title that summarizes the main point of this passage.
10. a. What might have been going through Peter's mind when Jesus told him to "Put out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4)?
b. Can you think of a time when you similarly felt challenged by God to do what seemed impossible? If so, explain.
11. In Luke 5:8, what was Peter's response to the miraculous works of God? Why would this understanding be crucial for the success of Peter's evangelistic ministry in the years ahead?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Christ saw and called out the potential for spiritual excellence in Peter. Most important, the Lord gave Peter the power to fulfill that potential. Spend a few minutes in silent prayer, and then discuss the following as you are comfortable doing so: "I would like others to pray for me that I might develop more goodness and excellence in my life in the area of..."

b. What should be our motivation for everything we do?

c. Take time to examine your life, and record duties or tasks that to you have become drudgery. Pray for God's renewed call in your life, and for renewed vigor to "launch out into the deep" for Him.

Commit to praying for one another through the coming week.

13. In Luke 5:11, how did the disciples respond to the Lord's call? What sacrifices can you imagine they made to do so?

14. a. Do you think the disciples followed the Lord because they felt obligated? Guilty? Excited? Fully committed?

Scripture for Meditation

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

2 Peter 1:3



There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

Proverbs 14:12

Introduction

Knowledge is important. Knowledge about God is more important. Knowing God personally is most important of all. Saint Aquinas once wrote, "A scrap of knowledge about sublime things is worth more than any amount about trivialities." This lesson reminds us of the importance of knowing the truth about God that we might better know God.

John Wesley once received a note that said, "The Lord has told me to tell you that He doesn't need your book-learning, your Greek and your Hebrew." Wesley answered, "Thank you, sir. Your letter was superfluous; however, as I already knew the Lord has no need for my 'book-learning,' as you put it. However, although the Lord has not directed me to say so, on my own responsibility I would like to say to you that the Lord does not need your ignorance either." (*Evangelism for Tomorrow*, by Charles Templeton)

Two Kinds of Knowledge

Peter wrote his letter to help Christians distinguish true knowledge from false knowledge. The word "knowledge" (Greek *gnosis*) was commonly used among the philosophers of that day. Their influence encroached upon the average Christian's thinking and life. Other favorite words used by these promoters of pseudo-Christian thought which were included in Peter's letter include "godliness," "goodness," "nature," and "corruption." Their teaching was part of a broad ranging school of religion called Gnosticism (from the Greek word for knowledge), which would be developed in full force by the second century. We understand a good deal about Gnosticism from the writings of the early Church fathers and from numerous ancient religious texts. Peter apparently sought to turn Gnostics to Christ and to turn their words into teaching tools by injecting them with Christian meaning.

False Knowledge Today

The very same errors that fueled Gnostic beliefs in Peter's day are alive and well today. Gnostics taught that the body was evil and that matter was of no importance. (Visit a Christian Science reading room and you will be delving headfirst into a similar teaching.) Gnostics claimed a secret knowledge, available only to those who were in touch with the higher powers. Dabble in the New Age movement and you will learn about today's initiates with their own private spirit-guides. Listen to certain theologians today who teach that Christ's resurrection was spiritual but not physical, and you have stepped into Gnostic waters. Such teaching was and is dangerous, not because it looks so radically different than Christianity but because it appears so much the same. In much the same way, mushrooms are dangerous because the good ones are so difficult to distinguish from the poisonous ones. Peter was determined to draw the line separating truth from error.

True Knowledge

In our text (2 Peter 1:1-11), Peter uses the term "knowledge" five times. He proclaims knowledge

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

John 14:6

of God through Jesus Christ as the source of grace and peace (2 Peter 1: 1) and the basis for growth in spiritual life and true godliness (2 Peter 1: 3). Knowledge is the second step in his stairway of virtues (2 Peter 1: 5-6), leading to a life of stability and fruitfulness for God (2 Peter 1: 8). In the most important realm of human life—that of salvation, true knowledge is distinguished from false based on one essential concern: What we believe about the Christ.

The Key Question

In Matthew 16:13, we find Jesus heading north toward the region of Caesarea Phillipi. He would soon turn south again, toward Jerusalem, where He was destined to give His life as the Pass-over lamb. Only six months remained in His earthly ministry. Jesus would need to forewarn His disciples of the difficult sufferings He would soon endure (Matthew 17:12, 22-23; 20:18-19, 28). But before the disciples could grasp why the Lord had to suffer, they needed to understand who Jesus was. Thus came the questions, "Who do people say the Son of Man is" (Matthew 16:13b)?

The Right Answer

The disciples responded, "Some say John the Baptist." Herod himself may have begun this rumor (Matthew 14:2). "Others say Elijah." (Such was the general expectation left from the prophet Malachi (Malachai 4:5) "and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. Perhaps Christ's great compassion caused people to link the two lives. Each Old Testament prophet, however, emulated different qualities of godliness, all of which are summed up in the person of Christ. Thus the guessing game about which prophet had somehow risen from the dead became of panoply of public speculation. But all that really mattered for the Lord's followers—and all that matters between you and your God—is the right answer to the Lord's pointed question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Keys To The Kingdom

Simon Peter, speaking out quickly for the surrounding disciples and for Christians of all ages, replied directly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). For such an answer came strong words of affirmation, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you're the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:17-19).

Peter was told that his insight was given from the Father in heaven. True knowledge of God is attainable only by a personal revelation from God. Martin Luther said, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him." Indeed, true knowledge of God is more than an intellectual assent; it is a heart assurance, a deep and settled conviction, a true faith birthed by the life-giving spirit of God (Ephesians 2:8-10). Upon this knowledge, spoken first by Peter and claimed by believers through the ages, would Christ build

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

His church. Through this knowledge would Peter and all believers be given the keys to the kingdom (John 20:22-23; Matthew 28:18-20).

Final Thought

When we tell others about the true person and mission of Christ, we are offering them the keys of the door of eternal life. They, in turn, must respond to the call of the Lord and open the door (Revelations 3:20). Peter would use these keys to be the first one to welcome Gentiles into the house of God (Acts 10). What about you? Have you embraced the keys of true knowledge and received the life God offers? Alternately, if you are a Christian, do you keep the keys hidden in the pocket of your understanding or do you use them actively to set the captive free?

