

Moving Forward 1 Commentary Materials
Genesis 37:14-33

Israel said ... Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem?—Anxious to learn how his sons were doing in their distant encampment, Jacob dispatched Joseph. Joseph left Hebron, sought them at Shechem, heard of them from a man in "the field," and found that they had left that neighborhood for "Dothan" (about 15 miles to the north). **Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan**—Joseph dutifully continues the trip till he reaches his brothers, with no sense of the evil plot that was about to be hatched.

18 when they saw him afar off—From the level grass-field, where they were watching their cattle, they could see him approaching in the distance from the direction of Shechem.

19 Behold, this dreamer cometh—lit. "master of dreams"—a bitterly sarcastic sneer. Since dreams were considered suggestions from above, to make false pretensions to having received one would reflect badly on the character of the deceiver. They began to form a plot to kill him, and he was rescued only by Reuben's suggestion that he be thrown into one of the wells, which were probably completely dried up during the summer. Reuben, the eldest and in disgrace with his father (cf. [35:22](#); [49:3, 4](#)), perhaps wished to be reconciled to his father.

23 they stript Joseph out of his coat ... of many colours—Imagine him advancing with the unsuspecting openness of a brother. How astonished he must have been at the cold reception and the rough treatment from his own brothers! A vivid picture of his state of agony and despair was later drawn by them as they recalled their evil deed (See [42:21](#)).

25 they sat down to eat bread—This exhibits the state of their hardened consciences. Their common share in this conspiracy is not the only dismal feature in the story. The speed with which the proposal was followed by their joint resolution, and the cool indifference, or rather the fiendish satisfaction with which they sat down to amuse themselves, is astonishing. It is impossible that mere envy at his dreams, his cloak, or the doting partiality of their common father could have goaded them on to such a pitch of resentment or confirmed them in such wickedness. Their hatred of Joseph must have had a far deeper seat. It must have been produced by dislike of his piety and other virtues, which made his character and conduct a constant censure upon theirs, and on account of which they found that they could never be at ease till they had rid themselves of his hated presence. This was the true solution of the mystery, just as it was in the case of Cain ([1 John 3:12](#)). **they lifted up their eyes ... and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites**—They are called "Midianites" ([37:28](#)), and in

Hebrew, "Medanites" ([37:36](#)), being a traveling caravan composed of a mixed association of Arabs. Apparently Abraham's descendants through Ishmael and the sons of Keturah ([25:1-4](#)) had formed a tribal league (cf. [Judg. 8:22-24](#)). Those tribes of northern Arabia had already engaged in caravaning and commerce. Their approach could easily be seen because their road, after crossing the ford from the Transjordan district, led along the south side of the mountains of Gilboa; a party seated on the plain of Dothan could trace them and their string of camels in the distance as they proceeded through the broad and gently sloping valley that intervenes. Trading in the produce of Gilead (northern Transjordan), they were in the regular course of traffic on their way to Egypt; and the chief articles of commerce in which this clan dealt were spices and aromatic materials; this would include a species of resinous gum called "balm of Gilead," the juice of the balsam tree, and myrrh, an Arabic gum with a powerful fragrance. The "balm of Gilead," was renowned for its medicinal qualities ([Jer. 8:22](#); [46:11](#); [Ezek. 27:17](#)). There must have been an enormous demand for these articles in Egypt, as they were constantly used in the process of embalming.

[26-28](#) Judah said ... What profit is it if we slay our brother?—The sight of these traveling merchants gave the conspirators a new solution to their problem. Having no wish to commit a greater degree of crime than was necessary for the accomplishment of their end, they readily approved of Judah's suggestion to dispose of their brother as a slave. The proposal, of course, was founded on their knowledge that the Arabian merchants traded in slaves; there is the clearest evidence furnished by the monuments of Egypt that the traders who were in the habit of bringing slaves from the countries through which they passed found a ready market in the cities of the Nile. **they ... lifted up Joseph out of the pit and sold Joseph**—Acting impulsively on Judah's advice, they had their poor victim ready by the time the merchants reached them; and money being no part of their object, they sold him for "twenty pieces of silver." The money was probably in rings or pieces (shekels); silver is always mentioned in the records of that early age before gold, on account of silver's rarity. The price paid for Joseph represents the "correct average price for a slave in about the eighteenth century B.C." (Kitchen 1966). **they brought Joseph into Egypt**—There were two routes to Egypt—the one was through the hill country, the route taken by Jacob in his flight to Haran; the other was directly westward across the country from Dothan to the maritime coast and then south to Egypt. It is difficult to know at this point in the story that this apparent travesty of justice was the means by which God sovereignly worked to place Joseph in Egypt where he would be able to save his family from certain death due to the area-wide famine that was just ahead.

[29, 30](#) Reuben returned unto the pit—He seems to have taken a circuitous route, with a view of secretly rescuing the poor lad from a lingering death by starvation. His intentions were excellent, and his feelings no doubt hurt when he discovered what had

been done in his absence. But the thing was of God, who had designed that Joseph's deliverance should be accomplished by other means than his.

31-33 they took Joseph's coat—One sin necessarily leads to another to conceal the first; the scheme of deception which the sons of Jacob planned and practiced on their father was a necessary consequence of their first crime. What a wonder that their cruel words, "thy son's coat," and their forced efforts to comfort him did not awaken suspicion! But extreme grief, like every other passion, is blind; and Jacob, great as his affliction was, did not allow himself to indulge his sorrow more than became one who believed in the omniscience of a supreme and all-wise God.

34 Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins—the common signs of Oriental mourning. A rent is made in the skirt, and a coarse rough piece of black sackcloth or camel's hair cloth is wound round the waist ([1 Kings 20:31, 32](#); [Isa. 3:24](#)), or could be worn in place of one's clothes ([2 Kings 6:30](#); [Job 16:15](#)), or under one's garments ([Jon. 3:6](#)).

Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Genesis 50:15-21
Commentary 1

Alarm (v. 15). When did this event occur? Was it after the family returned home from burying Jacob in Canaan, or was it during the period of official mourning in Egypt? The position of the narrative in the text suggests that it happened after the return from Canaan, but it could well have taken place during the long period of mourning prior to that trip. One day the eleven brothers became aware of the fact that their father's death left them without anyone to mediate with Joseph, the second most powerful man in Egypt; and they were afraid.

We who read this account centuries later want to say, "Men, what's the problem? Didn't Joseph forgive you, kiss you, weep over you, and give you every evidence of his love? Didn't he explain that God had overruled for good all the evil that you had done to him? Didn't Joseph make every provision to bring you to Egypt and take care of you? Then why are you alarmed?"

The answer is simple: *They didn't believe their brother.* The gracious way he spoke to them and the loving way he treated them made no impact on their hearts. But Joseph's brothers are no different from some professed Christians today who are constantly worrying about God's judgment and whether or not He's really forgiven them and made them His children.

"I feel the Lord has abandoned me," a church member said to me one day. "I'm sure I'm heading for judgment, and I'm just not saved at all." "What would you like God to do to assure you?" I asked. "Do you want Him to perform a miracle?"

"Oh, no, that wouldn't work. Satan can perform miracles." "Would you like to hear Him speak to you from heaven?" "Well, some personal message from God would be helpful."

"Fine. Let's open His Word and see what He has to say about your sins and His forgiveness. After all, when we open the Bible, God opens His mouth and speaks to us." We looked into the Scriptures together, and as she laid hold of God's promises, the Lord gave her peace.

After all that Joseph had done to encourage them, it was cruel of his brothers to say, "Joseph will perhaps hate us and pay us back for what we did to him." (We often suspect in others what we'd do ourselves if we had the opportunity!) When you doubt God's Word, you soon begin to question God's love, and then you give up all hope for the future, because faith, hope, and love go together. But it all begins with faith: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" ([Rom. 10:17](#), NKJV).

What the men should have done was to sit down and calmly review all that Joseph had said to them and done for them. In many tangible ways, Joseph had demonstrated his love and forgiveness and had given them every reason to believe that their past sins were over and forgotten. They really had nothing to fear.

How did we know God loves us and forgives those who put their faith in Christ? *His unchanging Word tells us so.* "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" ([1 John 5:13](#), NKJV). How we feel and what God says are two different things, and we must never judge God's eternal Word by our transient emotions. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" asked Paul, and then he proceeded to answer the question: *Nothing* ([Rom. 8:35, 38-39](#)).

Appeal (vv. 16-17). Afraid to approach Joseph personally, they sent a message to him, hoping to convince him. Did Jacob actually speak the words they quoted? Probably not. If Jacob had wanted to intercede for the guilty sons, he could easily have done it when he was alone with Joseph. And he had seventeen years in which to do it! It's likely that the brothers concocted this story, hoping that Joseph's love for his father would give him a greater love for his brothers.

How did Joseph respond to their message? "When their message came to him, Joseph wept" ([v. 17](#)). He was deeply hurt that his own brothers didn't believe his words or

accept his kind deeds at face value as true expressions of his love and forgiveness. What more could he have done to convince them? Charles Wesley may have had Joseph and his brothers in mind when he wrote his hymn "Depth of Mercy":

Depth of mercy! Can there be Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear— Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
Now incline me to repent; Let me now my sins lament;
Now my foul revolt deplore, Weep, believe and sin no more.
There for me the Saviour stands, Holding forth His wounded hands;
God is love! I know, I feel, Jesus weeps and loves me still.

Assurance ([vv. 18-21](#)). Joseph must have summoned his brothers to his home, for it's not likely they would go there on their own. When they arrived, they fell prostrate before him in fear, their last bow in fulfillment of Joseph's prophetic dreams. Like the Prodigal Son, they couldn't accept free forgiveness. That was expecting too much! The brothers offered to become servants and work their way to the place where Joseph could forgive them and accept them ([Luke 15:19](#)). If that's your approach to forgiveness, read [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) and claim it.

The only people God can forgive are those who know they're sinners, who admit it and confess that they can't do anything to merit or earn God's forgiveness. Whether it's the woman at the well ([John 4](#)), the tax collector in the tree ([Luke 19:1-10](#)), or the thief on the cross ([23:39-43](#)), all sinners have to admit their guilt, abandon their proud efforts to earn salvation, and throw themselves on the mercy of the Lord.

How does God assure His children that He has indeed forgiven them and forgotten their sins? The same way Joseph assured his frightened brothers: *He speaks to us from His Word*. Twice Joseph said, "Don't be afraid!" He comforted them and spoke kindly to them. This is what God does for His own if they will read His Word, receive it into their hearts, and trust it completely. "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid" ([Isa. 12:2](#), KJV).

Some Christians think it's a mark of humility and special sanctity to be fearful and insecure about their salvation. Actually, an attitude of fearful indecision and anxiety is only evidence of unbelief and a refusal to take God at His Word. It's nothing to brag about! Can God be trusted? Does He lie? Are His promises true? Then why do people waver in unbelief?

Joseph didn't minimize their sins, for he said, "You intended to harm me" ([Gen. 50:20](#)). He knew that there had been evil in their hearts, but he also knew that God had overruled their evil deeds to accomplish His good purposes. This reminds us of what

happened on the cross. Peter said, "Him [Jesus], being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up" ([Acts 2:23-24](#), NKJV). Out of the greatest sin ever committed by humankind, God brought the greatest blessing that ever came to humankind.

Joseph not only forgave his brothers, but he also assured them of his constant care. "I will nourish you, and your little ones" ([Gen. 50:21](#), KJV). He gave them homes to live in, work to do, food to eat, and provision for their needs. Once again, we see here a picture of our Savior, who promises never to leave us or forsake us ([Matt. 28:20](#); [John 6:37](#); [10:27-29](#); [Heb. 13:5-6](#)) and to meet our every need ([Rom. 8:32](#); [Phil. 4:19](#)).

For seventeen years Joseph's brothers lived under a cloud of fear and apprehension all because they didn't really trust him. As long as their father was alive, they trusted in human ties to protect them, but when Jacob died, their only defense was gone. Had they believed Joseph, they could have enjoyed those years with him and their father, and there wouldn't have been clouds of fear to rob them of joy.

As God's children through faith in Christ, let's rejoice that our sins are forgiven and forgotten, buried in the depths of the sea ([Micah 7:19](#)), cast behind God's back ([Isa. 38:17](#)), blotted out and remembered no more ([Isa. 43:25](#), [44:22](#); [Heb. 8:12](#), [10:17](#)). Let's believe what God says! The old life has been buried and we can walk in newness of life ([Col. 2:13](#); [3:1-11](#)).

Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Authentic (Genesis 25-20).

