

# The **Bible** Unpacked

## **Intermediate Study Series**

The Bible's teaching summarized  
for growing believers

Paul Mallison



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The Bible's teaching summarized  
for growing believers

## **Part E. Relating to God**

Paul Mallison

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## Contents

A Quick Word.....	iv
Suggestions for Study Groups.....	v
<b>21. Being Right with God .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>22. Having Faith in God .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>24. Connecting with God.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>25. Exalting God .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Topics in This Series.....	51
The Seven Editions .....	53
Persecuted Christians.....	54

## 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 eight booklets in the series, based on the eight parts of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Intermediate Edition*. Each booklet has five chapters, with two sections each. These ten sections can be used for ten or more studies.

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 lead the Israelites 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](http://www.thebibleunpacked.net).

**Users are asked to pray regularly for persecuted Christians** and, if possible, support them financially. These things can be done through organizations that provide aid to them and/or prayer notices, such as those listed under [Persecuted Christians](#).

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## 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.

### 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 and/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?





# 21. Being Right with God

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## I. Getting Right with God

God's Invitation.....	2
Repentance.....	3
Belief in Jesus Christ.....	4
Reasons for Assurance .....	5

## II. Staying Right with God

The Need to Obey God.....	7
The Need for Good Deeds.....	7
Living Free of the Law and Sin – by the Spirit.....	8
Epilogue: Living 'in' Jesus Christ .....	9

## I. Getting Right with God

**See also:** *God's people are baptized in the "name" of Jesus Christ*, Ch. 29

There are two prominent themes in the NT regarding how to get "right with God". These are repentance and belief in Jesus Christ.

Bear in mind that in using the expression "right with God", this chapter largely has in view being deemed righteous in God's eyes, which involves the forgiveness of one's sins. As such, it also means that we are at peace with God.

### God's Invitation

#### God invites all people to come to him and be saved

[GOD:] *Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!* For I am God, and there is no other. [ISAIAH 45:22](#) ESV

#### God wants us to earnestly seek him

[PAUL, PREACHING TO THE ATHENIANS:] God began by making one person, and from him came all the different people who live everywhere in the world. God decided exactly when and where they must live. <sup>27</sup>*God wanted them to look for him and perhaps search all around for him and find him*, though he is not far from any of us: ... [ACTS 17:26–27](#) NCV™

#### We must believe in God and what he says

Now *without faith it is impossible to please him, for the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* [HEBREWS 11:6](#) NET

[JESUS:] I tell you the solemn truth, *the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me* has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life. [JOHN 5:24](#) NET

Jesus' words were from God, who sent him. It is critical that we believe God's words.

## We need to be open to believing and responding

He [Jesus] called a child, had him stand among them, <sup>3</sup>and said [to his disciples], “I tell you the truth, *unless you turn around and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven!* <sup>4</sup>*Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* MATTHEW 18:2–4 NET

Here Jesus refers to the humility, openness and receptiveness of little children. These characteristics are required to believe and respond to Jesus’ message – and so enter God’s kingdom.

## Repentance

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The words in the Bible that are translated as “repent” speak of: changing one’s mind, regret and consequently turning around. When people are called to repent, they are called to change their mindset and turn away from sin to God.

### We must repent

Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, *he now commands all people everywhere to repent, ...* ACTS 17:30 NET

### Confess your sins . . .

But if *we confess our sins*, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. 1 JOHN 1:9 NET

### . . . Turn from sin and do what is right

*Turn away from evil and do what is right!* PSALMS 34:14A NET

### Turn to God in repentance

[PAUL:] I testified to both Jews and Greeks about *repentance toward God* and faith toward our Lord Jesus. ACTS 20:21 ISV

### Repentance is required for the forgiveness of sins

Therefore *repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, ...* ACTS 3:19 NET

## Belief in Jesus Christ

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### Believe in Jesus Christ

Jesus replied, “This is the deed God requires – to *believe in the one whom he sent.*” JOHN 6:29 NET

Believing in Jesus involves believing what the Bible says about: who he is; his teaching and deeds; and his death and resurrection – including their significance. Key matters concerning who he is and the significance of his death and resurrection are mentioned below. Regarding the latter, primarily we are to believe that as a result of his death and resurrection, Jesus provides forgiveness of sins (and consequently righteousness, leading to eternal life). As such we are to trust in him for the forgiveness of our own sins.

### Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God

[MARTHA, TO JESUS:] Martha said to him, “Yes, Lord, *I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who was expected to come into the world.*” JOHN 11:27B GW

“Christ” and “Messiah” are Greek and Hebrew terms respectively, meaning the “anointed” or the “Anointed One”. The OT tells of a coming anointed one of God, and on occasions speaks of him as God’s Son (cf. 2Sam 7:11b–14a; Ps 2:6–7; Ps 89:27).

### Belief in Jesus Christ brings forgiveness of sins

About him [Jesus] all the prophets testify, that *everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.* ACTS 10:43 NET

### Belief in Jesus Christ makes one righteous before God

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup>*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* ROMANS 3:21–22A ESV

### Belief in Jesus Christ brings eternal life

For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that *everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.* JOHN 3:16 NET

## Reasons for Assurance

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The verses in this section give reasons for assurance of things such as being saved and being in a close relationship with God – and consequently give assurance of being made right with God.

### Having the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received *the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.”*<sup>16</sup> *The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children.* ROMANS 8:15–16 NET

Note that we can be confident that God has given the Holy Spirit to us through evidence such as: indications of the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit in our lives (cf. Galatians 5:22); having a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit (some of which are more obvious than others); and recognition of the Holy Spirit’s help, such as his empowerment or guidance. Moreover, we can sense or have an inner awareness of God, which is constant evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

### Obedience to God

*We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands.* 1 JOHN 2:3 NCV™

### Love for other Christians

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *We know that we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love our brothers and sisters.* 1 JOHN 3:14 GNT

### Further reasons

*But if we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.* 1 JOHN 1:9 NET

[JESUS:] Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me, and *the one who comes to me I will never send away.* JOHN 6:37 NET

Jesus assures us that he will not reject anyone who comes to him.

Why do we need to become like little children to enter God's kingdom (cf. Matt 18:2-4)?

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Explain in your own words what it means to "repent".

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What does believing in Jesus Christ involve?

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Explain the relationship between being forgiven and being made righteous or justified.

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Are you sure of being right with God – and of salvation? If so, why?

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## II. Staying Right with God

See also: *By faith we stand firm*, Ch. 22

Having been made right with God, it is critical that we live in accordance with this standing, so as to stay right with God. The following topics deal with some key aspects involved in this, namely: obedience; good deeds; living by the Holy Spirit; and living "in" Jesus Christ.

### The Need to Obey God

#### We need to obey God as well as believe

And by the command of the eternal God it [the gospel] is made known to all nations *that they might believe and obey*. [ROMANS 16:26B](#) NCV™

#### Obedience is critical for holiness and eternal life

[PAUL, SPEAKING TO BELIEVERS OF BEING SLAVES IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD:] Now you have been freed from sin and have *become God's slaves*. *This results in a holy life and, finally, in everlasting life*. [ROMANS 6:22](#) GW

After he [Christ] had finished his work, he became the source of *eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him*. [HEBREWS 5:9](#) GW

### The Need for Good Deeds

#### True faith involves good deeds

*Just as a person's body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!* [JAMES 2:26](#) NCV™

#### Good deeds accompany salvation

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Even though we speak like this, dear friends, *we are convinced of better things in your case, things that point to salvation*. <sup>10</sup>For God is not so unjust as to forget *your work and the love you have shown him as you have ministered to the saints and continue to minister to them*. [HEBREWS 6:9–10](#) ISV

*He [God] will reward each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup>eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory and honor and immortality, ...* ROMANS 2:6–7 NET

### **But our deeds do not earn salvation, for it is by grace**

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For *by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>it is not from works, so that no one can boast.* EPHESIANS 2:8–9 NET

Good deeds are an effect rather than a cause of salvation.

## **Living Free of the Law and Sin – by the Spirit**

### **We have been freed from the law to live by the Holy Spirit**

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] In the past, the law held us like prisoners, but our old selves died, and *we were made free from the law. So now we serve God in a new way with the Spirit, and not in the old way with written rules.* ROMANS 7:6 NCV™

Through what Christ accomplished, God’s people have been freed from the Mosaic Law as the means of being right with him. We are instead to live by his Spirit. Living by the Holy Spirit involves: being alert and responsive to the Spirit’s guidance; and relying on the Spirit’s power, to help and change us. Along with this, our minds should be focused on things of the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:5 below).

### **Instead of living by the sinful nature, live by the Holy Spirit**

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He [God] condemned sin in the flesh <sup>4</sup>so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who *do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but *those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ROMANS 8:3B–5 ISV

Here the term “flesh” denotes our sinful nature.