Spending Time With God

This study series, “A Call to Excellence,” based on the life and letters of Peter is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. How does Paul close his first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:20-21)? List some of the opposing ideas posing as Christian ideals that you have encountered recently.

4. Read Paul's magnificent prayer in Colossians 1:9-12, and record the part you like the most. Notice the phrase "growing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). Pray for a person, using the pattern used here by Paul. If his prayer helps you to pray, consider using it regularly as a guideline in the future as you pray for others.

2. From 1 Timothy 1:3-7, describe the opposition and disruption Timothy faced in his pastorate.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What insights from the above commentary or personal study section would you like to discuss with others?

3. How did Timothy respond (1 Timothy 4:11-16)?

6. Read Matthew 16:13-20. From verse 13, how would you answer the question today, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

7. Christ then asked, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" How might you answer this if asked by:
- An inquisitive five year old?
 - A hardened atheist?
 - An orthodox Jew?
 - Jesus?
8. See Matthew 16:17. Is it necessary for the Holy Spirit to assist us if we are to come to a true knowledge of God? Explain.
9. Read Matthew 16:21-23. Discuss the sharp contrast between Peter's response to Christ here and that found in verse 16. Why the change?
10. a. Why is it that sometimes when we are doing exceptionally well spiritually, we are most prone to a downfall?

b. Give an example from your walk with Christ when you were doing very well, but were tempted to fall or had things happen that might have discouraged or derailed your faith.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Matthew 16:18 is sometimes a central point of controversy between Catholics and Protestants. Do you know why? How do you interpret this verse? Why?

c. What can you do now to help when you are confronted by such situations?

13. Record the names of one or more people who you wish would come to a true knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray for these people, and pray that your group might become more effective in reaching out to others.

11. Complete this thought: "Some of the most significant things, experiences, or people, that have most helped me come to really know God through the course of my life are..."

Scripture for Meditation

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

2 Peter 1:3



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will-to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.

Ephesians 1:3-6

Introduction

Peter exhorts us, “add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control” (2 Peter 1:5-6a). *Self-control*. We all struggle with it, whether we are resisting the wrong or striving for the right.

James tells us, for example, to control our tongues (James 3:1-12). Yet how many of us have spoken an unfitting or unkind word in the last 24 hours because it just came out? Puritan Thomas Watson in a sermon once said, “God has given us two ears, but one tongue, to show that we should be swift to hear, but slow to speak. God has set a double fence before the tongue, the teeth and the lips, to teach us to be wary that we offend not with our tongue.”

Paul exhorts us to control our appetites (1 Corinthians 10:31). During his term as President of the U.S., Lyndon Johnson was somewhat overweight. One day, his wife challenged him with this blunt assertion: “You can’t run the country if you can’t run yourself.” Respecting Mrs. Johnson’s wise observation, the President lost 23 pounds. Do we have control over the temptation to eat more than we need?

Peter, the great Apostle and servant of the Lord, placed self-control in the middle of his grand list of Christian virtues, all of which are obtained by faith in the promises of God (2 Peter 1:3-4). Let us examine in Peter’s letters a definition of self-control, and in Peter’s life, a description.

Self-Control: A Living Definition Attitude Check

Webster’s Dictionary tells us that *self-control* means “to control one’s-self.” We, who struggle to control ourselves, want more than a simple book definition to help us along the way. We want a living definition. We want to know how this chief virtue is achieved in our lives. In his first epistle, Peter writes much about self-control (1 Peter 1:13; 4:6; 5:8). The passage that seems to best explain how to develop this Christian characteristic is 1 Peter 4:1-7. We see there that self-control begins in the command post of the mind.

If we hope to control our actions and words, we must first recognize that attitude is everything. What we do and what we say proceeds from the ever-flowing fountain of our hearts. All adjustments related to our outer-lives must begin in our inner-lives. Thus, Peter exhorts us to arm ourselves with the attitude that Jesus Himself carried. He is literally telling us to examine Christ’s attitude and then own it. Put it on like armor. We must be committed to obey God -- even when that stand costs us dearly. Such an attitude is the best protection we can find against spiritual and soulish attack. It is the first step toward self-control.

Action Check

While self-control is first an attitude, it relates to every aspect of our behavior and our fate. Peter speaks directly to this point. Like Paul (1 Corinthians 6:12), Jude (Jude 4-16), James (James 3:7-12), John (Revelation 22:12-15), our Lord (Matthew 23:26-35), and every effective teacher of

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Proverbs 16:32 KJV

God's Word, Peter looks sin in the face and names it specifically. A doctor must diagnose an illness before he can prescribe medicine for a cure. Sin left in vague categories, leaves repentance fuzzy and incomplete. In 1 Peter 4:3, Peter lists six forms of sensuality: three personal—"living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness" and three social—"orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry."

As Christians, we may read such a list and say, "I control myself well. I don't sin like so many people who don't know God." But if we draw Biblical lists of fleshly actions out for more careful examination (e.g., Galatians 5:19-21), we begin to recognize our areas of weakness. Further, if we consider the fruit expected in a life controlled by God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), we see with yet more clarity our great need for self-control. We must fall to our knees in prayer, confessing that even with the best motives, self-control (as the Bible defines it) escapes our grasp. It is only by the power of God that we can live for God. Answers to prayer for self-control will be the building blocks to a stronger life of prayer. As Peter exhorts us: "Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7b). As a living definition, then, Biblical self-control is an attitude of complete submission to the living God and dependence through prayer on the power of God to live a life in accordance with the Word of God.

Self-Control: A Living Demonstration of The One Who Leads

Jesus has just performed a mighty miracle—the feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. In Matthew 14:22, we read that He "immediately" made the disciples depart in their boat while he sent the crowds away. From the account in John 6:15, we learn why the crowd would be dismantled in such a hurry: The people wanted to force Jesus to become their king. Jesus, tempted by pride from the very start of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11), demonstrated self-control as He turned from the opportunity for glory and climbed the mountain to be with His Father in prayer (Matthew 14:23). Here, as throughout the Gospels, Christ is the perfect example of self-control. He sets the standard. He calls His disciples to follow in His steps.

