

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

This series of studies is based on the
Comprehensive Edition of The Bible Unpacked.

There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked.*
These aim to address the needs of
NON-CHRISTIANS through to MATURE CHRISTIANS,
from TEENAGERS to ADULTS.

For more information and free downloads go to:
www.thebibleunpacked.net

An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

The Bible Unpacked™

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching for believers established in the faith

28. Serving God

Composed by Paul Mallison

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Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

 **Two-Minute Edition:** Key Bible teachings for people “on the run”
For giving to non-Christians.


 **Pocket Edition:** Key Bible teachings for seekers of truth
Largely for giving to inquiring non-Christians or young new Christians.

 **Concise Edition:** A look at the Bible’s teaching for new and young believers. For either new or young Christians. Suitable to give to non-Christian friends. Has study series based on it.


 Studies

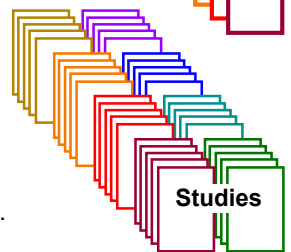
 **Foundations Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers consolidating their faith. For newer Christians. Study series is ideal for studies with newer believers.

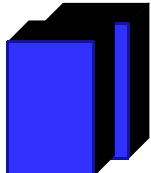
 Studies

 **Intermediate Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers growing in the faith. For developing a sound understanding of the faith. Studies are excellent for Bible study groups.

 Studies

 **Comprehensive Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers established in the faith. For a comprehensive knowledge of the faith. Useful as a study or a devotional tool - and preparing talks. Studies are ideal for studying topics in detail.

 Studies

 **In-Depth Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for teachers and students of the Bible. For Christians keen to gain a deep understanding of their faith. Useful for speakers preparing talks, study groups leaders, Bible students and Bible colleges. It is also in an electronic version, which is a PDF file.

 Electronic Version

Section II. What to Do

Part E. Relating to God

21. Being Right with God

- I. Getting Right with God
- II. Staying Right with God

22. Having Faith in God

- I. Faith and Hope
- II. What Not to Do

23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

- I. Loving and Fearing God
- II. Obeying God

24. Connecting with God

- I. Being Close to God
- II. Praying to God

25. Exalting God

- I. Instructions
- II. Reasons to Exalt God

Part F. Church Life

26. Being One Body

- I. General
- II. Caring for the Body

27. Worshiping God

- I. General
- II. Offerings

28. Serving God

- I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights
- II. Doing God's Work

29. Significant Practices

- I. Symbolic Rites
- II. Other Significant Practices

30. Church Leadership

- I. General
- II. Teaching in the Church

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- I. Justice in Action
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- I. Being Wise
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34. Common Relationships

- I. Family Relationships
- II. Civil Relationships

35. Spreading the Gospel

- I. Instructions
- II. Insights

Part H. Persevering

36. Standing Firm

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Warfare

37. Rejecting Sin

- I. Encountering Sin
- II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy

38. Major Pitfalls

- I. Pride
- II. Riches and Sex

39. Hard Times

- I. General
- II. Praying in Hard Times

40. Persecution

- I. The Persecution of God's People
- II. What to Do in Persecution

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Paul Mallison

Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

1. God's Being

- I. Basics
- II. God's Pre-Eminence

2. God's Character

- I. Holy Characteristics
- II. Loving Characteristics

3. Jesus Christ

- I. General
- II. Jesus Christ and God

4. The Holy Spirit

- I. General
- II. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as One

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

- I. Angels
- II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

- I. General
- II. God's Creation of People

7. God's Sovereignty

- I. God's Supreme Authority
- II. God's Control over the World

8. God's Word

- I. General
- II. Key Old Testament Covenants

9. The Problem of Sin

- I. General
- II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

10. God's Judgment

- I. Basics
- II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

- I. The Messiah's Identity
- II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person

12. Jesus Christ's Mission

- I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
- II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ

- I. Salvation from Sin
- II. Salvation for the World

14. The New Order

- I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
- II. Key Elements of the New Order