Commentary 2

[15-21](#) When Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us—Joseph was deeply affected by this communication. He gave them the strongest assurances of his forgiveness and thereby displayed a beautiful trait of his own pious character and appeared an eminent type of the Savior. Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Saw that their father was dead—This at once argues both a sense of guilt in their own consciences, and a want of confidence in their brother. They might have supposed that hitherto he had forbore to punish them merely on their father's account; but now that he was dead, and Joseph having them completely in his power, they imagined that he would take vengeance on them for their former conduct towards him.

Thus conscience records criminality; and, by giving birth to continual fears and doubtfulness, destroys all peace of mind, security, and confidence

He that commits a fault shall quickly find The pressing guilt lie heavy on his mind.
Though bribes, or favor shall assert his cause, Pronounce him guiltless, and elude the
laws, None quits himself; his own impartial thought Will damn, and conscience will
record the fault. This, first, the wicked feels.

We have seen this in the preceding history often exemplified in the case of Joseph's
brethren.

Genesis 50:16 Thy father did command—Whether he did or not we cannot tell.
Some think they had feigned this story, but that is not so likely. Jacob might have had
suspicions too, and might have thought that the best way to prevent evil was to humble
themselves before their brother, and get a fresh assurance of his forgiveness.

Genesis 50:17 The servants of the God of thy father—These words were
wonderfully well chosen, and spoken in the most forcible manner to Joseph's piety and
filial affection. No wonder then that he wept when they spake to him.

Genesis 50:19 Am I in the place of God?—These words may be understood either
as a question, or an affirmative proposition. How should I take any farther notice of
your transgression? I have passed it by, the matter lies now between God and you. Or,
in the order of Divine providence I am now in God's place; he has furnished me with
means, and made me a distributor of his bounty; I will therefore not only nourish you,
but also your little ones, **Genesis 50:21**: and therefore he spake comfortably unto them,
as in **Genesis 45:8**, telling them that he attributed the whole business to the particular
providence of God rather than to any ill will or malice in them, and that, in permitting
him to be brought into Egypt, God had graciously saved their lives, the life of their
father, the lives of the people of Canaan, and of the Egyptians: as therefore God had
honored him by making him vicegerent in the dispensations of his especial bounty
towards so many people, it was impossible he should be displeased with the means by
which this was brought about. A Commentary and Critical Notes.

Romans 8:28

8:28 We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.^{NIV}
This verse develops the thought introduced at the end of **verse 27**. Paul emphasizes
that the Spirit's efforts on our behalf are carried out in full agreement with God's will, to
bring us to maturity. This is expressed elsewhere by Paul: "He chose us in him before
the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**Ephesians 1:4** NIV).

Everything that happens to us in this life is directed toward that goal. What happens
may not itself be "good," but God will make it work to our ultimate good, to meet his
ultimate goal for our life. In the KJV this well-known verse reads, "All things work
together for good to them that love God . . ." The wording is smooth and familiar but,

unfortunately, can lead to a misunderstanding of Paul's point. God works all things for good, not "all things work out." Suffering will still bring pain, loss, and sorrow, and sin will bring shame. But under God's control, the eventual outcome will be for our good.

God works behind the scenes, ensuring that even in the middle of mistakes and tragedies, good will result for *those who love him*. At times this will happen quickly, often enough to help us trust the principle. But there will also be events whose results for good we will not know until eternity. Paul knew this from his own experience: "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" ([Philippians 1:12](#) NIV); I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" ([2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#) NIV).

Who are called according to his purpose.^{NRSV} God's Spirit called us, convinced us of our sinfulness, showed us what Christ could do for us, and then helped us to accept Christ. Our ultimate destiny is to be like Christ. God's design is more than just an invitation; God summons us with a purpose in mind: we are to be like Christ and share his glory.

LIFE APPLICATION

IN ALL THINGS

God works in all things—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good; evil is prevalent in our fallen world. But God is able to turn it around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose. Note also that this promise can be claimed only by those who love, God and are "called according to his purpose." Those who are called are those the Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive Christ. Such people have a new perspective on life. They trust in God, not life's treasures; they look to their security in heaven, not on earth; they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution, because God is with them.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Romans.

Moving Forward 1

Life-Sharing-Pioneers Lesson 1 Forgiveness & Healing Genesis 37:14-33, Genesis 50:15-21, Romans 8:28

1. Do you find it more difficult to forgive a wrong done to you or a wrong done to someone you love?

I find it more difficult to forgive a wrong done to someone I love, especially if the person still seems to be hurt or affected by what happened.

2. How does an unforgiving heart, keep us from being healed to move forward in life?

Having unforgiveness in our hearts produces bitterness in our hearts. Bitterness is a poison for Christians always leading to death. Ann Lott Graham said that having unforgiveness is like drinking rat poison ourselves and then sitting and waiting for the rat to die. We are only destroying ourselves. No one who is killing himself/herself is moving forward in life.

Genesis 37:14-33 (NIV)

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.

²⁰ "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." ²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. ²² "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe--the richly ornamented robe he was wearing-- ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take

them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

²⁷ Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. ²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. ²⁹ When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes.

³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

³¹ Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

³² They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this.

Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." ³³ He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

Genesis 50:15-21 (NIV)

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died:

¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"

²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

3. What did Joseph's brothers take from him?

Joseph's brothers robbed him of his future. They took away the relationship he had with his father and his brother Benjamin. They removed the dreams he had for his life. They made him question the goodness of God. They took away his freedom in selling him as a slave.

4. How did they try to guarantee that no one would go looking for Joseph?

Their father is the one person who would have sold all that he had to go looking for Joseph. By convincing Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal,

they knew that no one would ever go looking for Joseph, thereby assuring that they would never be found out.

5. It's been more than 25 years between Joseph going into slavery and the brothers asking to be forgiven. What's the longest you have held a grudge against someone?

I really don't know. There were times when I thought I had completely let go of something, but then when I retell the story of what happened to me, I still have some of the same early feelings again. A lady falsely accused me of stealing money from a cash register merely because I was a black boy in the south walking past the register. I was taken to jail and stripped naked as they looked for the alleged money. The money was actually still in the register. I don't know if I carried a grudge against the lady who accused me or against the system of racism that allowed it to happen. I saw the lady again years later, but instead of anger, I just felt sorry for her. I never did say anything to her.

6. Why did Joseph's brothers wait until their father had died before taking responsibility for their actions?

They knew that Joseph would not take any action that would hurt their father who was up along in years. They were hiding behind their father with him as a shield to protect them. They knew what they had deserved to get.

7. Why do we sometimes not come forward and apologize for the wrong that we have done?

Sometimes we are embarrassed and ashamed. Sometimes we are afraid of how the person might react. Sometimes like the brothers we try to hide behind someone or something. We may blame our actions on being drunk, or on drugs, or even on some previous actions of the person we hurt. Sometimes we are just filled with too much pride to actually humble ourselves and admit we were wrong.

8. What happens in a relationship when we try to move forward without confessing our feelings to the one who has hurt us?

There are times when we are not aware of how our actions have changed toward that person. The other person notices the change, but we will be in denial by claiming nothing is wrong or everything is alright, but our unconscious actions betray the very words we speak. We may begin to even distance ourselves emotionally from the person. This keeps us from trusting the person, and our mistrust may cause us to misinterpret the actions or words of the person. We no longer put our all into building a positive relationship with the other person which allows us to move forward in honesty and openness. There is a crack in the relationship, that may lead to eventual breakdown in the relationship if the crack continues. It's like a crack in a wall. If you don't tend to what caused the crack, it will continue to go and spread.

9. Is it possible to forgive without the other person offering an apology? Why or why not.

Yes. Jesus never made granting forgiveness dependent on the actions of another, otherwise we would still be at the person's mercy. Forgiveness is a choice. It is a choice to give up your right to get back or to get even with another person. Forgiveness does not mean that a relationship is immediately restored. It means that you have removed the obstacle on your end, for some type of restoration to take place. There are some people who are going to never apologize for their actions. Sometimes the person is certain that he/she did not do the wrong you may have accused them of doing. Sometimes the person did not intend the consequences that we are holding against them. Sometimes the person did not do what we actually believed the person did and the problem lies with us making wrong assumptions. Forgiveness may still be needed on our part, but the other person is not going to apologize. The reality is that in some situations, we simply have to agree that the two of us see the same situation entirely different and agree to move on without bringing the same situation up over and over again.

10. At what point do you think Joseph forgave his brothers?

I think Joseph finally forgave his brothers here in chapter 50 after his father had died. Joseph had planned to only save the life of his brother Benjamin and was quite content sending his brothers back to face the famine in chapter 45 of Genesis. It was only because his brothers told him that it would kill his father if

Benjamin did not come back with them, that he revealed himself as his brother to them. His brothers probably remembered this and that's why they were afraid of Joseph.

11. How were Joseph's brothers kept from moving forward during the time prior to their father's death?

Joseph's brothers did not have a close relationship with him despite the kindness he had shown them. Their own guilt kept them wondering, "when is going to give to us what is coming to us." Nobody was brave enough to bring everything out on the table so the family gatherings had a sort of hollow ring to them. They probably all blamed their lack of confession on not wanting to get their elderly father too upset all over again. They were not able to build relationships around trust with Joseph so they lived their lives on the edge of fear. Lingered in the back of all they were doing was "what's going to happen when our father dies."

12. Do you think Joseph should have let his brothers off so easily? He had been sold as a slave and later thrown into a prison? What punishment do you think would have liked to have seen them get, had you been Joseph?

I don't think Joseph's brothers got off easily. They spent 13 years lying about their brother's death to their father. Then they had to admit faking his death which caused them to lose a lot of credibility with their father. They spent years living in fear that they were one day going to be arrested and possibly put to death. Their families knew what they had tried to do to Joseph which may have caused some of them to lose some respect for them. I think in the early days of being sent to Egypt I would have liked to have seen them thrown in jail. But now after all these years, I'd just want to try to end my life and theirs on a positive note. Nothing was going to undo the damage that had been done. God had seen me through it all and blessed me in the process. s

13. Do you still spend time thinking about getting back at a person for a wrong that was done to you? Why won't you let it go?

At this point in my life, I believe that I have been set free from trying to get back at anyone.

14. What made it possible for Joseph to move on with his life?

Joseph recognized that God had a plan in mind all along. He recognized that God used the malicious acts of others to put him in a place where he could make a greater difference in the lives of others. The worst day of his life was actually the beginning of salvation for the people of Israel and the nation of Egypt. What we think is leading to our destruction, can lead to great things for us if we choose to believe that God was at work in us even when it looked as though God had abandoned us.

15. How does this verse from Romans 8:28 help us to move forward when others have hurt us deeply?

Romans 8:28 (NIV) ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to God's purpose.

If we recognized that they have only furthered the plan of God for our lives, then we can let go sooner. People can hurt us, but they can't keep us from becoming what God has called us to be. Only we can stop the process of God in our lives. Our setbacks do not have to knock us out. God is still at work.

16. Is it possible that our unforgiveness of others is actually an unwillingness to forgive God for allowing certain things to happen to us? Why or why not.

Yes. We often blame God for things happening to us, but we don't actually admit it. We are more tempted to say things like, "God if only you had of done this", or "if only you had warned me." Or "if only I had not tried to do what you I thought you told me to do. We may need in our hearts to forgive God even though God has done no wrong. It may be the first step in moving forward. God is big enough to withstand us blaming Him for the things that have gone wrong in our lives. In times, God may even reveal the "why" of what it was that we have endured.

Life-Sharing -Pioneers Lesson 2—Letting Go Of The Past Genesis 19:10-29, Ecc. 7:10

Genesis 19:10-29

12, 13 Hast thou here any besides? ... we will destroy this place—Apostolic authority has declared Lot was "a righteous man" ([2 Pet. 2:8](#)), at bottom good, though he contented himself with lamenting the sins that he saw instead of acting on his own convictions and withdrawing himself and his family from such a sink of corruption. But favor was shown him; and even his bad relatives had, for his sake, an offer of deliverance, which was ridiculed and spurned ([2 Pet. 3:4](#)).

15, 17 The kindly interest the angels took in the preservation of Lot is beautifully displayed. But he "lingered." Was it from sorrow at the prospect of losing all his property, the acquisition of many years? Or was it that his benevolent heart was paralyzed by thoughts of the awful crisis? This is the charitable way of accounting for a delay that would have been fatal but for the friendly urgency of the angel.

18, 19 Lot said ... Oh! not so, my LORD ... I cannot escape to the mountain—What a strange lack of faith and fortitude, as if he who had brought about his rescue would not be able to fortify him for the strenuous climb of the mountain (Westermann).