Those Who Follow

The twelve were told to "go on ahead of him to the other side" (Matthew 14:22). What might have been on their minds when they found the wind and waves to be insurmountable? How do we react when we seek to obey the Lord's commands and find life becoming more difficult -- almost impossible? Like the early followers of Christ, we are often sent into the school of self-control, built upon circumstances, designed by God. Our schoolmaster tests us at opportune times until the very elements of His plan and person are written on our hearts. The crucial factor in our becoming God's people is our developing God's character which requires God-given trials (James 1:1-12; 1 Peter 1:6-9).

It was not until the fourth watch of the night (between three and six in the morning), when the sun was likely just brushing the horizon with light, that the Lord appeared. Yet the Lord was really with them all along. Would not the all-knowing Son of God, praying on the mountainside, be praying that His followers would pass the test? And would not He who loves perfectly know

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

James 1:2-3

the perfect time to calm the storm? Yet, even when Jesus appeared they did not expect Him or recognize Him. May the Lord give us eyes to recognize Him in the midst of our challenges!

Peter Steps Out

Peter, taking strength in Jesus' presence, displayed at once the greatness of his courage and the weakness of his control over impetuous tendencies by crying out, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (Matthew 14:28; NASB). Here, and throughout the Gospels, we see that Peter is never rebuked for his bold spirit. Here, as in other places where Peter acts and speaks prematurely, he will experience the downside of allowing his heart to rule his mind. A faith based primarily on feeling is shaky and unpredictable. Faith based only on intellect is dry and impoverished. But a faith that joins heart and mind in following Christ finds stability and growth with each new challenge. We, who like Peter tend to live from the heart, are likely to sink into the overwhelming consequences of the ocean of life's challenges if we don't take time to think and time to pray. Peter didn't wait until he hit bottom but shouted what is one of the shortest and most passionate prayers in the Bible: "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30b).

Final Thought

Peter must be commended for his daring spirit. He wanted to live for God. His wish to walk on the water was a wish to be with his Savior. He was tired of going nowhere, willing to step out of his comfort zone, and walk into unknown dangers just to be with the Lord. In his boat, he struggled against the waves—now he would walk on the waves.

Like Peter, we need to walk boldly toward the Lord in the midst of our trials and temptations. In what areas do you need greater self-control? Do you struggle with anger? Is your mouth apt to speak before your mind has time to think? Are you unable to say "no" even though you are already over committed? Do you depend on food, alcohol, or an addictive drug to make it through the day? Do you carry worry like a cloak, or drag doubts behind you like a ball and chain? Are there parts of your life that, if exposed, would embarrass you and dishonor God?

The Lord calls us to get up and walk in the midst of our storms rather than expend all of our energy resisting them. But let us be warned: Without a sincere trust in the Lord, responding to God's call will be as difficult as walking on water. We cannot do God's will without God's help. The key to self-control God's way requires true humility, complete dependence on God, and a life of sincere and sometimes desperate prayer.

Spending Time With God

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time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary and related Scriptures. Record one insight about self-control drawn from your readings that you hope to apply to your life.

- c. Read Hebrews 12:2-3 and record at least one good reason for comparing your present trials with those already endured by your Lord.

2. Read 1 Peter 4:1-7. Now focus on verses 1-2.

- a. Describe briefly the sufferings of Christ.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

- 3a. What was the attitude of Christ amidst his suffering (Philippians 2:1-11)?

- b. List some of the trials and difficulties that you presently endure.

- b. What might it mean to "arm yourselves with the same attitude"? (1 Peter 4:1)?

- c. Why is it that doing so enables us to have self-control against sin?
4. Read 1 Peter 1:13, 4:7, and 5:8. From each reading, tell briefly why or how you should further develop the virtue of self-control in your life.
5. Read aloud Matthew 14:22-33. As a group, assign a title to this passage.
6. See Matthew 14:23-25.
- With reference to the commentary, discuss how long the disciples battled the elements in their unsuccessful attempt to cross the lake.
- b. Have you ever felt this way: "God, I am striving to do your will. Why does it seem so impossible...like I'm getting nowhere?" Give examples.
7. See Matthew 14:26-29. Imagine as a group what it felt like for Peter to walk on the water. Notice that to do so, Peter's gaze was lifted from the stormy opposition and placed upon the Lord Himself. Peter walked on the very elements of his adverse circumstances and drew nearer to God. From your own insight and from the following verses, how might we do the same?
- 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

- b. 1 Peter 5:5-9
- b. Do you think Jesus was condemning in his tone to Peter, or was He motivating Peter toward greater faith? Pray as a group for the Lord to build each person's faith through the truths unwrapped in this study.
8. Read Matthew 14:30. Can you think of a time in your life when you offered up a "Lord, save me!" prayer with similar desperation? Explain. How did the Lord answer?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. Consider Matthew 14:31.
- a. Are there areas in your life where you too could be rebuked by the Lord for your lack of faith? Explain.

Scripture for Meditation

Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1:4



Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the Crown of Life that God has promised to those who love Him.

James 1:12

Introduction

The Apostle Peter has exhorted us, in 1 Peter 2:5-7, to build qualities of spiritual excellence on the foundation of our faith. In our first lesson, we saw that our preliminary building material is goodness; a reliance on God's indwelling power to live a virtuous life. Upon such godly energy, we must add knowledge, assuring that our good intentions are directed in the right paths. However, knowing the right way to go is no assurance that we will stay in the way. Hence, we are told to add to our knowledge, self-control. Self-control, however, may be here today and gone tomorrow. Thus, we must add to our self-control, perseverance.

When Handel wrote the *Hallelujah Chorus*, his health and his fortunes had reached the lowest possible ebb. His right side had become paralyzed, and all his money was gone. He was heavily in debt and threatened with imprisonment. He was tempted to give up the fight. The odds seemed entirely too great. And it was then he composed his greatest work—*Messiah*. He succeeded because, by the grace of God, he persevered.