15. 'The Last Things'

- I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
- II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

16. The Standing of God's People

- I. Belonging to God
- II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ

17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

- I. Basics
- II. God's Holy Spirit in His People

18. God's Transformation of His People

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Attributes

19. God's Care of His People

- I. God's Saving of His People
- II. God's Preservation of His People

20. God's Plans for His People

- I. General
- II. God's Plans for Israel

1THESS 5:19–20 *Do not put out the Spirit's fire.* ²⁰*Do not despise prophecies.* ISV

The use of spiritual gifts in corporate worship and meetings is most likely in view here. The Thessalonians were not to stifle the Holy Spirit's work by restricting the expression of spiritual gifts.

Which gift of the Holy Spirit do you think you have? If you are not sure, how could you find out?

If you believe you have a particular spiritual gift, how do you or how could you use your gift to build up the church?

Does Paul's instruction to "be eager for the spiritual gifts" (1Cor 14:1) indicate that we can gain more spiritual gifts? If so, how can we do so?

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

The gift of “discernment of spirits” (v. 10) appears to be the ability to distinguish whether something, such as a prophecy or teaching, is prompted by the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit. The gift of “tongues” (v. 10) is the ability to speak in an unlearned language. (Note that further spiritual gifts are mentioned in the following subsection.)

Make good use of spiritual gifts, using them appropriately

1TIM 4:14 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Do not neglect the spiritual gift you have, given to you and confirmed by prophetic words when the elders laid hands on you.*

ROM 12:6B–8 [PAUL:] *So if your gift is prophecy, use your gift in proportion to your faith. ⁷If your gift is serving, devote yourself to serving others. If it is teaching, devote yourself to teaching others. ⁸If it is encouraging, devote yourself to encouraging others. If it is sharing, share generously. If it is leading, lead enthusiastically. If it is helping, help cheerfully. ^{15v}*

The phrase “in proportion to your faith” (v. 6) most likely refers to the extent of one’s faith in God – “according to the amount of faith we have” (CEV).

Use your spiritual gift to build up the church

EPH 4:11–13 *It was he [Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.*

As parts of the body of Christ, believers are to use the gifts they have been given (v. 11) in ministry (v. 12a) so that Christ’s body may be built up and become mature (vv. 12b–13).

Further instructions about spiritual gifts

1COR 14:1, 39 *Pursue love and be eager for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ... ³⁹So then, brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid anyone from speaking in tongues.*

e) Spiritual Gifts

God equips his people to serve him, notably by giving them spiritual gifts.

God gives each of his people a spiritual gift, through the Holy Spirit

1COR 7:7 [PAUL:] I wish that everyone were like me, but *each person has his own gift from God*. One has one gift, another has another gift.

NCV™

1COR 12:8 *The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom, and the same Spirit gives another the ability to speak with knowledge.* NCV™

God's people are given different spiritual gifts

ROM 12:6 *And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us.*

The various spiritual gifts

1COR 12:8–10 *For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.*

Broadly speaking, “the message of wisdom” and “the message of knowledge” (v. 8) quite possibly are respectively “the ability to give wise advice” (NLT) or insight and “the gift of special knowledge” (NLT) – with probably the application and conveying of spiritual truths being particularly in view.

The term “faith” (v. 9) does not refer to saving faith, but to exceptional faith or trust in God. The gift of “prophecy” (v. 10) is the communication of a revelation from God, such as a foretelling of a future event or a revelation of God’s will regarding a certain matter.

I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights

All of God’s people are necessarily his servants – and so need to be prepared to serve him. This requires devotion to God and to his work.

As well as instructing us to serve God, the Bible provides plenty of encouragement to persevere in doing so. The Bible also gives insights into being guided by God, something which is very much applicable to serving God as well as to other areas of our lives.

a) Be Prepared to Serve God

We are called to serve God and Jesus Christ

1PET 2:16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. *Live as servants of God.* NCV™

ROM 12:11 Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, *serve the Lord.*

So, be prepared and ready to do God's work . . .