21 See, I have accepted thee concerning this ... also—His request was granted him, the prayer of faith availed, in order to convince him from his own experience that it would have been best to follow implicitly the divine directions.

22 Haste ... for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither—The ruin of Sodom was suspended till he was secure. What care God takes of his people ([Rev. 7:3](#))! What a proof of the love which God had for a good though weak man!

24 Then the LORD rained ... brimstone and fire from ... heaven—Some have thought that this destruction was brought about by volcanic activity. But the lack of volcanoes in the area east and south of the Dead Sea, where the cities in question are believed to have been located, would seem to deny this. The area was dotted with bitumen pits ([Gen. 14:10](#)) and God may well have ignited these to create the conflagration (Davis).

26 Lot was accompanied by his wife and two daughters. But whether it was from irresistible curiosity, or that she was about to return to save something, his wife

lingered, and while thus disobeying the angel's counsel, "look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain," she was overwhelmed by the fallout and died.

27 Abraham gat up early in the morning ...—Abraham was at this time in Mamre near Hebron, and a traveler has verified the truth of this passage. "From the height which overlooks Hebron, where the patriarch stood, the observer at the present day has an extensive view spread out before him toward the Dead Sea. A cloud of smoke rising from the plain would be visible to a person at Hebron now, and could have been, therefore, to Abraham as he looked toward Sodom on the morning of its destruction by God" (Hackett). It must have been an awful sight, and is frequently alluded to in Scripture ([Deut. 29:23](#); [Isa. 13:19](#); [Jude 1:7](#)). Some exploration in this region has shown burnt and scorched soil, which may have resulted from this event.

29 when God destroyed the cities ...—This is most instructive after so painful a narrative. It shows that if God is a "consuming fire" to the wicked, he also is the friend of the righteous. He "remembered" the intercessions of Abraham. What confidence this gives us that he will remember the intercessions of one greater than Abraham in our behalf—Christ.

Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

[Genesis 19:11](#) And they smote the men—with blindness—This has been understood two ways:

1. The angels, by the power which God had given them, deprived these wicked men of a proper and regular use of their sight, so as either totally to deprive them of it, or render it so confused that they could no longer distinguish objects; or,
2. They caused such a deep darkness to take place, that they could not find Lot's door. The author of the book of The Wisdom of Solomon was evidently of this latter opinion, for he says they were compassed about with horrible great darkness, [Genesis 19:17](#). See a similar case of Elisha and the Syrians, [2 Kings 6:18](#), etc.

[Genesis 19:12](#) Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law—Here there appears to be but one meant, as the word [חתן](#) *chathan* is in the singular number; but in [Genesis 19:14](#) the word is plural, [חתניו](#) *chathanaiv*, his sons-in-law. There were only two in number; as we do not hear that Lot had more than two daughters: and these seem not to have been actually married to those daughters, but only betrothed, as is evident from what Lot says, [Genesis 19:8](#); for they had not known man, but were the spouses elect of those who are here called his sons-in-law. But though these might be reputed as a part of Lot's family, and entitled on this account to God's protection, yet it is sufficiently plain that they did not escape the perdition of these wicked men; and the

reason is given, [Genesis 19:14](#), they received the solemn warning as a ridiculous tale, the creature of Lot's invention, or the offspring of his fear. Therefore they made no provision for their escape, and doubtless perished, notwithstanding the sincerely offered grace, in the perdition that fell on this ungodly city.

[Genesis 19:16](#) **While he lingered**—Probably in affectionate though useless entreaties to prevail on the remaining parts of his family to escape from the destruction that was now descending; laid hold upon his hand—pulled them away by mere force, the Lord being merciful; else they had been left to perish in their lingering, as the others were in their gainsaying.

[Genesis 19:17](#) **When they had brought them forth, etc.**—Every word here is emphatic, Escape for thy LIFE; thou art in the most imminent danger of perishing; thy life and thy soul are both at stake. Look not behind thee—thou hast but barely time enough to escape from the judgment that is now descending; no lingering, or thou art lost! one look back may prove fatal to thee, and God commands thee to avoid it. Neither stay thou in all the plain, because God will destroy that as well as the city. Escape to the mountain, on which these judgments shall not light, and which God has appointed thee for a place of refuge; lest thou be CONSUMED. It is not an ordinary judgment that is coming; a fire from heaven shall burn up the cities, the plain, and all that remain in the cities and in the plain. Both the beginning and end of this exhortation are addressed to his personal feelings. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life;" and self-preservation is the first law of nature, to which every other consideration is minor and unimportant.

[Genesis 19:19](#) **I cannot escape to the mountain**—He saw the destruction so near, that he imagined he should not have time sufficient to reach the mountain before it arrived. He did not consider that God could give no command to his creatures that it would be impossible for them to fulfill; but the hurry and perturbation of his mind will at once account for and excuse this gross oversight.

[Genesis 19:20](#) **It is a little one**—Probably Lot wished to have it for an inheritance, and therefore pleaded its being a little one, that his request might be the more readily granted. Or he might suppose, that being a little city, it was less depraved than Sodom and Gomorrah, and therefore not so ripe for punishment; which was probably the case.

[Genesis 19:21](#) **See, I have accepted thee**—How prevalent is prayer with God! Far from refusing to grant a reasonable petition, he shows himself as if under embarrassment to deny any.

[Genesis 19:22](#) **I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither**—So these heavenly messengers had the strictest commission to take care of Lot and his family; and even

the purposes of Divine justice could not be accomplished on the rebellious, till this righteous man and his family had escaped from the place. A proof of Abraham's assertion, The Judge of all the earth will do right.

The name of the city was called Zoar—צוער *Tsoar*, LITTLE, its former name being Bela.

[Genesis 19:24](#) The Lord rained—brimstone and fire from the Lord—As all judgment is committed to the Son of God, many of the primitive fathers and several modern divines have supposed that the words **יהוה** *vaihovah* and **מאת יהוה** *meeth Yehovah* imply, Jehovah the Son raining brimstone and fire from Jehovah the Father; and that this place affords no mean proof of the proper Divinity of our blessed Redeemer. It may be so; but though the point is sufficiently established elsewhere, it does not appear to me to be plainly indicated here. And it is always better on a subject of this kind not to have recourse to proofs which require proofs to confirm them. It must however be granted that two persons mentioned as Jehovah in one verse, is both a strange and curious circumstance; and it will appear more remarkable when we consider that the person called Jehovah, who conversed with Abraham, (see [Genesis 18](#)), and sent those two angels to bring Lot and his family out of this devoted place, and seems himself after he left off talking with Abraham to have ascended to heaven, [Genesis 19:33](#), does not any more appear on this occasion till we hear that JEHOVAH rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from JEHOVAH out of heaven. This certainly gives much countenance to the opinion referred to above, though still it may fall short of positive proof.

Brimstone and fire—The word **גפרית** *gophrith*, which we translate brimstone, is of very uncertain derivation. It is evidently used metaphorically, to point out the utmost degrees of punishment executed on the most flagitious criminals, in [Deuteronomy 29:23](#); [Job 18:15](#); [Psalm 11:6](#); [Isaiah 34:9](#); [Ezekiel 38:22](#). And as hell, or an everlasting separation from God and the glory of his power, is the utmost punishment that can be inflicted on sinners, hence brimstone and fire are used in Scripture to signify the torments in that place of punishment. See [Isaiah 30:33](#); [Revelation 14:10](#); [19:20](#); [20:10](#); [21:8](#). We may safely suppose that it was quite possible that a shower of nitrous particles might have been precipitated from the atmosphere, here, as in many other places, called heaven, which, by the action of fire or the electric fluid, would be immediately ignited, and so consume the cities; and, as we have already seen that the plains about Sodom and Gomorrah abounded with asphaltus or bitumen pits, (see [Genesis 14:10](#)), that what is particularly meant here in reference to the plain is the setting fire to this vast store of inflammable matter by the agency of lightning or the electric fluid; and this, in the most natural and literal manner, accounts for the whole plain being burnt up, as that plain abounded with this bituminous substance; and thus

we find three agents employed in the total ruin of these cities, and all the circumjacent plain:

1. Innumerable nitrous particles precipitated from the atmosphere.
2. The vast quantity of asphaltus or bitumen which abounded in that country: and,
3. Lightning or the electric spark, which ignited the nitre and bitumen, and thus consumed both the cities and the plain or champaign country in which they were situated.

Genesis 19:25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain—This forms what is called the lake Asphaltites, Dead Sea, or Salt Sea, which, according to the most authentic accounts, is about seventy miles in length, and eighteen in breadth.

The most strange and incredible tales are told by many of the ancients, and by many of the moderns, concerning the place where these cities stood. Common fame says that the waters of this sea are so thick that a stone will not sink in them, so tough and clammy that the most boisterous wind cannot ruffle them, so deadly that no fish can live in them, and that if a bird happen to fly over the lake, it is killed by the poisonous effluvia proceeding from the waters; that scarcely any verdure can grow near the place, and that in the vicinity where there are any trees they bear a most beautiful fruit, but when you come to open it you find nothing but ashes! and that the place was burning long after the apostles' times. These and all similar tales may be safely pronounced great exaggerations of facts, or fictions of ignorant, stupid, and superstitious monks, or impositions of unprincipled travelers, who, knowing that the common people are delighted with the marvelous, have stuffed their narratives with such accounts merely to procure a better sale for their books.

The truth is, the waters are exceedingly salt, far beyond the usual saltiness of the sea, and hence it is called the Salt Sea. In consequence of this circumstance bodies will float in it that would sink in common salt water, and probably it is on this account that few fish can live in it. But the monks of St. Saba affirmed to Dr. Shaw, that they had seen fish caught in it; and as to the reports of any noxious quality in the air, or in the evaporations from its surface, the simple fact is, lumps of bitumen often rise from the bottom to its surface, and exhale a fetid odor which does not appear to have any thing poisonous in it. Dr. Poccoke swam in it for nearly a quarter of an hour, and felt no kind of inconvenience; the water, he says, is very clear, and having brought away a bottle of it, he "had it analyzed, and found it to contain no substances besides salt and a little alum."

As there are frequent eruptions of a bituminous matter from the bottom of this lake, which seem to argue a subterraneous fire, hence the accounts that this place was burning even after the days of the apostles. And this phenomenon still continues, for

"masses of bitumen," says Dr. Shaw, "in large hemispheres, are raised at certain times from the bottom, which, as soon as they touch the surface, and are thereby acted upon by the external air, burst at once, with great smoke and noise, like the *pulvis fulminans* of the chemists, and disperse themselves in a thousand pieces. But this only happens near the shore, for in greater depths the eruptions are supposed to discover themselves in such columns of smoke as are now and then observed to arise from the lake. And perhaps to such eruptions as these we may attribute that variety of pits and hollows, not unlike the traces of many of our ancient limekilns, which are found in the neighborhood of this lake. The bitumen is in all probability accompanied from the bottom with sulphur, as both of them are found promiscuously upon the shore, and the latter is precisely the same with common native sulphur; the other is friable, yielding upon friction, or by being put into the fire, a fetid smell." The bitumen, after having been some time exposed to the air, becomes indurated like a stone. I have some portions of it before me, brought by a friend of mine from the spot; it is very black, hard, and on friction yields a fetid odor.

For several curious particulars on this subject, see Dr. Pococke's Travels, vol. ii., part 1, chap. 9, and Dr. Shaw's Travels, 4th. edit., p. 346, etc.
A Commentary and Critical Notes.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 Commentary

The former days were better than these?—This is a common saying; and it is as foolish as it is common. There is no weight nor truth in it; but men use it to excuse their crimes, and the folly of their conduct. "In former times, say they, men might be more religious, use more self-denial, be more exemplary." This is all false. In former days men were wicked as they are now, and religion was unfashionable: God also is the same now as he was then; as just, as merciful, as ready to help: and there is no depravity in the age that will excuse your crimes, your follies, and your carelessness.

Among the oriental proverbs I find the following: "Many say, This is a corrupt age. This mode of speaking is not just, it is not the age that is corrupt, but the men of the age."

A Commentary and Critical Notes.

10 Do not call God into question for making the former days better than the present, as Job did ([Job 29:2-5](#)). Verse [7:10](#) points to the problem of waiting until the end of things and then making a judgment, for even then the evaluations are not always accurate. Thus [7:10](#) provides a necessary check to [7:8, 9](#) (cf. Crenshaw).

Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Life-Sharing -Pioneers Lesson 2—Letting Go Of The Past Genesis 19:10-29, Ecc. 7:10

1. Jesus said, “come follow me.” What was the most difficult thing for you to let go of in order to follow Jesus or if you are not a believer, what is the most difficult thing you would have to let go of to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Trying to commit to only dating or going out with girls who were Christians.