When William Carey began thinking of going to India as a pioneer missionary, his father pointed out to him that he possessed no academic qualifications that would fit him for such a task. But Carey answered, "I can plod." How true it is that God accomplishes mighty things for His kingdom through those who are willing to persevere, who are willing to plod faithfully through one difficulty after another in the power of the Spirit. In the words of Napoleon Bonaparte, "Victory belongs to the most persevering."

When The Trial Came (Luke 22:31-62)

Peter's Problem

Perseverance is an easy concept to own...until it is challenged. For Peter, the great challenge to his ability to endure was the Lord's crucifixion. Despite Peter's erratic performance in the past, he entered this most difficult time with the false confidence that he was ready and able in his own strength to persevere with Christ to the end. As Jesus shared His last meal with His followers (Luke 22:1-30). He warned Peter of a great trial to come (Luke 22:31-32). Peter exclaimed, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." To which Jesus replied, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me" (Luke 22:33-34) Peter's denial of the Lord was perhaps the lowest point of his life (Luke 22:54-62). At the time when the Lord seemed to need him the most, Peter denied Jesus with oaths. Peter thought himself ready to follow Christ to prison and to death, but found himself unable to confess even that he knew Jesus.

God's Promise

The good news for Peter, and the good news for each believer, is that Jesus prays for us (Luke 22:32; John 17:9-11,20; Hebrews 7:24-25). Our faith is not dependent on our ability but on our faithful God. The Lord has promised to protect us and never to forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-6). Per-

So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Hebrews 13:6

severance then, like all the virtues listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, can be laid hold of through the promises of God. It depends not on our strength but on our faith in the ever-powerful God (John 10:28) who promises to finish the work He has begun in our lives (Philippians 1:6).

Peter would, because of Christ's prayers, become stronger through his trial. He would be equipped through his failure to help others through their trials (Luke 22:32). In the book of Acts, Peter began a new chapter in his life—a new life of perseverance. He no longer swayed and bent under the winds of persecution, even when facing prison and death (Acts 4 and 12). In his letters, the new Peter exhorts us to add to our self-control, perseverance.

When The Trial Comes (1 Peter 1:1-9)

God's Pilgrims

Peter wrote his first letter to those who were scattered (1 Peter 1:1). His letter was sent to Christians who had been dispersed through persecution. Life was not easy in that day for the followers of Christ. They were dispersed throughout the country we know today as Turkey. Uprooted from their homes, they knew what it felt like to be "strangers in the world." They were living the truth that we all need to remember: Christians are pilgrims, just passing through this world and awaiting their arrival home with the Lord.

We can take heart with the early Christians in Peter's words of comfort. For we too are God's "elect" (1 Peter 1:1). Before we ever chose God, He knew us and chose us to be sanctified—to grow into the likeness of Christ (1 Peter 1:2). We can claim our stake in heaven now, for through faith in Christ, we are born anew and given an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:4). Even our faith will be protected by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5). Perseverance is a gift from God, providing strength for today and confidence regarding our eternal future.

Perseverance Made Perfect

Our perseverance is made complete, however, through "all kind of trials" (1 Peter 1:6). The Greek word meaning *all kinds* is also translated "various," and literally means "many-colored." Peter uses this same word only one other time where it refers to the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). For every darkly colored trial, we are promised the bright colors of God's grace. It is the deeper hues that make the bright colors more brilliant. God sends various trials to make our faith excellent and our perseverance more sure. As James 1:2-4 states: "... Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

In Peter's words: "These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1: 7). Gold is precious but impure until it is refined in the smelter's furnace. So our faith, more precious than gold, is purified through trials and our

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

perseverance made complete.

Final Thought

We saw in our first lesson that Simon was given the name Peter, meaning “rock.” He would not live like a rock, however, until he learned through challenges bigger than his abilities that his perseverance was derived from God alone. Through the grace of God, Peter became a pillar in the Church (Galatians 2:9). Peter then had the ministry of encouraging Christians who similarly were facing painful trials: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial that you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). The English word translated *painful* is derived from the Greek word meaning “to burn.” Peter may have been referring metaphorically to the historical reality of the Neronian persecution. Christians were blamed for the burning of Rome. Some were covered with pitch and used as living torches to light the imperial gardens at night. Peter may have believed the provincial officials were near to stake-burning Christians in Asia Minor as well. Let us remember those who have suffered for their faith and persevere in ours. They survived through the Lord’s power. No matter what we face, we too can persevere if our faith is in the Lord.

Spending Time With God

This study series, “A Call to Excellence,” based on the life and letters of Peter is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read 1 Peter 1:1-9. Record from this reading one favorite verse.

4. Record some of the trials you are facing today. Now see 1 Peter 1:7-9. Compare with Romans 5:1-5 and James 1:2-4. Record promises of God regarding His grace to you amidst your trials.

2. From 1 Peter 1:1-4, what good things has God done for you?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What insight or concern would you like to discuss from the above commentary or personal study questions?

3. Have you ever worried about losing your faith? On what basis is our faith protected (1 Peter 1:5). What should be our response (1 Peter 1:6)?

6. Read aloud Matthew 26:31-34. Then discuss:

a. Christ knew ahead of time what Peter would face and how he would respond. Why was this time of challenge necessary for Peter?

- b. See Luke 22:61. What do you think was Christ's expression when He looked at Peter? How may Peter have felt? Do you think the Lord has ever looked upon you with a similar expression?
- c. See Mark 16:7. Notice the Lord's special concern for Peter. What Scriptural promise can you claim as reassurance that even in the midst of our darkest trials, the Lord has not forgotten us and is waiting for the right time to comfort us? (Consider also reviewing 1 Peter 1:1-9).
7. See Luke 22:31-34. Discuss:
- Who is Satan (1 Peter 5:8)?
 - Why might God have allowed Satan to sift Peter's faith?
 - Does Christ pray for us as He did for Peter (John 17:9-11; Hebrews 7:24-25)?
 - Do you really believe that Christ is able to keep you from falling in the midst of your trials (Jude 24, Philippians 1:6)?

8. Notice in Luke 22:32 what Peter was to do once he had gotten back on his feet spiritually. Complete this sentence for discussion: "I am best able to minister to others in the areas where I have been tried and tested because... Give an example.
10. See 1 Peter 4:12-19. Find at least two reasons why we should rejoice in the midst of our sufferings.