1PET 1:13A *So prepare your minds for service* and have self-control. NCV™

JER 1:17A [GOD:] But you, Jeremiah, *get yourself ready!* Go and tell these people everything I instruct you to say.

. . . and be willing to do God's work

1PET 5:2 [PETER, TO CHURCH LEADERS:] Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you, *exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly* under God's direction, *not for shameful profit but eagerly.*

Being prepared for God's work requires godly living

TITUS 1:7–8 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF CHURCH LEADERS:] For *the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God's work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain.*
⁸*Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled.*

Accordingly, consecrate yourself to serve God . . .

Ex 28:41 [GOD, TO MOSES:] And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and *consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.* ESV

In the OT the act of consecration involved rituals signifying that the person involved was setting themselves apart from all that was not holy in order to be holy or sacred, so as to be fit and ready to serve God. As God himself is holy, it is essential that those who serve him are likewise holy. Although the rituals

What is one thing you could do or do differently to better “be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35)?

What are the advantages of working with other believers in serving God?

What work do you do with other believers? How do you encourage them in this work – and how do they encourage you?

Keep each other informed about the work and associated challenges

ACTS 14:27 *When they [Paul and Barnabas] arrived and gathered the church together, they reported all the things God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles.*

ACTS 4:23 *When they were released, Peter and John went to their fellow believers and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said to them.*

Note: Churches send out workers, to aid the spread of the gospel

ACTS 13:1–3 Now there were these prophets and teachers *in the church at Antioch*: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch from childhood) and Saul. ²While they were serving the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* ³Then, *after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off.*

ACTS 8:14 Now *when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.*

involved in the OT practice of consecration are not pertinent to Christians, the concept of setting oneself apart from all that is not holy in order to serve God is very much applicable.

. . . and so be holy

2TIM 2:21 *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.* ESV

One must cleanse oneself from corruptive influences in order to be holy, useful to God, ready to do his work.

What should we do to prepare ourselves to serve God? (Do not limit your answer to what is mentioned in this study.)

Why do we need to live godly lives to serve God?

What have you done or should you do in order to consecrate yourself to serve God?

b) Be Devoted to God's Work

Devote yourself to God's work

EZRA 7:10 Now Ezra had dedicated himself to the study of the law of the LORD, to its observance, and to teaching its statutes and judgments in Israel.

TITUS 3:8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may *be careful to devote themselves to good works*. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ESV

Serve God only – do not serve anything or anyone else . . .

1SAM 7:3–4 Samuel said to all the people of Israel, “If you are really turning to the LORD with all your hearts, remove from among you the foreign gods and the images of Ashtoreth. *Give your hearts to the LORD and serve only him*. Then he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” ⁴So the Israelites removed the Baals and images of Ashtoreth. *They served only the LORD*.

DAN 3:17–18, 28 [SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO, TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR:] Your majesty, if it be his will, *our God whom we serve* can deliver us from the blazing fire furnace, and he will deliver us from you. ¹⁸But if not, rest assured, your majesty, that *we won't serve your gods*, and we won't worship the golden statue that you have set up.” . . . ²⁸Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said: ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! He sent his angel to deliver his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and *were willing to risk their lives in order not to serve or worship any god except their own God*. ISV

. . . Accordingly, seek to please God rather than people

GAL 1:10 [PAUL:] *I am not trying to please people. I want to please God. Do you think I am trying to please people? If I were doing that, I would not be a servant of Christ*. CEV

d) Working with Other Believers

(⇒ *Help Each Other*, in 26. *Being One Body*)

This section speaks of working with other believers both in: working among them, ministering to them; and working alongside them, ministering to others (such as in outreach). Note that most of the other teachings in this chapter are also very relevant to this topic.

Serve each other

GAL 5:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but *through love serve one another*.

MARK 9:35 After he [Jesus] sat down, he called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must *be last of all and servant of all*.”

Do God's work together

PHIL 4:3 [PAUL:] Yes, I say also to you, true companion, help them [Euodia and Syntyche]. *They have struggled together in the gospel ministry along with me and Clement and my other coworkers*, whose names are in the book of life.