2. What makes it difficult to let go of our past?

There are some things in our past that were a lot of fun to do. There are people that we have been friends with for a long time that we don't want to say goodbye to. There are memories associated with certain places and we do not want to let them go. There are lifestyles that were comfortable for us and we do not want to downsize. There are certain benefits and privileges we have that we want to keep. Sometimes we just do not want to let go because we don't like change.

Genesis 19:10-29 (NIV)

¹⁰ But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door.

¹¹ Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door. ¹² The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here--sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, ¹³ because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

¹⁴ So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

¹⁵ With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." ¹⁶ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.

¹⁷ As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" ¹⁸ But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! ¹⁹ Your servant has found

favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die.

²⁰ Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it--it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared."

²¹ He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of.

²² But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.) ²³ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴ Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah--from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities--and also the vegetation in the land.

²⁶ But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. ²⁷ Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. ²⁸ He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

²⁹ So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

3. Why had Lot chosen to live in the area of Sodom and Gommorah. (See Genesis 13:10-13)

Originally, Lot and Abraham had such large possessions that their servants were arguing over the water for their flocks. Abraham had told Lot to choose whether he wanted to go to the right or to the left. Lot chose the plains heading toward Sodom because the land looked great and was well watered. He thought he was getting the best end of the deal.

Genesis 13:8-12 (NIV)

⁸ So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." ¹⁰ Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: ¹² Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

4. How do we know things had not gone too well for Lot with his choice to live near Sodom. (See Genesis 14: 10-12, 14)

The city of Sodom had been conquered and the people had been carried off as slaves. Lot was caught up in the battle as one of the prisoners. Had it not been for Abraham, he might have remained a slave.

Genesis 14:11-12 (NIV) ¹¹ The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. ¹² They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom. **Genesis 14:14-16 (NIV)** ¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

5. What do you think it was that kept pulling Lot back To Sodom?

It's hard to know why Lot kept coming back to Sodom. I think he was a man trying to live on both sides of the fence at the same time. At times he must have enjoyed the sinful lifestyle going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. He had moved from the plains, to the gates of the city, and finally he was living inside the city. The people had to have been offering Lot something in order for him to stay there. Yet at other times he seemed to have been bothered by the sin in that we find this in 2nd Peter.

2 Peter 2:6-8 (NIV) ⁶ if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)--

6. Why do you think it was hard for Lot's sons in law to take him seriously?

They saw no reason to believe that any kind of judgment was imminent. Life was going on just as it always had been. Lot obviously had done a lot of joking around with his sons in law in regards to his own religious beliefs because they

thought that Lot was just joking around. Lot had lost some credibility among the future sons in law, so they saw no need to take him seriously in talking about the judgment of God. Maybe Lot was not walking close enough to the Lord for them to have seen any real difference between their lives and the life that Lot was living.

7. Why is it hard for some people to take us seriously if we talk about the judgment of God coming to this country?

Some people do not see much of a difference between the lives of Christians and the lives of people who do not know Christ. They figure that judgment would have to start in the church before it could start in the world. If our lives are not any different from the lives of our unsaved friends, we lose our moral authority to talk about sin and judgment. Every believer that is truly trying to live for God is going to be treated differently by those in the world, even if it simply means mocking them for their faith. In unbelievers never feel uneasy when we are with them, then we are probably not walking the walk.

8. Why do you think Lot hesitated to leave when the angels told him so that the angels had to grab the arms of the four of them to get them out of the city?

Lot may have not wanted to feel responsible for not being able to convince his sons to be to leave and wanted more time. Lot is being asked to leave all of his possessions behind with no chance of retrieving anything. He may have wanted to gather some possessions to take with him so that he wouldn't leave broke. He may have simply been hoping that this was all just a bad dream and that the angels were not really going to destroy the city. If what the angels said were true, then all of their friends, their servants, and their possessions would be gone within 24 hours. That was not a very promising future. He was he going to start all over again with nothing?

9. What do you think the family was most afraid of once they got outside of the city?

I think they were afraid of how earth were they going to make it having to leave everything behind. They had come to Sodom as a pretty wealthy family. They were leaving with nothing but the clothes on their back. They probably were not afraid of the judgment that was to come because the angels had promised them safe passage to Zoar.

10. What do you think is Lot's true motivation for trying to save the city of Zoar?

I think that Lot was trying to save a piece of his past. They may not have been able to go back to Sodom, but they could go back to Zoar.

11. Why do you think Lot's wife looked back?

I think she looked back for the memories of what they were giving up. She probably wanted to look, remember, and say goodbye. So much of what was important to her was being destroyed back in Sodom.

12. Have you ever gave something or someone one more look or one more chance and regretted that you did?

Yes. God clearly delivered me from a temptation when I was in college, and then I was stupid enough to see if God would deliver me from the same temptation a second time. I should have never taken a second look. Sometimes, once we are clear of a situation, we should do all that we can to avoid trying to go back to that situation, place, thing or person again.

13. How does the desire to look back, hinder us in moving forward in areas of our lives?

The desire to look back can cause us to believe that our best days are all behind us. We start measuring our lives based on what was, instead of what could possibly still be. We start focusing on what God did, rather than on what God is doing. We forget that God says in Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV) ¹⁸ "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.

14. Looking at Ecclesiastes 7:10, do you think the "good old days" were as good as we remember them to have been? Why or Why not?

A lot of times the good ole days are absent of some of the bad memories that occurred during that time. We may remember the joy we had as kids playing with each other, while forgetting the racism and prejudice was going on all around us. People talk about the 1950's as a time when America was close to God, yet at the same time the discrimination and racism destroying the lives of Black People were sanctified by the law and by many churches. Our society has always been at odds with the word of God even though certain benefits were given to certain segments of Christianity. There has never been a time when this nation was a Christian nation. There were periods in which Christianity had greater influence through the law in our society, but never have we been submitted to the cause of Christ.

15. Why must we at times resist the urge to say, "this is how we use to do it", or "this is how we always did it?"

When we do this, we limit our ability to become creative in the solutions that we can come up with which may be far better than how we use to do it. If God

changes the way God does things, then we should likewise be willing to change. Our new way of doing things could be the greatest thing to happen to our church.

16. When was the last time you actually did something differently from how you “use to do it?”

For the first time in about 45 years, I went three days without wearing a wrist watch on my arm. It's been a difficult transition to make even though I have a clock on my cell phone. Change does not come easily. I plan to replace my broken watch as soon as I get back into town.

Hebrews 12:1-13

[12:1](#) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.^{NKJV} After hearing the roll call of faithful believers throughout the centuries, illustrating true faith ([chapter 11](#)), the readers are challenged to also persevere in their faith. These faithful people from the past now stand as *so great a cloud of witnesses*. Hebrews uses the athletic imagery of a Greek amphitheater that has rows and rows of spectators, a "great cloud" or a large group. They do not "witness" as if they were merely spectators, looking down from heaven and watching believers' lives; instead, they witness through the historical record of their faithfulness that constantly encourages those who follow them. We do not struggle alone, and we are not the first to struggle with problems, persecution, discouragement, even failure. Others have "run the race" and crossed the finish line, and their witness stirs us to run and win also. What an inspiring heritage we have! These great believers' lives, examples, and faithfulness in God, without seeing his promises, speak to all believers of the rewards of staying in "the race." This metaphor of a footrace run "with endurance" describes a marathon, a test of stamina and commitment. This provided an apt description of the lives of these suffering believers.

Three aspects to this "race" are set before all believers:

1. *Preparation.* The first step of preparation to run the race requires that each racer *lay aside every weight*. This had two meanings for the racers of the ancient world: the clothes that hold back (races often were run naked) or the fat or superfluous weight that would keep an athlete from running efficiently. Christians must be "spiritually trim" and able to run the race unencumbered (see [1 Corinthians 9:25](#); [2 Timothy 2:3-4](#)). Many "weights" may not be necessarily sinful acts, but could be things that hold us back, such as use of time, some forms of entertainment, or certain relationships. The second step of preparation requires believers to avoid *the sin which so easily ensnares*. Classical Greek runners would race nude so that a garment would not impede or slow them down. Spiritually speaking, Christians should put away any sin that might entangle, impede, or trip them up. Sins such as greed, pride, arrogance, lust, gossip, dishonesty, and stealing can cause believers to drift off spiritual course.
2. *Participation.* After Christians prepare, they must participate in the race—they must *run*. Hebrews gives examples of what it means to "run": having faith,

visiting prisoners, entertaining strangers, believing God, trusting God, worshiping God, knowing Christ, having courage, praying, encouraging others, and confessing sin. These can be summarized as loving God and loving others.

3. *Perseverance*. The race that we run is not our own. We did not select the course; it is God who marks it out before us. We should be running for Christ, not ourselves, and we must always keep him in sight. The "race that is set before us" refers to the trials Christians will experience as outlined in [12:4-11](#). Finally, Christians persevere, running *with endurance the race that is set before [them]*. The writer has often referred to having endurance, being diligent, and persevering (see [2:1](#); [4:11](#); [6:11](#); [10:34, 36](#); [11:27](#); [12:7](#); [13:14](#)). The Christian life involves opposition and suffering, requiring believers to give up whatever endangers their relationship with God, to run patiently, and to struggle against sin with the power of the Holy Spirit. To live effectively, believers must keep their eyes on Jesus. We will stumble if we look away from him to stare at ourselves or at the circumstances surrounding us.

Running a race requires preparation, participation, and perseverance. Christians prepare to run the race through daily training. We pray, read the word of God, and examine our life for habits that would impede us in the race. We participate in worship, and we persevere by maintaining a Christlike and God-honoring attitude even when the trials are strong and we feel weak.

LIFE APPLICATION

SHEDDING WEIGHT

To run the race set before us, we must train. Long-distance runners work hard to build endurance and strength. On race day, their clothes are lightweight and their bodies lean.

Since shedding "sin weight" is important to your spiritual run, how can you do it?

- Choose friends who are also committed to the race. Wrong friends will have values and activities that may deter you from the course. Much of your own weight may result from the crowd you run with. Make wise choices.
- Drop certain activities. That is, for you at this time these may be a weight. Try dropping them for a while; then check the results. If TV consumes precious time, try doing without it. If shopping is your

stress relaxer, try something else.

- Get help for addictions that disable you. If you have a secret "weight" such as pornography, gambling, or alcohol, admit your need and get help today.

[12:2](#) Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.^{NRSV}

Jesus, our example, perfectly finished his race. Because he stands at the finish line, Christians should *fix [their] eyes on Jesus*, looking away from other distractions or options (see also [3:1](#)). This is the same focused attention Moses had, as recorded in [11:26](#), "He was looking ahead to his reward" (NIV). Jesus is the ultimate "hero of faith" as carried over from the list of heroes in [chapter 11](#).

We look to him as the supreme model of persevering faith ([11:26-39](#)). We should have single focus on him. We cannot look in two different directions at the same time. The use of

Christ's followers cannot expect better treatment in the world than their Master had.

Matthew Henry

the name "Jesus" focuses on Jesus' humanity; in the flesh, he faced suffering and thus is able to help us. Each member of the "great cloud of witnesses" can be inspiring, but Jesus provides the ultimate example. Jesus is described in two ways:

1. *Pioneer*. The Greek word is *archegon*; it means pioneer, pathfinder, or leader. Perhaps "champion" conveys the best meaning. Jesus is our hero, the first who obeyed God perfectly and thus began the new covenant (see also [2:10](#)). He set the course of faith, ran the race first ([6:20](#)), and now waits for us to join him at the end, encouraging us all the way.
2. *Perfecter of our faith*. "Perfecter" is *teleiotes* in Greek, meaning finisher, the one who brings us to our intended goal. Jesus is our perfecter, both because he was made the perfect High Priest through suffering and obedience (see [2:10](#), [5:8](#)) and because he perfects us as we draw closer to him.

After explaining some of Jesus' credentials and reasons for keeping our eyes on him, Hebrews tells how Jesus must be the believers' example in facing trials. He *endured the cross, disregarding its shame*. Crucifixion was a horrible and shameful way to die. Jesus endured this disgraceful and degrading death; even more, he "disregarded" the shame it represented, despising and scorning it. The human shame amounted to nothing compared to the shame that Jesus felt when he took on the sins of the world. So great were the sins that even the Father had to turn his face away from his Son.

Yet Jesus endured all this suffering on account of *the joy that was set before him*. He kept his eyes focused on the goal of his appointed course, the accomplishment of his priestly work, and his seat at the right hand of God. Knowing that a great reward was coming for God's people gave Jesus great joy. He did not look at his earthly discomforts, but he kept his eyes on the spiritual, invisible realities.