Take time to pray for one another, that God's strength will be your resource for spiritual stamina and growth.

11. Read again 1 Peter 4:17. What are the implications? In view of eternity, why should we rejoice in our salvation, even if suffering? Take time to offer prayers of thanks and praise to God for His protection and grace.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. Name people you know or famous people who have persevered through great trials. Through what did they suffer, and what was the outcome?

What role did faith play in the outcome?

Scripture for Meditation

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

2 Peter 1:5-7



It teaches us to say
“No” to ungodliness and
worldly passions, and
to live self-controlled,
upright and Godly lives in
this present age.

Titus 2:12

Introduction

Godliness...the mountain peak description of Christian character. If the first five virtues listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 focus on qualities of the inner life of the believer, the term *godliness* rises as the summit, supported by the rest. Godliness is the radiant expression of a life fueled by goodness, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance. Once godliness has taken root in a person's character, the remaining two qualities from 2 Peter 1:5-7, which are brotherly kindness and love (relational qualities), are the natural fruit.

The Importance of Godliness

Godliness was a term used by worshippers of pagan deities in Peter's day. It described devotion, veneration, and submission to their gods. When Paul and Peter were nearing the end of their pilgrimages on earth, they both laid hold of the word *godliness*, recognizing it as a jewel in the rough and placed it carefully in the velvet setting of God's Holy Word. Paul wrote much to his disciple Timothy about godliness (1 Timothy 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11). Peter used the term often in his second letter (2 Peter 1:3, 6-7; 3:11). The only time the word godliness was used prior to these later-in-life letters of the two great Apostles is when Peter utilized the term, explaining that power for healing did not come from human ability or godliness (Acts 3:12). It seems that growing wisdom through years of ministry caused the two Apostles to recognize the high priority of calling Christians everywhere, above everything, to lives of godliness.

When Oscar Wilde arrived for a visit to the U.S. in 1882, he was asked by customs officials if he had anything to declare. He replied: “Only my genius.” Fifteen years later, alone and broken in prison, he reflected on his life of waste and excess. “I have been a spend thrift of my genius...I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character” (*Imprimis*, Vol 20, #9). Godliness matters.

Ungodliness Challenged (2 Peter 2)

The Source of Ungodliness

In the second chapter of Peter's second letter, the saints are warned about the primary source of ungodliness in the Christian church: false teaching. For wrong teaching gives birth to wrong thinking. And the child of wrong thinking is wrong living. In this chapter, Peter seems hot with holy indignation as he describes the anticipated infiltration of ungodliness into the Christian Church (2 Peter 2:12-14). You can almost feel the Apostle's righteous anger as you read his words. His scathing word-pictures are very similar to those found in the book of Jude. The main difference is this: Peter confronted the false teachers he expected to appear (2 Peter 2:1); Jude confronted those already present (Jude 4). Two different men with the same boiling passion against compromised Christianity, one focused on problems today and the other on problems that may arise in the future. Whether we struggle today with issues of ungodliness or whether we recognize the potential struggle in the days ahead, we do well to learn the reason for such

...having a form of Godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

2 Timothy 3:5

alarming language.

God's Judgment for Ungodliness

Peter warns that the false teaching which precipitates such ungodliness will be introduced quietly and secretly, as though insignificant. Yet each little compromise of the heart leads to a sinking step in the quagmire of ungodliness.

F. B. Meyer once wrote, "The supreme test of goodness is not in the greater but in the smaller incidents of our character and practice; not what we are when standing in the searchlight of public scrutiny, but when we reach the firelight flicker of our homes; not what we are when some clarion-call rings through the air, summoning us to fight for life and liberty, but our attitude when we are called to sentry-duty in the gray morning, when the watch-fire is burning low. It is impossible to be our best at the supreme moment if character is corroded and eaten into by daily inconsistency, unfaithfulness, and besetting sin."

The teaching that godliness really doesn't matter is eternally destructive and one of the most dangerous forces ever to face the Christian Church (2 Peter 2:1). Peter draws from three historic illustrations to remind us of the horrific consequences of buying into a twisted version of the Christian message (2 Peter 2:4-8):

The judgment given to the fallen angels who followed the lie of Lucifer;

The punishment unleashed on all of humanity during their exceedingly wicked lifestyles in the days of Noah; and

The fury of God's wrath unleashed on the lawless towns of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In each case, Peter contrasts the punishment inflicted upon the majority to the mercy shown by God to the godly minority. Good angels, Noah and his family, and Lot, together remind the world that no matter what our verbal profession, our lives must express godliness as a demonstration that we are really God's children—or we may be in for a startling surprise.

Godliness Encouraged (2 Peter 3)

The Source of Godliness

Right living is the daughter of right thinking. Thus, Peter begins chapter three by saying: "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking" (2 Peter 3:1). Right thinking is born through right teaching. Peter thus draws us back to the unshakable truth of God: "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles" (2 Peter 3:2). Let us contemplate the teachings that encourage godliness in our lives.

God's Reward for Godliness

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14

Peter states: "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4). We are surrounded today by such critics. In fact, far too many have carried their logic one step further, denying not only the Lord's future coming but also His past work of creation.

We can be comforted that regardless of the unbelief of our generation, the same God who first created (by water) will one day destroy all things temporal (by fire) to establish a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:5-7, 13). This is the only text in the Bible where God's plan to use fire for the world's final destruction is clearly described. "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10). God's sword of judgement however is restrained by His heart of mercy for He is patient "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Final Thought

The great conclusion of Peter's second epistle is summed up in these words: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives" (2 Peter 3:11). And looking at our future prospects from the positive side... "We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:13b-14). Whether we focus on hell or heaven, judgment or mercy, God's punishments or rewards, a careful look at the future will motivate us toward godliness.

If you have not yet come to a place of deep and abiding commitment to living a godly life, then ask yourself two things. First, have you bought into false thinking as delivered through false teaching? Second, in view of the truth that you will soon meet your Creator, should you not embrace a righteous anger, as did Peter and Paul, if you have been pulled aside from the challenge of the Christian race? Get back on the track. Set your eyes on the goal. Run in such a way as to win (1 Corinthians 9:24). Live for the Lord with everything you have, in every way you can.