3JN 1:7–8 [JOHN, SPEAKING OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS:] After all, they went on their trip to serve the one named Christ, and they didn't accept any help from the people to whom they went. ⁸*We must support believers who go on trips like this so that we can work together with them in spreading the truth*. GW

Encourage each other in doing God's work

HEB 10:24 *We must also consider how to encourage each other to show love and to do good things*. GW

2CHR 35:2 He [King Josiah] appointed the priests to fulfill their duties and *encouraged them to carry out their service in the LORD's temple*.

house! ⁷You must speak my words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.

Instead, fear God and serve him faithfully

1SAM 12:24 However, *fear the LORD and serve him faithfully* with all your heart. Just look at the great things he has done for you!

Why is important to serve God with humility?

When facing opposition or other daunting challenges in doing God's work, what can we do in order to be strong and courageous?

Which of the points made in this section do you need to work at the most? What steps can you take to help you in this?

Put God and his work before your own interests . . .

PS 132:3–5 [DAVID:] *“I will not enter my house or get into my bed, ⁴I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, ⁵until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”*

ESV

These verses probably are speaking of David's intent to build a temple for God.

. . . Put Jesus Christ even before everyone else

MATT 10:37 [JESUS:] *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

Moreover, give up your life to live for God and Jesus Christ . . .

ROM 12:1 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: *offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.* GNT

LUKE 9:23 Then he [Jesus] said to them all, *“If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

We must deny ourselves – give up living for ourselves and what we want – and live for Christ instead, daily shouldering the accompanying difficulties.

. . . Even be willing to endanger your life

ACTS 20:22–24 [PAUL:] *And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem without knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit warns me in town after town that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. ²⁴But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.*

In fact, be willing to give up everything for God and Jesus Christ

LUKE 14:33 In the same way,” concluded Jesus, “*none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.* GNT

MATT 13:44–46 *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field.* ⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found a pearl of great value, he went out and sold everything he had and bought it.

Although some commentators have a somewhat different understanding, both these parables seem to be essentially illustrating the absolute cost of the kingdom of God; one must be prepared to forgo everything for it. Note the joy in doing so that is apparent in v. 44.

c) The Manner in Which to Serve God

Serve God in holiness and righteousness

LUKE 1:73B–75 [ZECHARIAH, THE PRIEST:] This oath [of God] grants ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, may *serve him without fear,* ⁷⁵*in holiness and righteousness* before him for as long as we live.

Serve God with humility

ACTS 20:19 [PAUL:] *I served the Lord with all humility,* with tears, and with trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. ISV

LUKE 17:10 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] So you also, *when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’* ESV

Serve God with all your heart

DEUT 10:12 [MOSES:] And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to *serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,* ... ESV

Be strong and courageous, as God is with those doing his work . . .

1CHR 28:10 [DAVID, TO SOLOMON:] Realize now that the LORD has chosen you to build a temple as his sanctuary. *Be strong and do it!*

DEUT 31:23 The LORD gave this command to Joshua, son of Nun: “*Be strong and courageous, because you will bring the Israelites into the land that I swore to give them, and I will be with you.*” GW

. . . and so do not be afraid

EZEK 2:6–7 [GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] But you, son of man, *do not fear them, and do not fear their words – even though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions – do not fear their words and do not be terrified of the looks they give you,* for they are a rebellious

In what ways should the following factors influence us in doing God's work: without Jesus we "can accomplish nothing" (John 15:5); and it is God who makes "the plants grow" (1 Corinthians 3:7)?

Paul speaks of "using Christ's great strength that works so powerfully in me" (Col 1:29). How can we likewise utilize Christ's great strength?

In your own words explain what it means to do God's work in the "name" of Jesus Christ.

In what ways do you find it difficult to put Jesus Christ before everyone else (cf. Matt 10:37)?

How can we give up everything we have (cf. Luke 14:33)?