When the suffering was complete and Jesus had finished the race appointed for him, he took *his seat at the right hand of the throne of God*. Again Hebrews returns to the focus of [Psalm 110](#) (see commentary on [1:13](#); [8:1](#)). Christ "sat down" because when he offered up his life, he completed his work. He no longer needs to provide sacrifices or pave a way to God. Just as Christ, our forerunner, received great reward for finishing the race before him and now sits enthroned by God, exalted to a place of highest honor, Christians will also share his reward when they finish the race set before them (see [Luke 22:28-30](#)). So, like Christ, we should persevere in times of suffering, looking to Christ as our model and concentrating on our heavenly destination.

[12:3](#) Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up.^{NLT} Christ endured great suffering to finish his race. As a result, he can be an inspiring example for believers who face suffering and persecution. When these believers were tempted to focus on their trials, even to the point of considering renouncing their faith, Hebrews encouraged them to *think about all [Jesus] endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him*. Christ was ridiculed, whipped, beaten, spit upon, and crucified. Even so, he did not give in to fatigue, discouragement, or despair.

By focusing on Christ and what he did on our behalf, we won't *become weary and give up*. Trials can cause us to become discouraged and even to despair. During these difficult times, we can remember how Christ endured, and that endurance can inspire us. Throughout the history of the church, meditation on the suffering of Christ has helped countless martyrs, prisoners, and those being persecuted. Christ's suffering surpassed any suffering we humans might face. We can also remember the great cloud of witnesses who demonstrated faith ([chapter 11](#)), and they can inspire us. Facing hardship and discouragement, we must not lose sight of the big picture. We are not alone; Jesus stands with us. Many have endured far more difficult circumstances than we have experienced. Suffering trains us for Christian maturity, developing our patience and making our final victory sweet.

LIFE APPLICATION

WHEN YOU'RE TIRED

Weariness takes a great toll on the lives of "people helpers." Mothers of young children know the feeling. So do social workers, teachers, and anyone for whom work never seems to end. How does "focusing on Christ" relieve stress from constant work responsibility and fatigue?

- Jesus did not try to do it all. His ministry was less than three years long. He left a lot of work for disciples to do. Ask for help, and don't be afraid to depend on others.
- Jesus took breaks. Often he went alone to pray, sometimes during his busiest weeks. In your life, schedule breaks for prayer, reading, and learning.
- Jesus remained faithful. He trusted God through all his ordeals; he did not abandon his mission or those who believed in him. He stands beside us in our troubles. Trust him.

[12:4](#) In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.^{NIV} Here we find a clue about the present situation of the readers in that the writer mentions their *struggle against sin*. This "struggle" refers not to personal struggles against temptation, but rather to their struggle against sinful people. Just as Christ struggled against sinful people ([12:3](#)), so Christians struggle against opposition from hostile nonbelievers and sometimes even from fellow believers. Jesus had told his disciples, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" ([John 15:20](#) NRSV).

During their struggle, the Jewish Christians had *not yet resisted to the point of shedding [their] blood*. These readers were facing difficult times of persecution, but none of them had yet died for their faith. As difficult as these times were, they did not compare with the difficulties that Christ faced. These living believers were urged to continue to run their race. Just as Christ did not give up, neither should they. Their suffering might one day lead them to death, so the text says "not yet."

[12:5-6](#) And have you entirely forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his children? He said, "My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children." NLT Hebrews explains that difficult times may come as a result of God's discipline. In reality, it is a sign of God's love. In fact, discipline is so important that the writer explains it as the normal experience of believers. The believers should have remembered the words of [Proverbs 3:11-12](#), which say, *My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children*. Proverbs contains many words of wisdom regarding discipline, both earthly and spiritual. In these verses, both

kinds of discipline are combined. This quotation teaches that God's discipline comes from his love. God's discipline, although difficult, should encourage us that God loves us. He cares about us enough to help us mature. Like a loving father, he wants us to stay away from what would hurt us and to move along the path toward maturity. Sometimes that involves discipline.

The question becomes: how do we know whether the difficult times we face are part of the discipline of the Lord or something else? For example, they could be the result of our own foolish behavior or attacks by Satan. Regardless of their sources, we can treat all difficulties as opportunities for us to grow and learn from God. The context of this chapter shows that these words apply to the suffering that believers face from hostile nonbelievers, those who mistreat Christians who stand for their faith. In many parts of the world, Christians face persistent persecution. Even if we are not experiencing persecution (and perhaps we should be if we are truly standing for Christ), we can pray for those who are.

Much of the force of this verse is lost to modern readers in an age of permissiveness. Such harsh discipline (the Greek word for "punishes" literally means "to whip") seems cruel to many, and the point of these verses may be overlooked. Discipline is a responsibility for human fathers; thus, the father who does not provide it shows indifference and lack of love to his children. Human parents should learn from the way God disciplines. Parents discipline their children because they love them and because correction and teaching help train and educate children. The goal of correction shouldn't be merely punishment, but to help teach important lessons and to help them become more responsible and mature. When we discipline our children, that correction should have the same loving purpose and self-restraint that God shows with us.

LIFE APPLICATION

NEED PROOF?

Who loves his child more—the father who allows the child to do what will harm him, or the one who corrects, trains, and even punishes the child to help him learn what is right? It's never pleasant to be corrected and disciplined by God, but his discipline is a sign of his deep love for us. When God corrects you, see it as proof of his love, and ask him what he is trying to teach you. If you believe that a sovereign God disciplines his beloved children, turning problems into moments of growth and finally joy, you will overcome fear and shame.

12:7-8 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined? If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all.^{NLT} Because God promises to discipline his children, believers must *endure this divine discipline*. The only other choice would be to refuse to endure it, to pout, to grow depressed, or to give up completely. How much better to remember that, when God disciplines you, *he is treating you as his own children*. The rhetorical question, *Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?* pictures the Jewish fathers of the day who were responsible for the training, education, and discipline of their children. Proverbs explains that "those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them" ([Proverbs 13:24](#) NRSV). Indeed, to refuse discipline would be tantamount to hating one's children! While we may indeed know of some children who were never disciplined, we also know what kind of children they are—unruly, destructive, mean, and lacking self-control (the book of Proverbs also attests to this; see [Proverbs 5:22-23](#); [10:17](#); [12:1](#); [13:18](#); [15:5](#)).

God will go to any lengths to bring us to an acknowledgement of who he is.

Elisabeth Elliot

Jesus died on the cross for sinners. Those who believe in him still battle a sinful nature and need guidance in order to stay on course ([12:1](#)). Sometimes we need God's discipline in order to learn the tough lessons and not repeat the same mistakes. It works for our earthly children; it works for God's spiritual children.

Therefore, Christians will experience God's discipline. Those who are not disciplined are *illegitimate and are not really his children after all*. "Illegitimate children" were those born of a slave or concubine. In that culture, only illegitimate children received no discipline, attention, or education. Under Roman law, illegitimate children also did not receive any inheritance or recognition that came with being a genuine child. When we experience God's discipline, we can be encouraged that we really are God's children.

12:9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!^{NIV} The analogy between human fathers and the heavenly Father figures often in Jesus' teachings (see [Matthew 7:9-11](#); [21:28-31](#); [Luke 15:11-32](#)). Here *human fathers* are compared to *the Father of our spirits*, that is, to the Creator himself. [Verses 7-8](#) describe the value of discipline and that all of God's children will endure discipline; [verses 9-10](#) teach the parallel between God's discipline and earthly parental discipline. All people (or at least the vast majority) *had human fathers who disciplined* them. Rarely did that discipline occur out of cruelty; instead, loving fathers would discipline with the children's best interests in mind. As a result, *we respected them for it*.

If this is true with earthly fathers, *how much more* it is so of our heavenly Father. If we respected the discipline of our earthly parents, how much more *should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live*. Submission to God's discipline means not trying to wriggle out of it by making excuses or hardening our hearts; instead, it means allowing the discipline to drive us to our knees before God so that he can teach us the lessons he has for us. This phrase recalls the challenge to covenant obedience recorded in Deuteronomy: "For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will *live* and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" ([Deuteronomy 30:16](#) NIV, italics ours). Submitting to God means being willing to obey him. When we have this attitude toward God's discipline, we will "live"—referring to our ability to truly enjoy this life and to look forward to eternity with God.

LIFE APPLICATION

REAL LIVING

The book of Hebrews stresses the importance of submitting to God. The consequences of rebelling are disastrous. A biography of the great essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson describes the change that came over him when his first wife died young. He withdrew from the ministry and from Christian faith and became famous for advocating the glory of self. By the time he reached midlife, he had "died" emotionally and spiritually. The fire he sought in his own soul had become a dim flicker on a wet wick.

Instead of rebelling when life's adversity rolls over you, regard your problems as God's opportunities to shape your character. Depend on God for relief and deliverance. Trust God for vision to see beyond the bleakness. Believe God to be the loving parent he is. And live.

[12:10](#) For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness.^{NLT} *Earthly fathers* are imperfect. Sometimes they discipline when they shouldn't or in the wrong way, and sometimes they fail to discipline when they should. But most of them did *the best they knew how* for the *few years* during which they had responsibility for us. Their effort reminds us of the perfection of God's discipline.

God always exercises the right discipline, in the right way, at the right time. His *discipline is always right and*

It is doubtful if God can bless a man greatly without hurting him deeply.

good for us. His discipline is always to our advantage (see [Romans 8:28-29](#); [1 Corinthians 10:13](#)).

A. W. Tozer

God's discipline also means that *we will share in his holiness*. Discipline may not be enjoyed, but it brings great reward. Earlier in this book, the Christians were said to be partakers of God's holiness ([3:14](#)). Christians already share in God's holiness as a result of Christ's work. Here, however, sharing in holiness refers to our growth. God's discipline helps Christians become more and more like Christ, mature and complete (see [Matthew 5:48](#); [1 John 3:2](#)). Only God, the loving Creator and Father, could take the suffering brought upon his children by sinful unbelievers and turn it into a blessing for his children—drawing us ever closer to his holiness.

See Also:

[Chart: Theology of Trials in the New Testament](#)

[12:11](#) No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.^{NIV} All Christians will experience God's discipline, and all Christians should endure that discipline because the results are worth it. While *no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful*, Christians can respond to it by remembering the end result of the discipline. After the fact, the benefits will be clear. Certainly discipline is painful; if it weren't, it would have little effect in combatting sin or changing us from within. When brought in the form of suffering or persecution, the pain may be extreme. By painful discipline, however, believers will be made more like their heavenly Father who disciplines them, sharing in his holiness ([12:10](#)). We may respond to discipline in several ways:

- we can accept it with resignation;
- we can accept it with self-pity, thinking we really don't deserve it;
- we can be angry and resentful toward God;
- we can accept it graciously, letting it accomplish its purpose in us.

The result of discipline, however, makes the pain worthwhile: *It produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it*. The "harvest of righteousness" evokes the imagery of pruning. By pruning a plant, greater fruitfulness occurs (see [John 15:2](#)). God's discipline strengthens our faith and character (see also [Romans 5:1-5](#)). The "training" referred to is continuous, strenuous training that requires perseverance. This is an athletic term from which our word "gymnasium" comes. The training received in discipline helps us stand strong and firm for the faith so that we live righteous lives in an unrighteous world. When discipline cleans up sin in our lives, it

moves us on the pathway toward righteousness and holiness. The promised peace refers both to an inward tranquility and contentment ([Philippians 4:11-12](#); [James 1:4](#)) in any circumstance ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)).

[12:12-13](#) So take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong.^{NLT} This passage vividly pictures God as a challenging coach who pushes us to our limits, encouraging us beyond what we think we can attain. When the pressure and opposition build, we must not be paralyzed with fear and inaction. We must get involved in the challenging contest. Although we may not feel strong enough to push on to victory, we will be able to accomplish it as we follow Christ and draw on his strength. Then we can use our growing strength to help those around us who are weak and struggling. Apparently these readers were low in spirits and weak in their resolve; therefore, the writer introduces a series of concluding commands (reminiscent of [Isaiah 35:3](#) and [Proverbs 4:26](#)):

- *Take a new grip with your tired hands.* Tired hands want to stop working. The Christians were at the point of sheer exhaustion; morale was low. Rather than concede defeat, Christians must continue to make the effort and always be ready to endure.
- *Stand firm on your shaky legs.* Discipline or persecution should not cause Christians to fear; instead, difficult times should encourage them to endure. Rather than dropping in defeat, Christians should stand firm—even when knees are weak and legs are shaky—in their confident expectation of Christ's return (see [10:37](#)).
- *Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you . . . will become strong.* Most "paths" encountered in nature wind and dip along with the terrain. A "straight path," however, has most likely been constructed by someone who took the effort to move the rocks, level out the holes, and even clear away little pebbles that would be hard on one's feet. This picture of making a straight path ties in with the "righteousness" ([12:11](#)) that results in the life of a person who has faced discipline and has worked to remove any stumbling blocks that would impede progress. Hard work obviously helps, but it has another benefit for those who follow behind. Some who follow may indeed be *weak and lame*. We can help them not to *stumble and fall* by encouraging them and working hard to remove the obstacles that may be in the path. We must not ignore the spiritual and moral fatigue of other believers. Though they are weak and lame (disabled or out of joint), God will heal them so they can follow.