Spending Time With God

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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Record an insight from the commentary and Scripture readings that has encouraged your faith or challenged you to be more faithful.
2. Skim 2 Peter 2:1-22. Assign a title to this passage.
3. Take a look at the book of Jude. These are the kind of passages we like to avoid. Why is it important to take such Scriptures into our mental processes and make them a part of our lives?
4. Recall the story of Lot (Genesis 19). From this account, record at least one reason for living a godly life.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. See 2 Peter 3:1. Discuss:
 - a. What things help stimulate you toward “wholesome thinking?”
 - b. What are some of the major distractors from healthy thought patterns?
6. See verse 2 Peter 3:3-4. Have you met such scoffers today? Explain.

7. From 2 Peter 3:5-6 and Genesis 6, discuss the flood of Noah's day.
 - a. Why the flood?
8. From 2 Peter 3:7, 10-12, discuss:
 - a. What is God's plan for the earth we now inhabit?
9. See 2 Peter 3:9. Do you think of God as being "slow" about fulfilling His purposes on earth? Explain.
10. Compare 2 Peter 3:11 and 14 with 1 Timothy 4:7-8. List at least three ways that we might "train ourselves" to be godly.
11. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10.
 - a. What is the symptom of a godly soul?
- b. How should God's plans influence our thinking?

- b. What warnings are found in this passage?
- b. If so, why do we fall short? What might we be lacking(2 Peter 1:4)?
- c. Read 2 Peter 3:17-18 and use these verses as a basis for closing prayers of blessing for the members of your group.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. See 2 Timothy 3:1-5, especially verse 5. How can we distinguish true godliness from the mere “form of godliness” in our lives?

13. See 2 Peter 1:3.

a. How does God provide what we need to become truly godly people?

Scripture for Meditation

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:8



Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:11

Introduction

Peter has exhorted us to make every effort to build five key character qualities into our lives as the evidence and confirmation of our Christian faith (2 Peter 1:5-7). Now we will see that growth in such Christ-like qualities of heart and spirit bring excellence into our personal relationships.

When character is right, then marriages, families, churches, the workplace, and whole communities will be blessed. Brotherly kindness is listed after godliness in Peter's list of divine virtues. Both virtues are related.

The Greek word for brotherly kindness is *philadelphia* (from *phileo*: i.e., "love" or "tender affection", and *adelphia*: i.e., "of a brother"). It refers to the spiritual bond of gentle and caring love that is expected between all believers (Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1) for we are all brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 8:29) and children of the Heavenly Father (1 John 5:19).

How Peter Excelled In Brotherly Kindness (Acts 10:1-48)

Cornelius' Need

Acts 10:1-8 tells of a centurion in Caesarea. He was stationed in the Roman capital of Palestine, commander of an Italian Regiment of 100 soldiers. He was respected by the people and had a great reverence for God. The term "God-fearer" is used at this point in time in the New Testament to refer to Gentiles who, disillusioned with the gods and goods of society, sought to affiliate with the God of the Jews. They did not become circumcised or attend the synagogue but believed in one God and sought to live ethically.

According to the Lord's promise that if we seek we will find (Matthew 7:7), this God-fearer was visited by an angel of God (Acts 10:3-6). Cornelius was told to send men to Joppa, where they would find Peter, so that the Apostle might explain more fully God's will for the Gentile community of which Cornelius was part.

Peter's Dilemma

Acts 10:9-48 picks up the account from Peter's side. Peter needed to be prepared by God to meet Cornelius so that he might welcome this Gentile into the Christian Church. In so doing, God would work through Peter to open the door of brotherly kindness for the nations of the world to enter the kingdom of heaven. Thus, while Peter was engaged in an ordinary time of contemplation and prayer, God saw fit to send an extraordinary message to Peter through a vision.

Peter may have been telling God how his Jewish principles were already being tested to the limit. He was staying in the home of Simon the tanner. A tanner worked with the dead bodies of animals and was therefore considered unclean by Jewish law (Leviticus 11:39-40). Tanners were among those whose trade was despised by Jewish society, not only because of their work with the dead bodies of animals, but because of the stench of the materials used in tanning. "The

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

world cannot do without perfume makers and tanners, happy is he who prepares perfumes, woe to him whose craft is tanning" (The Babylonian Talmud). But now, in a vision, God would command Peter to kill and eat animals that were unclean (Acts 10:9-16).

According to Leviticus 11, a religious Jew should only eat animals which chewed the cud and whose hoofs were cloven. When Peter objected three times, God responded in turn: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15b). As Peter contemplated this startling vision, Cornelius' servants arrived at his door.

The Spirit of God instructed Peter to take the two-day journey back to their hometown. Strict Jews believed that God had no use for Gentiles. Some even declared that a Jew must never help a Gentile woman give birth because that would only be to bring another Gentile into the world.

Peter's Obedience

But Peter, obedient to the heavenly vision, soon found himself in Caesarea amidst a gathering of anxious Gentiles to whom he declared: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection" (Acts 10:28-29).

Upon preaching the Gospel, the Holy Spirit fell upon the new believers; they spoke in tongues and were baptized into the Christian family. Peter stayed with them a few days, teaching them more fully the ways of the kingdom (Acts 10:48).

How Peter Failed In Brotherly Kindness (Galatians 2:1-21)

In Galatians 2, we find a story in which Peter fails to exhibit the brotherly kindness required by God. This account occurred shortly after one of Paul's visits to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1). Most scholars would place this Galatians incident after Peter's Acts 10 vision. It was after such a startling revelation from God regarding the need to accept all believers equally that Peter would fail publicly to show the unbiased love of God.

The Church at Antioch was growing strong and comprised of Gentile as well as Jewish Christians. Peter arrived for a visit and found himself freely eating with the Gentiles. He enjoyed their fellowship and probably even some pork, or other non-kosher food. The mere fact that he was eating at the same table with Gentiles would greatly disturb any Jewish traditionalist.