Select a verse that you find challenging from this section, and say why? What could you do in response to this?

c) Reasons to Serve God

He is our God, who has done great things for us

DEUT 10:20–21 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Revere *the LORD your God, serve him*, be loyal to him and take oaths only in his name. ²¹He is the one you should praise; *he is your God, the one who has done these great and awesome things for you that you have seen.*

We are God’s servants

JAMES 1:1A From *James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ.* CEV

LEV 25:55 [GOD:] This is because *the people of Israel are servants to me. They are my servants*, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God. NCV™

God cares for his servants

ISA 41:9B–10 [GOD, TO ISRAEL:] I told you, “*You are my servant.*” I have chosen you and not rejected you. ¹⁰*Don’t be afraid, for I am with you! Don’t be frightened, for I am your God! I strengthen you – yes, I help you – yes, I uphold you with my saving right hand!*

God’s care of his servants gives good reason to serve God.

Your work for God will be productive

LUKE 8:15 [JESUS, EXPLAINING A PARABLE:] But the ones on the good soil are the people who hear the word but also hold on to it with good and honest hearts, *producing a crop through endurance.* ISV

The “crop” produced may well be referring to – or at least may be applied to – the productivity of one’s work for the kingdom (as per the theme of this subsection). Alternatively the spiritual growth of the individual believer may be in view.

You will be rewarded for your work

2CHR 15:7 But as for you, be strong and don’t get discouraged, for *your work will be rewarded.*

Moreover, serve God through the Holy Spirit

ROM 7:6 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that *we serve in the new way of the Spirit* and not in the old way of the written code. ESV

2TIM 1:14 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Protect that good thing* [the gospel message] *entrusted to you, through the Holy Spirit who lives within us.*

God’s people serve and obey him now by following the directing of the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit’s empowerment, rather than by focusing on “obeying the letter of the law” (NLT).

Note: Commit to God whatever you do

PROV 16:3 *Commit your works to the LORD*, and your plans will be established.

Do God's work through God and his power

JOHN 3:21 But those who follow the true way come to the light, and it shows that *the things they do were done through God*. NCV™

2COR 6:7 *We have spoken the truth, and God's power has worked in us. In all our struggles we have said and done only what is right.* CEV

As such, do the work by faith . . .

HEB 11:32–34 And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. ³³*Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, received promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴put out raging fires, escaped death by the sword, found strength in weakness, became powerful in battle, and routed foreign armies.* ISV

In fighting their enemies (vv. 33a, 34b; 2Chr 14:11b ↴) – along with administering justice (v. 33a) – these men of God were in a real sense doing God's work, doing so by faith. As such passages like this are very much applicable to believers in doing their work for God.

. . . and do the work in God's "name"

2CHR 14:11B [ASA, KING OF JUDAH:] Help us now, O LORD our God, because *we are relying on you, and in your name we have come out to fight against this huge army.* LORD, you are our God; no one can hope to defeat you. GNT

To the ancient Hebrews and Jews, a person's name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and aims or cause. As such, doing something in God's name would appear to involve acting: as his representative; by his authority; and in accordance with his will. Doing so is allied with acting in reliance on his power, by faith in him. (The same applies to acting in Jesus Christ's name, as per the following subsection.)

Likewise, do God's work in the "name" of Jesus Christ

COL 3:17 *And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

The exhortation in this verse was not made specifically in reference to doing God's work, but obviously is applicable to it.

MARK 10:29–30 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, *there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel ³⁰who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, all with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life.*

In v. 29 Jesus mentions some things that his followers may be required to forego in following and serving him. In v. 30 Jesus speaks of corresponding blessings of this present "age". These blessings are primarily fulfilled through the new relationships in the family of God's people, to which Jesus' followers belong.

Whoever does not produce good "fruit" will be cut off from God and Jesus Christ

MATT 3:10 *Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

JOHN 15:2A [JESUS, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit.* NCV™

Note that when used metaphorically in the NT, "fruit" can refer to spiritual characteristics (cf. Gal 5:22–23) or spiritual outcomes of quality work for the kingdom. In verses in this chapter, "fruit" has been interpreted to be referring to the latter, or at least to be inclusive of it.