As said throughout this epistle, Christians have the responsibility to encourage one another and to help those who are weak. If the original readers were contemplating a return to Jewish practices, their example would prove discouraging to new Christians. Instead of running in a straight, clear path, they would be adding hindrances and obstacles to the already difficult trip. Believers must not live with only survival in mind—others will follow their example. Does your example make it easier for others to believe in and follow Christ, and to mature in him? Or would those who follow you end up confused and misled?

LIFE APPLICATION

MOVING ON

How can we get a new grip and stand firm? We can reconsider our purpose. Is your purpose continued misery, or progress? Another day of self-pity, or a breakthrough into joy?

If your purpose is misery, then try this: Get bitter about your problems, escape through some chemical addiction, and die snarling that life should have been better.

If your purpose is progress, try this: Get adjusted to the reality that God knows what he is doing, agree to cooperate with God's agenda, and live in the light of God's promises.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Hebrews.

Luke 9:59-62

9:59-60 He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."^{NIV} The previous man came on his own to Jesus ([9:57-58](#)); this time, however, Jesus asked another man to *follow* him. But this man explained that he *first* needed to go and *bury* his father. In ancient times, doing a proper burial of a dead person was a sacred duty. The text does not report whether the father was already dead or whether he was elderly or sick and going to die soon. It is unlikely that the father was already dead and the son was merely asking permission to finish the funeral because, if that were the case, the son would have been nowhere near Jesus—hardly on the road where Jesus was walking—because he would have been at home with the mourners. More likely, the man was asking for permission to wait until his father died—an indefinite delay.

LIFE APPLICATION

PAYING THE PRICE

No great success comes without sacrifice. Ask champion athletes or concert musicians what they had to give up to attain their level of expertise. Ask a mother if she has had to forgo some of her own plans and desires in order to do what is best for her child, and she will tell you that she has. Nothing worthwhile comes without sacrifice, and that applies to Christian discipleship as well. Of course, there are incomparable benefits to having a living relationship with God, but they do not come without a price. Jesus said that he, the Son of Man, didn't even have a home, a place to call his own. What sacrifices has God asked you to make in view of the much greater privilege of following Jesus? Earthly success, possessions, and recognition must not deter us from serving others.

The reason is not given, but whatever it was, the man wanted to do it "first." Perhaps he was the firstborn son and wanted to be sure to claim his inheritance. Perhaps he did not want to face his father's wrath if he were to leave the family business. Whether his concern was fulfilling a duty, having financial security, keeping family approval, or something else, he did not want to commit himself to Jesus just yet. Jesus sensed this reluctance and challenged the man to consider that his commitment had to be complete, without reservation. If this man truly desired to follow Jesus, he would not wait until he had fulfilled all his traditional responsibilities. Jesus was not advising that children disregard family responsibilities. Rather, Jesus was responding to this disciple's qualifying use of "first." Jesus must always come "first," above all human loyalties. Jesus' directive was not heartless; it called the man to examine his primary loyalty.

Jesus' response ("*Let the dead bury their own dead*") points out that those who want to follow him should count the cost and set aside any conditions they might have. "The dead" in Aramaic can also mean "the dying." So Jesus may have been saying, "Let the dying bury the dead." In other words, let those who are spiritually dying (those who have not responded to the call to commitment) stay home and handle responsibilities such as burying the dead. This may sound insensitive, but it had precedents. A high priest and those who had taken the Nazirite vow were required by the law to avoid the corpse of even a parent ([Leviticus 21:11](#); [Numbers 6:6-8](#)). A later Jewish precedent says that if there were enough people in attendance, a student of the Torah should not stop his studying to bury the dead. Jesus placed commitment to God even above these precedents. As God's Son, Jesus did not hesitate to demand

complete loyalty. Even family loyalty was not to take priority over the demands of obedience to the command to *go and proclaim the kingdom of God*. Jesus' direct challenge forces believers to evaluate their priorities. They must not put off the decision to follow Jesus, even though other loyalties compete for attention. Like the first man, it is not known whether this man chose to follow Jesus or turned away.

LIFE APPLICATION

A BETTER TIME?

Luke did not give the reason why this man said no to Jesus. But Jesus used the response to teach an important lesson. True discipleship requires instant action; the responsibilities of the kingdom cannot be put off until a "better time." Jesus did not teach people to forsake responsibilities to family, but he often gave commands to people in light of their real motives. Perhaps this man wanted to delay following Christ and used his father as an excuse. There is a cost to following Jesus, and each follower must be ready to serve, even when it requires sacrifice. Don't wait for a better time to follow and serve Jesus—he is calling you now.

[9:61-62](#) Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."^{NIV} A third person approached, and this one, like the first, expressed his desire to *follow* Jesus. However, this man too had something he wanted to do *first*. Jesus ascertained in this potential follower a sense of reluctance and an unfortunate willingness to put something else ahead of following Jesus. Who knows what might occur on his trek back to his family that would deter him from the task at hand. Who knows what this attitude might mean in the years to come if a precedent were set that service for the kingdom can be put off in pursuit of other matters. "No," Jesus answered, for this was not the type of follower he needed.

The picture of a person putting a hand to the plow and looking back can be compared with Elijah's call of Elisha in [1 Kings 19:19-21](#). Elisha was called to be a prophet right in the middle of plowing a field—and he never looked back. In fact, he slaughtered the oxen so that they would not even be a temptation to return. Elisha then moved wholeheartedly into the ministry to which he had been called. Elisha was allowed to say good-bye to his father and mother, but the kingdom of God was not at hand then. Jesus explained that *service in the kingdom of God* was of such vital importance that his followers must make it their top priority. It had an even greater

urgency than the Old Testament discipleship arrangement. They must step out in faith to serve him, without looking back.

What does Jesus want from his followers? Total dedication, not halfhearted commitment. His followers must accept the cross along with the crown, judgment as well as mercy. They must count the cost and be willing to abandon everything else that has given them security. Nothing should distract them from service for the kingdom.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

Moving Forward 3
Life-Sharing Pioneers Lesson 3 —Fixing our Eyes On Jesus
Hebrews 12:1-13 Luke 9:62

1. What was a goal you fixed your eyes on and stayed on task until it was completed even though at times you wanted to quit?

The first year I went out for varsity football. I wanted to quit. I thought the coach was joking when he said we would have another session in the afternoon at 1:00 I thought the heat alone would kill me. I wanted so badly to quit, but I kept showing up and made it through. Football ended up being one of the great blessings in my life and God used it to draw me into the kingdom.

2. What do you think it means to fix your eyes on Jesus?

I think to fix our eyes on Jesus is a to make a decision to follow Jesus no matter what may come our way. All of the plans we make for our lives are to be based on what choice Jesus would have us make.

3. When are you more likely to take your eyes off of Jesus—When things are going badly or when things are going extremely well?

I tend to take my eyes off Jesus more when things are going extremely well. I am tempted to try to do things in my own strength rather than fully rely on God. Difficult times force me to rely more upon the Lord.

Hebrews 12:1-13 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

⁵ And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My

child, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone he accepts as His child."

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children. For what child is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons and daughters. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹²

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

4. We are often told that we as Christians are in a race. What is the race that we are running, and what do you think the finish line looks like?

We are running an obstacle course that has been chosen for us by God. There are circumstances and events coming into our lives that we must run past, jump over, run around, run through, and keep moving forward to be molded and shaped into the person that God wants us to be. We are running as witnesses for Christ so that others are challenged to consider the claims of Jesus because of the way we are running our lives. The finish line is what it takes to be a fully mature disciple of Jesus Christ. That means our hope and our confidence is fully in God. We do not fear anything or anyone but God because we know that God is with us.

5. What are the things that slow us down in our race for Christ?

Nothing slows us down quicker than to choose a knowingly sinful lifestyle in which we know we are breaking the commands of God as revealed in the Scripture. Hidden and secret sins also slow us down because they prevent us from having a deeper walk with God. The psalmist wrote: Psalm 32:2-3 (NIV)

² Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

Weights can also slow us down in the race. Weights are not necessary sin, but they are things that rob us of time that could be used to help us grow in Christ or help us to build up the ministry of the church. Hobbies, tv, going to certain places, hanging with certain people, and certain activities can be weights that slow us down in our race.

Being lazy, having a critical spirit, being a complainer, and being ungrateful are other weights that can slow us down in the race. When others see these traits in us, they are not encouraged to listen to our message about the power of Jesus Christ.

6. Who are you racing against in your race for Christ?

We are all racing against who we were, who we are now and who we could be in Christ. The goal is to run fast enough to catch up with who we could be in Christ if our lives were fully dedicated to him. We are never racing against other believers, because no other believer has the same race laid out in front of him/her that we have. That's why we do not compare ourselves to others, but only to what we could be for Jesus.

Remember how Jesus handled Peter when Peter wanted to race against John. John 21:19-23 (NIV)

¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" ²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")

²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" ²² Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." ²³ Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

7. Why are pain and setbacks a necessary part of each believer's walk?

God wants us to know what it means to depend upon him. With no pain or setbacks in our lives, we can be deceived into thinking that we have everything under control and that we are in charge of our circumstances. When things happen beyond our control, we tend to cry out more to God. God also uses pain and setbacks as growth opportunities in developing certain spiritual qualities in us, that are rarely developed when our lives are not experiencing a sense of loss. We are told in Ecclesiastes that there is a time and season for everything under the sun. That includes pain and setback as well.

In addition, when we get off track in our walk with God, God will use pain and setbacks as a means of discipline to get us back on track. Without the pain and setback that Joseph endured in lesson 1, it is unlikely that we would have ever heard of Joseph. Even Jesus had pain and setbacks in his ministry and he lived a perfect life. Jesus even told us we were blessed when hard times entered our lives.

Matthew 5:10-12 (KJV) ¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

The reality is that pain and setbacks are part of God's plan for our lives to help us receive all the rewards that God has for us.

8. What are some of the ways God disciplines us today?

God disciplines us through exposure of our sin, through loss of relationships, loss of income, through allowing us to hit rock bottom because of our sin, by letting us get our own way and suffering the consequences which follow, by allowing difficult circumstances to come into our lives, by preventing certain blessings from coming into our lives and by ways we probably have not even thought of.

9. How can we tell the difference between God's discipline and things just going wrong in our lives?

The reality is most of the time we cannot. It is only when God reveals it to us that we are being disciplined for something that we are 100% certain. We can be sure though if we are deliberately leading a double life that God is going to intervene and discipline us. We are not free to simply tell people, that has happened to you because of your sin unless we are certain that we are acting in the role of the prophet and have that spiritual gift. We are free to confront one another when we see sin in each other's lives, but not to designate that something has happened because of that sin. There is a good chance that most of us know when we are being disciplined by God in our hearts. But there are times when things just have natural consequences to them. If we shoplift and get arrested, that's not necessarily God's discipline as much as it is the natural consequence for a behavior. Likewise if our child is born with a birth defect, that does not mean that is punishment for having sex before marriage. It could simply be the natural result of a defective gene found in one or both parents.

Our goal as believers is to allow difficulties in our lives to push us into a greater reliance upon God and a determination to move away from the sins and weights that want to hinder us in our race for the cause of Jesus Christ.

x

Luke 9:62 (NIV)

⁶² Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

10. What do you think Jesus means by verse 9:62?

If we start to walk with Jesus Christ and then keep turning to look back, we should not have started the walk. A person who plows a field has to plow in a straight line. If the person is looking back, the line is going to be crooked and will have to be done all over again. When we take our eyes off of Jesus to yearn once again for the things we have left, we do a disservice to the kingdom of God.

11. What are some positive steps that we can take to fix our eyes on Jesus as individuals to keep us moving forward?

We can gather with other believers for fellowship, worship, discipleship, evangelism, ministry, prayer, and bible study. We can be mindful of the type of entertainment we watch, guard what we allow into our hearts and minds, and be diligent in how we

spend our free time. We can place the commandments to love the Lord and to love our neighbors at the top of the priorities for our lives.