When certain men arrived from Jerusalem, Peter pulled back from his brotherly association with the Gentiles and ate separately with his Jewish friends. This spirit of separation soon affected the other Jews present until even Barnabas separated himself. Bold and uncompromising, Paul would have none of it. He opposed Peter "to his face" (Galatians 2:11) and stopped the beginnings of a potential church schism that could have greatly hindered the spread of the Gospel to the Gentile world.

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:18

A Call To Kindness

Peter received one of the clearest and startling revelations from God regarding the importance of accepting other believers as brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of difference in tradition, race, or status.

Our revelation, however, is even more clear. We have access to the complete Word of God. We can daily read and see, not only in Peter's life but also in Paul's, the other Apostles, and in the very life of Christ, exhortations and instructions regarding brotherly kindness.

Peter knew what was right, but due to public pressure and personal selfishness, he slipped into the snare-trap of separatism.

Is it possible that we too, knowing what is right, are not living righteously in this all-important matter of brotherly kindness? Remember that our relationships with one another demonstrate our relationship to God. If we claim to live by the First Commandment (to love God), let us also keep the Second by showing God's love to our neighbor.

Final Thought

By showing kindness to others, we not only bless others but also will be blessed ourselves. Bruce Thielemann, in a sermon titled *Christus Imperator*, said “there is a story that comes to us from long ago of a king who organized a great race within his kingdom. All the young men of the kingdom participated. A bag of gold was to be given to the winner, and the finish line was within the courtyard of the king's palace. The race was run, and the runners were surprised to find in the middle of the road leading to the king's palace a great pile of rocks and stones. But they managed to scramble over it or to run around it and eventually to come to the courtyard.”

“Finally all the runners had crossed the finish line except one. But still the king did not call the race off. After a while one lone runner came through the gate. He lifted a bleeding hand and said, ‘O King, I am sorry that I am so late. But you see, I found in the road a pile of rocks and stones, and it took me a while, and I wounded myself in removing them.’ Then he lifted the other hand, and in it was a bag. He said, ‘But, Great King, I found beneath the pile of rocks this bag of gold.’ The king said, ‘My son, you have won the race, for that one runs best who makes the way safer for those who follow.’”

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ing God for special insight into His Word.

b. Matthew 6:5-8; 7:7-11

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Record an insight from the commentary and Scripture readings that has encouraged your faith or challenged you to be more faithful.

c. Hebrews 11:6

2. Read Acts 10:1-2. Note that Cornelius did not yet know salvation through Jesus Christ. Do you know people like this man, devout, seeking, yet unsaved? Write down names of such individuals and pause to pray for God to reveal Himself to them.

4. Read Acts 10:30-48. Notice that the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Read the following references and record promises about the Holy Spirit for your life. Thank God for His indwelling presence and pray for God to fill you with power, enabling you to show true kindness to all people.

a. John 14:26; 15:26-27

3. Read Acts 10:3-4. Note that God heard Cornelius' prayers, though He was not yet born of God. Read the following references and record some of God's requirements for answered prayer:

a. Psalm 34:15-16

b. Acts 1:8

6. Read aloud Galatians 1:6-9.

a. What are some of the “different gospels” that are preached today?

c. Romans 8:5-6,16

b. What is the different gospel that Paul was confronting in his letter to the Galatians Church (Galatians 3:1-6)?

7. Read aloud Galatians 2:11-14.

a. Discuss how it was that Peter fell into the sin of partiality between believers.

b. See also James 2:1-4. In what ways does the Church of our day tend to show favoritism and partiality?

c. Fill in the blank: "I am most likely to show partiality at church, work, and/or home when..."

8. We are commanded to show brotherly kindness to all people, most especially those of the faith. As time allows, read the following passages, discussing what guidelines, praises, or commands stand out for you. Spend time in prayer, asking God to help you to extend brotherly kindness more freely to others.

a. Proverbs 17:17; 18:24

b. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

c. 1 Peter 1:22

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. See 1 Peter 3:8-9.

a. Based on this text, define "brotherly kindness."

b. What is the reward for Christians who exemplify this Christian quality? (1 Peter 3:10-13.)

c. Is this the experience in the average Christian church today? If not, what needs to change? Take time to pray for one another and for your church that God's Word might do its work and God's Spirit might bring spiritual awakening.

Scripture for Meditation

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

2 Peter 1:8-9



I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Jeremiah 31:3b,c

The Crowning Virtue

Peter crowns his list of divine virtues with the word *love* (2 Peter 1:7). Of all the qualities in Peter's list we might truly say that "the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Thomas à Kempis once wrote: "Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or on earth.... A lover flies, runs, rejoices.... Love often knows no limits but is fervent beyond measure. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of labors, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility.... Though wearied, it is not tired; though pressed, it is not straitened; though alarmed, it is not confounded; but as a lively flame and burning torch, it forces its way upwards and passes securely through all."

This list of virtues is designed to help us draw nearer to God; we should expect then that it would end with the word *love*, for what concept could draw us nearer to the Father of Lights, who Himself is *love* (1 John 4:8)? How did Peter seek to apply *love* into his daily life? And how should we follow Peter's call to excellence in loving God and neighbor? A study of John 21 provides some answers.

Longing For Answers (John 21:1)

We read in John 21 that "Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias" (John 21:1). John 21:14 tells us that "this was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead." Jesus had appeared to His group of followers twice before (John 20:19, 24-29) and made other appearances to individuals.

We might ask ourselves, then, why Peter and the other disciples were more interested in fishing than in evangelizing and why they preferred to get into their boat rather than gather in the Upper Room and pray?

Perhaps Peter, still feeling the weight of guilt and failure over his denial of Christ (Luke 22:54-62), considered himself unworthy of ever again entering into the Lord's service. Perhaps, he experienced the conflicting thoughts that go through our minds as well: "Sure the Lord reigns. But what does that have to do with me? I'm not good for much. Guess I'll find a way to keep myself happy."

Connecting With The Past (John 21:2-14)

The similarity of this post-resurrection story with that which opened the Gospels is striking. Perhaps Peter had not tried his hand at fishing since the day Christ first called him to become a "fisher of men," making the parallels all the more interesting (Luke 5:1-11).