Further warnings and consequences regarding not doing God's work

LUKE 12:47 *That servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or do what his master asked will receive a severe beating.*

HAG 1:9 [GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] *You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.* ESV

In working on their own interests rather than doing God's work, rebuilding his temple, the results of the people's efforts were very disappointing.

Note: Do not work for things that do not satisfy or do not last

ISA 55:2A [GOD:] *Why pay money for something that will not nourish you? Why spend your hard-earned money on something that will not satisfy?*

JOHN 6:27A *Do not work for food that goes bad; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life.* GNT

Rather than working simply for what spoils or does not last, work for that which leads to eternal life.

In your daily living, how conscious are you of being a servant of God? If you were more conscious of it, what would do differently or approach differently?

Why do you serve God?

What do you work to achieve or gain? To what extent do or will these things satisfy and last?

b) Do the Work through God

(⇒ *God Works through His People (II): Empowerment*, in 20. *God's Plans for His People; The gospel is not dependent on us and our presentation of it – but on the Holy Spirit and God's power . . .*, in 35. *Spreading the Gospel*)

Apart from God and Jesus Christ we can accomplish nothing

JOHN 15:4–5 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] Remain in me, and I will remain in you. *Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.* ⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me – and I in him – bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing.

1COR 3:6–7 [PAUL:] I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, *but God made them sprout and grow.* ⁷*What matters isn't those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow.* CEV

God's servants cannot themselves produce any true and lasting spiritual results or growth from the work that they do – only God can.

So, pray to God for help in the work – and ask others to pray

ACTS 4:29–31 [THE EARLY BELIEVERS, PRAYING:] And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and *grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,* ³⁰*while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.* ³¹*When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.*

EPH 6:19–20 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS:] *Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak – that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel,* ²⁰*for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may be able to speak boldly as I ought to speak.*

Has God called you to – or assigned to you – particular work to do for him? How do we ascertain what work God wants us to do in serving him?

How can we ensure our work will produce “the kind of fruit that will last” (John 15:16)?

How can we emulate Daniel and “continually serve” God (Dan 6:20)? How is the concept of continually serving God applicable to the everyday tasks that we need to do to live?

d) Being Guided by God

(⇒ *God Guides His People*, in *20. God's Plans for His People*)

The topic of being guided by God is very pertinent to serving God – such as in ascertaining his will in regard to how we should serve him. It is also of course important in other aspects of our lives. For it is vital in living righteously generally and in navigating through troubled times, as reflected in some of the following verses. God's guidance also becomes an issue when we need to make a significant choice or decision.

God's guidance may come through such sources as: the Holy Spirit's promptings; inner conviction or assurance (itself largely of the Holy Spirit); Scripture; circumstances; or advice from others. But God does not always guide his people by making them aware of his will. They may not even be aware of being guided by God, only recognizing his guidance in retrospect. The Bible actually says little about how one should find out God's guidance (apart from his directions evident in his laws). But the Bible does speak of how living a godly life and prayer are critical for being open to it – as is indicated in the following subsections.

To be guided by God: Live a godly life; . . .

ISA 58:9B–11A [DIRECTIVES TO ISRAEL:] *You must remove the burdensome yoke from among you and stop pointing fingers and speaking sinfully. ¹⁰You must actively help the hungry and feed the oppressed. Then your light will dispel the darkness, and your darkness will be transformed into noonday. ¹¹The LORD will continually lead you; he will feed you even in parched regions.*

PROV 3:5–6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. ⁶*Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight.*

A straight path (v. 6) suggests a way that is righteous and/or secure. The expression “make your paths straight” seems to be speaking either of: directing our ways so that we will take a straight path (cf. GNT, NLT, NKJV); or straightening the path before us (cf. CEV). Possibly aspects of both interpretations are involved.