12. What does a church look like that fixes its eyes on Jesus?

The members of the church all surrender their personal desires and ambitions to what God is calling the church to do and to be. Being pleasing to God through worship, service, evangelism, prayer, missions and discipleship are at the top of the church's agenda. Each person in the church is faithful in the ministry he or she has in the life of the church. Winning souls for Christ is a high priority of the church. Loving one another is a commitment that the members demonstrate to each other.

13. What causes a church to take its eyes off of Jesus?

People spreading a lot of gossip and rumors. People thinking the church is for their own personal desires and tastes. People and groups setting up their own private kingdoms within the church body. People rejecting the truth of the Scriptures in order to accommodate sin. People rejecting the spiritual leadership of the church.

14. What can you do to help your church stay focused on Jesus in order to keep it moving forward?

Pray, Serve, Give, Be Present, Encourage Others, Witness, Love The Lord With All My Heart.

Moving Forward 4 Commentary

Life-Sharing Lesson 4 “God’s Calling On Your Life” Ephesians 4:1-6, Philippians 3:12-14, John 15:16-17

Ephesians 4:1-6

4:1 **Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.** ^{NLT} The word "therefore" connects this sentence to Paul's words in the previous chapters—the great mystery God has revealed to us in his church. Paul was imprisoned in Rome *for serving the Lord* (that is, his imprisonment was a result of his preaching the gospel, see [Acts 21:27–22:22](#)). Despite the chains that bound him physically and kept him from traveling, Paul continued to write, in this case urging the Ephesian believers to *lead a life worthy of your calling* and to remember that they had been *called by God* ([1:4](#)). Their "call" to salvation was accomplished through Christ's humble act of dying on the cross for our sin. It was also a "call" to service for God.

LIFE APPLICATION

CALLED

God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives on earth. In light of this truth, we should live worthy of the calling we have received—the privilege of being selected as Christ's very own. This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. People are watching your life. Can they see Christ in you? How well are you doing as his representative?

How can one live *worthy* of the calling? The Greek word for "worthy" (*axios*) refers to a balance, as on scales. Thus, believers are to live "in balance" with their calling. How they act should match what they believe. Remembering Christ's sacrifice should cause believers to live for his glory in every area of their lives. The following verses describe how to do this.

4:2 **Be completely humble and gentle.** ^{NIV} This verse lists four characteristics of a person who is "worthy of the calling." Believers make up the church, the body of Christ. Thus, believers, by privilege of their responsibility, must be together, serve together, and worship together. The following characteristics help create and maintain smooth relationships among people.

Both the Greek and Roman cultures considered humility and gentleness to be weak character traits showing a lack of self-respect. The Old Testament, however, paved the way for a positive connotation for humility because God "lives with" the humble: "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" ([Isaiah 57:15](#) NIV). Jesus exalted humility as a virtue when he said, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" ([John 13:13-15](#) NIV). Christ expected his followers to be humble not only before God but toward one another—serving one another and not putting themselves "above" anyone else. Christ is our example; thus, we must also *be completely humble*.

Believers are also to be *gentle*. Humility is an attitude, and gentleness is the action derived from it. Gentle people do not attempt to grab for positions of importance or assert authority over others. Gentle people accept God's dealings with them without arguing or resisting. Gentle people are considerate of others. If everyone in a church had the characteristics of humility and gentleness, conflicts would disappear and members would have strength and power in their service.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love.^{NIV} Patience (also translated "long-suffering") conveys the quality of being able to handle one another's faults and failures and refusing to avenge wrongs. No one is ever going to be perfect here on earth, so believers must *be patient* with one another despite their faults. *Bearing with one another in love* is the action side of patience. Very similar in meaning to "patience," "bearing with one another" emphasizes the willingness to forgive and involves empathizing with the other person. To show patience requires *love*, which ought to be the guiding principle for all of a believer's actions, even when natural differences and clashes occur.

Bearing with one another presupposes that, at times, loving others will be a burden. Believers must be willing to carry the load without expecting reward, thanks, or return.

He who cannot forgive others
breaks the bridge over which he
must pass himself.

George Herbert

LIFE APPLICATION

WHAT A VIRTUE!

Perhaps no other virtue seems so foreign to our culture as patience. Be honest: Do you ever stand by the microwave, tapping your foot impatiently as you wait for it to heat something? practically pull the paper out of the fax machine because it is working too slowly? swerve between lanes on the highway in order to get ahead a few car lengths? If these aren't your particular problem areas, do you struggle with impatience in other areas? If you answered no to all the above, give yourself an *F*, for lying. We live in an instant world, and we expect instant results and instant gratification. Yet Paul instructs us to be patient with one another. How? We can start by reflecting on the patience God shows toward us—boundless, unmerited, compassionate—and then letting that same grace flow through us to others.

4:3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.^{NKJV} True *unity* among believers follows naturally from the characteristics described in [4:2](#) and provides the theme for [verses 3-6](#). Such unity is only possible when the Holy Spirit acts in believers' lives—the Spirit originates and sustains oneness among believers. Love for each other, which the presence of the Spirit causes, makes peace possible. The *bond of peace* includes the idea of uniting the members into one body. This "bond" holds people together, like string or twine. Peace functions as the "binding twine" of unity. God gives it to us, producing equality and understanding.

The Holy Spirit builds unity. He leads, but we have to be willing to be led and to do our part to keep the peace. The word "endeavoring" points to our part in the process (see also [1 Thessalonians 2:17](#); [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [2 Peter 1:10, 15](#); [3:14](#)). Believers cannot experience unity without the presence of the Holy Spirit, and neither can they maintain unity without allowing the Spirit to work in their lives. The Greek word translated endeavoring or "make every effort" is *spoudazontes*. The Greek word has no sense of the possibility of failure ("just try, even though you might fail"). The word conveys the idea of working toward something difficult with a determination to make it happen. Paul knew that maintaining unity among believers would take hard work and continual diligence. Believers face many attempts to tear apart their unity. False teachers would arise, even from within their ranks, attempting to divide the people;

persecution would attempt to frighten the church and send it scattering. The believers in each of the churches in and around Ephesus would need to work diligently to maintain their unity. Churches today need the same quality of diligence in maintaining *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*.

We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.

Francis Schaeffer

LIFE APPLICATION

UNITY

There are an infinite number of issues that divide us—doctrinal beliefs, worship style, race, language—and only one force that will keep us together: "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Unity can come only through the Spirit; it will remain only if we are diligent to maintain it. Unity is like a fire—it tends to die out if unattended. Would an objective observer describe your attitudes and actions as unifying or divisive? We have a clear command from Scripture: Work diligently to preserve unity.

4:4 There is one body and one Spirit.^{NRSV} Why should believers diligently maintain their unity (as described in [4:3](#))? Paul answered that question here. The words "there is" could be translated "because there is," connecting these verses with the previous verses that describe the bonds of unity. We must work to maintain our unity because Christ desires it—there is only *one body and one Spirit*. The repetition of the word "one" in [verses 4-6](#) emphasizes this unity. Regardless of all that can divide the believers—racial background, social status, and gender, to name a few—Christians belong to one body, through one Holy Spirit (see also [1:13-14](#); [2:11-22](#); [3:6](#)). In a pagan culture, people can choose from any number of cults to join and gods to worship. For Christians, however, there is only one body, unified by one Spirit.

The unity in the body of believers occurs because one Spirit indwells them. The Holy Spirit lives in all Christians and gives to the church its true oneness ([2:18](#)). Without the Spirit, the body could not exist. Christianity is not a club to join, nor is it some mystical but unreal entity. Instead, true Christianity is a spiritual relationship with Christ as well as with other believers. Through the Spirit, all believers are united in one universal body.

Christ's true body (all Christians from all ages) is already united under one Head (Christ), but that unity is not yet fully realized. After Christ returns, the unity of his church will be fully visible.

Satan separates; God unites; love binds us together.

D. L. Moody

[Verses 4-6](#) explain the unity of the believers, relating to the unity in the Trinity (the Spirit in [4:4](#), the Son in [4:5](#), and the Father in [4:6](#)).

Just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.^{NRSV} The "one Spirit" is the "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" ([1:14](#)). That inheritance includes "the hope to which he has called" us ([1:18](#)). All believers *were called to the one hope* of our

calling—that is, to eternal life in God's kingdom. Because the one Spirit made us part of one body, we are all promised "one hope." Jewish and Gentile believers have a common privilege, a common calling, and a common hope. Unlike the modern use of the word "hope" ("I sure hope this happens, but I don't know if it will"), Christian hope is an expectation of full salvation ("I expect the Lord's return").

LIFE APPLICATION

SICK OR HEALTHY?

Muscular dystrophy is a terrible disease. The person with MD has all the right parts and equipment available—brain cells, neurons, axons, dendrites, muscles—but they don't work properly. The problem is not in the brain. The brain sends the appropriate signals. The problem lies between the nerve and the muscle. The nerve conveys the brain's message, such as move, turn, lift, etc., but the muscle does not respond. The body is essentially nonresponsive to the brain's commands. [Ephesians 4:4-6](#) states that there is one body and one Lord over the body—Jesus. What happens when we don't obey his commands, follow his lead? We have a sick body. How healthy a part of the body are you? Promote well-being in the church by being a responsive servant. Don't do anything that tears it down.

[4:5](#) One Lord, one faith, one baptism.^{NRSV} This verse focuses on Christ. "One Lord" refers to Jesus Christ, whose lordship (headship) forms the basis of unity in the body. Christians worship one Lord. There are not many real gods from which to choose; there is only one—the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever people believe in Jesus Christ alone and trust in his death and resurrection for their salvation, they are joined with all other believers because of this *one faith*. This faith alone saves; this faith is the one and only "way" ([John 14:6](#)). This one faith binds all believers together.

The act of believing is manifested through the act of baptism, the symbol of being brought into the body. (Faith and baptism are similarly connected in [Mark 16:16](#) and [Colossians 2:12](#).) Paul's inclusion of this *one baptism* reveals the great importance that baptism held for the early church. Baptism replaced circumcision as the initiation rite of the new order, the new covenant. "Baptism" refers here to baptism in water, as opposed to baptism by the Spirit, because of the word's placement in this verse. If Paul had meant the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he would have placed it in the previous verse. Christians need only "one baptism" by which they publicly acknowledge their one faith in one Lord. Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to

drink of one Spirit" (NRSV). This expression of faith through baptism brings unity to believers.

LIFE APPLICATION

ONE

The sounds of Gregorian chants echoing in a European monastery chapel . . . shouts of "Aleluya!" and "Sí, Señor Jesucristo!" in a house church in Mexico . . . the rich, layered harmonies of gospel music from an African chorus . . . quiet, fervent prayers uttered in a stained-glass worship center in America . . . What do these strikingly different kinds of worship expression have in common? "There is one body and one Spirit, . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all." We, the body of Christ, come in all the colors of the rainbow and with as many different ways to worship him. Rather than let those things act as barriers between us, why not celebrate our diversity, our different-ness? We are different, but we are one body in Christ.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Ephesians.

Philippians 3:12-14

[3:12](#) Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.^{NIV}

Obtain can mean to take hold of, to receive, to make one's own, to apprehend in the moral or spiritual sense. So Paul may have been saying that he had not fully grasped all the meaning of Christ in his life. There is more to receive by pressing on. The power of Christ in Paul's life aroused him to want to know Christ better, and this would take a lifetime.

Paul saw the Christian life as a process. While believers are considered righteous when they accept salvation, their entire lives are marked by growth toward Christlikeness. Complete perfection will not be obtained until Christ's second coming, when he will take his people with him. While Paul may have seemed like a nearly perfect Christian to his Philippian friends, he emphasized that he had not obtained perfect knowledge of Christ, the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his suffering, and conformity to his death ([3:10](#)). All of these were part of the process of sanctification—of getting to know Christ better and better as he lived the Christian life. And even Paul, despite all his sufferings and victories for Christ, still had much to learn.

He had not yet *been made perfect*. He knew that only upon Christ's return would all believers be made perfect in knowledge and experience, but he was willing to *press on to take hold of* the goal—living and working for Christ—because of what Christ had done for him. "Pressing on" is a hunting term meaning to chase or hunt down. Christ Jesus *took hold of* Paul almost thirty years earlier when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Christ laid hold of Paul so that Paul could lay hold of the prize—knowing Christ completely.

LIFE APPLICATION

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

True Christian faith is often called a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ, and no verse describes it better than this. A relationship requires two persons, each actively searching, seeking, and building a bond between them.