Peter and company were fatigued after a night of fishing with no results. Then came a command from the Lord not to give up and to throw out the net yet once again (John 21:6). And no less amazing than at first, the Lord's bidding brought in an unbelievable catch of the slippery

There is no fear in love.
But perfect love drives
out fear...
1 John 4:18a

silver merchandise.

When Peter realized who it was that controlled the wealth of the seas and lands he could not restrain himself but immediately sought the shortest and fastest route to personally express to the Lord his overwhelming sense of awe and gratefulness.

Some commentators wrongly think that the similarities of this account with the earlier Gospel account demonstrates a rewriting of the same story. But it is the Lord's way to sometimes replay circumstances in our lives that He might write grace and forgiveness over our failures and beckon us through love to follow once again.

Examining Priorities (John 21:15)

After the others arrived and all had finished eating, Jesus asked Simon, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these" (John 21:15b)? Our Lord could have been referring to the fish. For Peter, who had for three years put aside his fishing vocation to follow Christ, had turned back to the potentially lucrative waters.

Or Jesus may have been referring to the other disciples. Peter had earlier stated with self-confidence: "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Matthew 26:33), implying in pride and self-confidence that he loved the Lord more than the rest. But, as we shall see, Peter now found it difficult to boast publicly about his own abilities and affections.

Two Kinds of Love (John 21:16-17)

The Greek language has several words for *love*, two of which are found in this exchange between Christ and Peter. Twice Jesus asks Peter: "Do you *agape* me" (love with full devotion, with all your heart)? Twice Peter responded: "Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you" (love with friendly affection).

It is the opinion of many scholars that these two different Greek words were the two sets of keys upon which Jesus and Peter together played the music of God's healing grace. Peter was slow to claim his unswerving allegiance to the Lord, having so recently denied the Lord. Yet, Christ would not allow His friend to settle into the mire of worthlessness or self-pity.

Peter Responds (John 21:18-19)

Our Lord, the third time, asked Peter if he truly loved Him. But this third time Jesus stepped down to Peter's level, using the lesser word for love, *phileo* (friendship love). Perhaps this explains why Peter was grieved to have been asked a third time. But Christ, who previously knew how to pray so that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:32), now knew how to encourage Peter so that his faith would be fortified. He who denied Christ three times was here allowed to confess his love for Christ three-fold.

After each call to love, Jesus commanded Peter to care for His "sheep" (John 21:15-17). He who

This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands.

1 John 5:2

loved Peter enough to lay down His life for him (John 15:13-14) was now calling Peter to lay down his life for his brethren. Jesus then described the eventual death that Peter would face (John 21:18-19).

Tradition has it that Peter was brought to Rome to be crucified. Insisting himself unworthy to be killed in the same manner as his Lord, Peter requested that he be crucified upside-down. And while this historic tradition cannot be fully confirmed, there is absolutely no doubt that Peter was reinstated as a result of this encounter with Jesus. We see in 1 Peter, for example, the love of God pouring out of Peter's pastoral heart in ways he previously knew not to the sheep under his care.

Final Thought

It is not easy to love another. In his book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one."

Peter encourages us: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Could it be that Peter was here remembering how the Lord's love covered his own failures and shortcomings? And in another part of his letter, Peter exhorts us: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

How can we so excel in this quality of divine life, except that we personally drink, as did Peter, from the Source of all love by drawing near to the Lord himself? Love must be the crown we wear as children of the King.

If you feel unworthy, unable, out of fellowship with God, and not good enough to serve the Lord, listen once again to the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37) and hear again the Lord's call upon your life.

Spending Time With God

This study series, "A Call to Excellence," based on the life and letters of Peter is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

LESSON 7

A CALL TO EXCELLENCE | THE LIFE OF PETER

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Give one insight from your reading of the commentary or from the sermon that has challenged you to deepen your love for the Lord.
 2. Read 1 Peter 1:22-25. On what basis does Peter exhort us to deepen our love for other Christians?
 3. Read 1 Peter 4:7-11.
 - a. Why does Peter exhort us to love each other in verse 8? What do you think this means?
 4. Read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17).
 - a. Which ones focus on our love for God? For one another?
 - b. Notice how Christ applies these Ten Commandments to our daily lives (Matthew 5:17-28). On this basis, where do you find yourself falling short in the exhortation to love?

c. Write out and think about the challenge of the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40). Take time to pray, confessing your failures before God and asking for His grace and redeeming mercy to rekindle the fires of love in your heart once again.

7. Read John 21:15-17.

a. Why do you think Christ repeatedly asked this question of Peter?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read John 21:1-6, visualizing this story in your mind. Can you think of a time when the Lord revealed Himself unmistakably to you? Explain.

b. How would you answer if Jesus asked this question of you?

6. Read John 21:9-14. Was the Lord attentive to details as He served His disciples? Explain. Do you think the Lord is attentive to details in your daily life? If you can, support your answer with Scripture.

8. Read John 13:36-38. What does Peter pledge to Jesus? Now read John 21:18-19. What is Jesus describing to Peter? What things happened to Peter to transform him between these two events? How is God working to transform your life?

Take some time to pray, confessing failures and asking for God's grace and help.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. See John 21:20-21.

a. What is Peter doing here? How is this our tendency as well?

10. See John 21:24-25. Compare with John 20:30-31. John wrote selectively. Why do you think he included this account (John 21) of Jesus' encounter with Peter? Realizing that this story was written for you (John 20:31), take time to pray that the Lord would speak to you personally about its application, as He did to Peter.

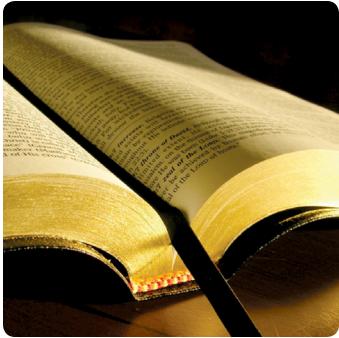
b. How did Jesus respond (John 21:22-23)?

What does this say to you personally?

Scripture for Meditation

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:10-11



BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/. (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this *BNEXT* study?"
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
 - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
 - b. Discuss the format of the *BNEXT* study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.

3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)

4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week

6. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.
2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
- (NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)
3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
5. Dismissal

SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
 - Go to ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/ for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
 - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.
 - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).