. . . and pray, asking God to guide you (as in troubled times)

Ps 31:3 [DAVID, TO GOD:] For you are my rock and my fortress; for the sake of your name guide me and lead me. ISV

Moreover, God's will is understood through godliness and prayer

ROM 12:2 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Do not be conformed to this world, but continually be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may be able to determine what God's will is—what is proper, pleasing, and perfect. ISV

COL 1:9–10 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] For this reason, since the day we heard about this, we have not stopped praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the full knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you might live in a manner worthy of the Lord and be fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the full knowledge of God. ISV

This is of course a prayer that God's will for others be revealed to them, but it is still indicative of the need to pray ourselves in understanding God's will in our own lives. Note that v. 10 indicates that in asking God to enable the Colossians to know his will (v. 9), Paul had their service to God in view (the subject of this chapter) along with related aspects of the Christian life.

Other sources of godly and wise guidance

PROV 1:1–5 *The Proverbs of Solomon* son of David, king of Israel:
²To learn wisdom and moral instruction, and to discern wise counsel.
³To receive moral instruction in skillful living, in righteousness, justice, and equity.
⁴To impart shrewdness to the morally naive, and a discerning plan to the young person.
⁵(Let the wise also hear and gain instruction, and let the discerning acquire guidance!)

This shows that God's word – here Proverbs in particular – provides guidance, as v. 5 explicitly indicates.

PROV 11:14 *When there is no guidance a nation falls, but there is success in the abundance of counselors.*

builds on it. And *each one must be careful how he builds.*¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ.¹² *If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw,*¹³ *each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done.*¹⁴ *If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward.*¹⁵ *If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

Here Paul speaks of the work of building the church, and is probably primarily addressing church teachers. Builders need to be careful to build with quality materials – symbolized by the gold, silver and precious stones (v. 12). Such “materials” would include correct doctrine, complemented by a godly lifestyle. Quality work – as with poor work – will be shown for what it is by testing on “the Day” of judgment (vv. 13–14).

Persistently serve God . . .

DAN 6:20 As he [King Darius] approached the den, he called out to Daniel in a worried voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, was your God whom you continually serve able to rescue you from the lions?”

. . . and complete the work you have been given

COL 4:17B “See to it that you complete the ministry you received in the Lord.”

ACTS 20:24 [PAUL:] But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

a) Do God's Work – the Best You Can

Do the work assigned to you . . .

EPH 2:10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus *he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.* GNT

It would appear that Paul is speaking of God preparing in advance particular work for each believer to do (cf. AMP). As such, believers need to look to God to guide them and enable them to do the work – and willingly do it.

. . . and carry out God's will

EPH 6:6 [PAUL, TO CHRISTIAN SLAVES:] Do not do this only while being watched in order to please them, but *be like slaves of the Messiah who do God's will from the heart.* ISV

Work hard at God's work . . .

ROM 16:12 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN BELIEVERS:] Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have *worked hard for the Lord.* Greet dear Persis, who has *worked very hard for the Lord.* GW

. . . and endure associated persecution and hardships

2COR 6:4–5 [PAUL:] But *as God's servants, we have commended ourselves in every way, with great endurance, in persecutions, in difficulties, in distresses, ⁵in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in troubles, in sleepless nights, in hunger, . . .*

Do quality work which bears “fruit” – “fruit” that will last

JOHN 15:16 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] You did not choose me. *I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last.* Then my Father will give you whatever you ask for in my name.

CEV

1COR 3:10–15 [PAUL:] According to the grace of God given to me, *like a skilled master-builder I laid a foundation,* but someone else

This illustrates the importance of advice from others in obtaining guidance, with wise advisors presumably being in view.

COL 3:15 [PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] And *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,* to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ESV

In its context the reference is to relationships with other believers, in which Christ's “peace” in the church body – and so also in the “hearts” of its members – should be sought and maintained amidst working through differences. The first part of the verse is often applied to obtaining personal guidance, being used to point to the principle of being at peace with a particular choice.

How does God guide his people?

What does “renewing . . . [our] minds” (Rom 12:2) involve doing?

If you are not sure what decision to make regarding an important matter, what should you do?

II. Doing God's Work

In instructing us in how to do God's work, serving him, the Bible urges us to do our best but emphasizes God's role and the need to rely on him. The Bible also teaches us about: the manner in which we should serve God; serving God in a church context; and God's extraordinary spiritual gifts to his people for serving him.