In your spiritual life, God takes the initiative (Christ takes hold of us), then we enter into it (pressing on) to pursue all that our new friendship offers. We are truly relating to each other, together pursuing God's goal for all creation—eternal life free of all pain, all death, all sin. Are you pressing on, taking responsibility for your progress in faith and character? What steps are you taking to know Christ better?

3:13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.^{NRSV} Paul had not yet attained perfection or complete knowledge of Christ. Unlike the Judaizers, Paul did not consider that he had achieved spiritual maturity; he was not perfect, but he lived in absolute confidence of his ultimate salvation. Christians know they will be saved, yet they must have perfection as their goal ([Matthew 5:48](#)) while not pretending that sin does not exist ([1 John 1:8](#)). Like Paul, they should not dwell on the past. The past should not be used as a barrier to the future, as an excuse for dropping out, or for avoiding proper spiritual conduct in their relationship with God. Believers should be devoted to God whatever their present circumstances ([Luke 9:62](#); [17:31-32](#)) and should strain forward to what lies ahead. Paul would forget his past with all its credentials and accomplishments (and sins) and, like a runner in a race with his whole body reaching for the finish line, would press on toward the goal ([3:14](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

LET IT GO

We have all done things for which we are ashamed, and we live in the tension of what we have been and what we want to be. Because our hope is in Christ, however, we can let go of past guilt and look forward to what God will help us become. Don't dwell on your past. Instead, grow in the knowledge of God by concentrating on your relationship with him *now*. Realize that you are forgiven, and then move on to a life of faith and obedience. Look forward to a fuller and more meaningful life because of your hope in Christ.

See Also:

[Chart: Training for the Christian Life](#)

3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.^{NRSV} As a runner straining every effort toward the finish line, Paul pressed on *toward the goal*. In Greek athletic games, the winner's prize was a garland or palm branch. While Paul didn't identify *the prize*, it seems from his writing above that the prize refers to gaining full knowledge of Jesus Christ (see also [1 Corinthians 9:24](#); [2 Timothy 4:7-8](#)). Paul aimed to win the prize, but all who finish the race win it as well. The full knowledge of Christ is the final prize for which believers gladly lay aside all else.

Scholars have presented several views for the meaning of the *heavenly call*, also translated "called me heavenward" (NIV) or the "upward call" (NASB). The Greek words *ano kleseos* literally mean "high or upward calling."

- Some scholars regard it as the rapture of the church, the call to God's eternal presence. The NIV "called me heavenward" could support this view. However, *kleseos* is not normally used for the rapture of the church.
- Other scholars have seen it to mean the call to be saved. [First Thessalonians 2:12](#) says, "Live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (NIV). God's call on the apostle occurred on the road to Damascus. Paul answered that call and had been in the race ever since. Every believer, not just Paul, receives this call of God to salvation ([1 Corinthians 1:26](#); [7:20](#); [Ephesians 1:18](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:11](#); [2 Timothy 1:9](#)). God summons the person out of a life of sinful rebellion upward into a life of fellowship with himself based on what Christ Jesus has done.

- Still other scholars connect it to the high purpose or high vocation of Paul as apostle. [Hebrews 3:1](#) says, "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (NIV). This view, as well as the previous one, equates the nature of the prize with the substance of the calling, making "of the calling" equal to "the prize."
- Yet because of Paul's use of the metaphor of athletic games, it seems more natural to understand the "call" as the calling of athletes up to the winner's stand. Thus, the heavenly call is the summons to win the victor's prize of salvation.

LIFE APPLICATION

LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING

Like a dedicated athlete, Paul wanted to run the race and gain full knowledge of Christ. The first-time marathon runner has periodic thoughts about quitting, especially during the last six miles. By then, the novelty of the experience has faded to the dull regularity of the pace; early adrenaline has given way to soreness and fatigue. Others around him or her are limping along, and some have dropped out entirely.

But dedicated runners must keep going. Somewhere out there is a finish line. Ask yourself these questions:

- What kind of race are you running for Christ?
- What prize do you seek?
- What kind of opposition do you face in your struggle to live as a Christian?
- How can Christ help you stay on track and reach the goal?
- What spiritual workout or training this week will help you run your Christian marathon?
- In what way can you renew your commitment to press on toward the goal of being like Christ?

[3:15](#) All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.^{NIV} After Paul described his spiritual goals, he explained to the Philippians that all mature believers should *take such a view*. That is, they too ought to be pressing on toward the goal. Mature believers would understand that they could not, in their own humanity, gain perfection and acceptance by God (as opposed to the teachings of the Judaizers). Yet

because of their love for Christ, they willingly pressed on to follow his example in order to become more like him in life, all the while knowing that they were promised to know him fully upon their death (or his return).

And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.^{NIV}

This verse betrays some of the problems that faced the Philippian church. Spiritual pride had found its way into some of the believers; apparently a few felt that they had reached a holier status than their fellow believers, causing them to look down on those whom they thought less "mature." Yet Paul made clear that those who were truly mature were those who realized their dependence on God. They pressed on, not to make themselves good enough or to gain credentials by their accomplishments; rather, they pressed on to know their Savior better. Whatever problem of pride threatened to divide the Philippian church, Paul stopped it. This was the final word on the matter; Paul invoked the illumination of God himself to clarify the truth of his words to those who thought differently. Those who were mature were to be committed to what Paul had said. And to anyone who thought differently about minor points, God would clarify the truth. God would lead them to the truth if they would keep their minds open.

LIFE APPLICATION

A PERFECT SCORE?

Sometimes trying to live a perfect Christian life can be so difficult that it leaves us drained and discouraged. We may feel so far from perfect that we can never please God with our lives. Paul used "perfect" ([3:12](#)) to mean mature or complete, not flawless in every detail. Those who are mature should press on in the Holy Spirit's power, knowing that Christ will reveal and fill in any discrepancy between what we are and what we should be. Christ's provision is no excuse for lagging devotion, but it provides relief and assurance for those who feel driven.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Philipians, Colossians, & Philemon.

John 15:16-17

[15:16](#) "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."^{NRSV} Jesus chose these disciples and appointed them to spread the gospel and bear fruit for God's kingdom. The Lord chooses each believer to

be a branch in the Vine—a branch that bears *fruit that will last*. The remaining, or lasting, fruit means either new believers whose faith perseveres, or the enduring quality of the fruit of the Spirit—especially brotherly love.

LIFE APPLICATION

THE CHOICE

Jesus made the first choice—to love and to die for us, to invite us to live with him forever. We make the next choice—to accept or reject his offer. Unless he chose us, we would have no choice to make.

Then, Jesus speaks of making requests to the Father: "**That whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.**"^{NKJV} As in verses 7-8, Jesus linked the request making with the fruit bearing. The Father would answer their requests in order to help them accomplish the mission he gave them—to produce "fruit that will last."

15:17 "This is my command: Love each other."^{NIV} This verse capsulizes the theme that Jesus introduced in [verse 12](#) and yet also serves as a contrast for what follows. The disciples must love one another because they would take Jesus' message to a world that despised them. Christians get plenty of hatred from the world; from each other we need love and support.

Jesus legislated love. He required his disciples to make peace with one another, to place the interests of others above their own, to solve differences quickly. He knew they were diverse in background, but he ordered them to love each other. Jesus knew that setting this high standard was essential to preserving the unity of the church. If he required it, the believers would accept and live out this standard. Backbiting, disrespect, and bitterness toward fellow believers strips the church of its power.

LIFE APPLICATION

GET-FRUIT-QUICK SCHEME

Jesus wants our fruitfulness to have enduring quality. Whether the fruit appears in our lives or in others, the fruit should be lasting. Results should not be so rushed that they lack dependable roots; superficial results may appear flowery but actually lack substance. A phony spiritual image is deeply dishonest and cannot generate new growth. Ministers or ministries that distort

the truth or utilize statistics to make their growth seem more impressive actually undermine the good they may actually accomplish. Jesus has not given us a get-fruit-quick scheme for spiritual living. Genuine growth takes time and lasts much longer than instant successes. Jesus intends our fruit to last for eternity!

Do you allow small problems to get in the way of loving other believers? Jesus commands that you love them, and he will give you the strength to do it.

LIFE APPLICATION

COMMANDED TO LOVE

Our world wants love to be spontaneous and driven by feeling. But Jesus knows our deeper need. We know we ought to love even when we don't feel like it because we want others to love us when we are unlovable. In Jesus we find both the supreme model for loving and the supreme resource. He commands us to love, and he helps us accomplish his command.

Jesus knew that if we would practice love, then the feelings of love would follow naturally. If we waited to be motivated by affection for others, we would never love others. Treating others with honor and respect (even when we don't feel they deserve it) may generate good will and affection. If we understand how deeply we are loved by God in spite of our sin, we will be pushed in the direction of loving others ourselves. Those who do not realize God's love for them find it difficult to love others.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – John.

Moving Forward 4

Life-Sharing Lesson 4 “God’s Calling On Your Life” Ephesians 4:1-6, Philippians 3:12-14, John 15:16-17

1. What comes to your mind when someone says “God has a calling on your life?”

I think of God wanting to use you in special way for God’s specific purposes.

2. Do you think God has something specific in mind to be carried out for each believer in the church? Why or why not?

Yes. God created everybody with unique talents, gifts, and circumstances that equip them for a unique service. When God saved us, there was already a job for us to do. We find in Ephesians Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV) ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 4:1-6 (NIV)

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

3. What is the calling that each of us has received in verse 4:1 and where did it come from?

We received a calling from Jesus Christ to come and follow Him. That calling brought with it an obligation to live a life worthy of Jesus Christ. Jesus told us in advance to count the cost before choosing to follow Him.

4. When things are not going your way, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the worse, how do you rate yourself on being humble, gentle, and patient, bearing with one another in love?

I know that I need to let go of my selfishness when things are not going my way. I allow myself to become full of stress and use the stress as justification for allowing anger and impatience to be a part of handling the situation. I would have to rate myself at a 5. I can walk better in each of these situations when things are going my way, but it is in the hard times that we find out just how much we clearly have yielded ourselves to Christ. It's not easy being patient and its not easy bearing with one another in love when people just don't seem to be doing their part.

5. Are you known more as a peacemaker preserving the unity through the bond of peace or as one who ends a situation through anger and screaming or putting someone in his or her place?

Most of the time in the church I have striven to be the peacemaker especially in group settings. My goal has been to be the moderator working toward reconciliation. I probably need a lot more help in the one to one situations when I am angry with a person.

6. Do you think God's calling on our lives is a calling "to come and do something" or more of a calling "to come and be something?" (what's the difference)

I think God's calling on our lives is more of one "to come and be something." God does not call us simply to be a policeman, but rather to "come and be a certain kind of a policeman." If we think we or only called and to come and do something, we may substitute the doing of the thing as the completion of the thing, and not realize that we were actually being called to be transformed by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. It's not enough to come and do ministry. The call is to be transformed yourself into a vessel God uses by entering into a deeper walk with God out of which you can serve and minister to others. God not only calls you to be a nurse, but to be a nurse who is transformed so as to be an effective witness of the love of Jesus to others.

Philippians 3:12-16 (NIV)

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and

Sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

7. What kind of things do we have to forget in order to strain toward what is ahead?

We have to forget how we use to live our lives to get our own way before Christ to make way for the new ways in Christ wants us to do things. We have to forget how we use to think in order to make way for a new way of thinking. We have to forget yearning for the praises and approval of others to be open to seeking to please Christ. We have to forget what the world tells us important and put value on what God tells us is important. We have to forget certain relationships in order to remove hindrances in our walk with God.

8. What do you think Paul means in verse 12 when he says "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me?"

Paul realized that God grabbed him, because God wanted him to do something specific in the kingdom of God. We find God telling Ananias in Acts 9:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

9. Why do you think Jesus Christ took a hold of you?

Jesus took a hold of me to impact my family, my friends, the churches I have served and the body of Christ.

10. What do you think is the prize that God is offering us?

God is offering us the prize of truly knowing who God is. God is offering us a life that can be free from the fears of this world, because of the knowledge that God is with us no matter what?

11. If you could do anything for Christ, what would it be?

I would like to be part of building a strong healthy church for Christ in which people's lives are being changed by the power of God and they get a vision to make

12. What do you want your legacy to be in the church when the church is having your homegoing service?

I want people to give testimonies of something I said or did that caused them to grow closer to the Lord. I want my legacy to be that he truly tried to make a difference for the cause of Christ and that he remained faithful to the end.

13. What do you need to work on the most now for your legacy to become a reality?

I need to become more of an evangelist than I have in the past. I feel as though I'm not making the most of the opportunities I have to share Christ with others.

John 15:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

14. What is the fruit that Jesus wants us to go and bear?

Jesus wants us to love each other.