### **Inner righteousness is needed, not just compliance with rules**

[JESUS:] “*You have heard that it was said to an older generation, ‘Do not murder,’ and ‘whoever murders will be subjected to judgment.’*”



<sup>22</sup>*But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment. ...* <sup>27</sup>*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’* <sup>28</sup>*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

MATTHEW 5:21–22A, 27–28 NET

## Epilogue: Living ‘in’ Jesus Christ

Paul often speaks of believers being or acting “in” Christ. This refers to their close relationship and association with Jesus Christ, in which they are even identified with him. (See also the introductory comment under *II. Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ*, Ch. 16).

Believers are to live their lives in accordance with this relationship. As such, in addition to being mindful of the relationship, believers should: be dependent on Jesus Christ in whom they subsist; and act in a way consistent with Jesus Christ and his teachings.

### Live “in” Jesus Christ by faith

[PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your morale and *the firmness of your faith in Christ*. <sup>6</sup>Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith* just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. COLOSSIANS 2:5–7 NET

Paul appears to associate having a firm faith in Christ (vv. 5, 7) with living in Christ (v. 6) and being “rooted and built up in him” (v. 7).

### Live “in” Jesus Christ by holding to his teachings

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. ...* <sup>10</sup>*If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.* JOHN 15:7, 10 NET

One remains in Jesus Christ (v. 7) and similarly in his love (v. 10), by holding to his words (v. 7) and so his commands (v. 10).

Why do you obey God?

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Why is it important for believers to do good deeds?

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How do we live by the Holy Spirit?

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What do you need to bear in mind the most in order to better live by the Holy Spirit?

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What does living “in” Jesus Christ involve?

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## 22. Having Faith in God

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### I. Faith and Hope

What Faith Is .....	12
What to Have Faith For .....	12
The Importance of Faith .....	14
Hope in God.....	15

### II. What Not to Do

Do Not Lack Faith.....	17
Do Not Be Afraid (I): Instructions .....	17
Do Not Be Afraid (II): Reasons.....	18
Do Not Worry .....	19
Do Not Trust in Other Things .....	19

## I. Faith and Hope

Faith in God is absolutely fundamental to the Christian life. We need to continually live by faith, doing so in all areas of our lives. Hope is also vital for Christians. It is necessary for such things as sustaining and strengthening us – particularly in sustaining our faith.

### What Faith Is

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#### Faith involves believing in God

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Through Christ *you believe in God*, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. *So your faith and your hope are in God.* 1 PETER 1:21 NCV™

This links belief with faith (and hope). As such, it reflects that having faith in God involves believing in him. Such belief includes believing what he says.

#### We must also trust in God

*Trust in him at all times, you people!* PSALMS 62:8A NET

Trusting in God is an integral part of having faith in God. Having faith in God can be defined as believing and trusting God. For we are to believe in God and what he says, and also confidently trust in him and what he says in regard to our own lives. One could say having faith means that: in our minds we are to believe and in our hearts we are to trust.

### What to Have Faith For

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#### Have faith that God will fulfill what he promises

[PAUL, TO MEN SAILING ON A SHIP WITH HIM IN A BAD STORM:] For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve came to me <sup>24</sup>and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before Caesar, and God has graciously granted you the safety of all who are sailing with you.’ <sup>25</sup>Therefore keep up your courage, men, for *I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told.* ACTS 27:23–25 NET

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *But in keeping with his [God's] promise, we are looking forward to new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.* 2 PETER 3:13 ISV

In “looking forward” to the fulfillment of God’s promises one demonstrates faith in them being fulfilled.

Note that God’s promises include promises regarding the afterlife (in view here), promises to take care of us (cf. Acts 27:23–25 ↑) and promises to answer prayer. The latter two are reflected in the next two subsections.

### **Have faith that God will care for you**

All of you that honor the LORD and obey the words of his servant, *the path you walk may be dark indeed, but trust in the LORD, rely on your God.* ISAIAH 50:10 GNT

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

Various people of God are shown here to have had faith that God would take care of them when facing powerful enemies and other very difficult circumstances.

### **Have faith that God will do what you ask**

[DAVID:] *LORD, in the morning you will hear me; in the morning I will present my case to you and then wait expectantly for an answer.* PSALMS 5:3 NET

As Jesus went on from there, *two blind men followed him, shouting, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”* <sup>28</sup>When he went into the house, the blind men came to him. *Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.”* <sup>29</sup>Then he touched their eyes saying, *“Let it be done for you according to your faith.”* <sup>30</sup>*And their eyes were opened.* MATTHEW 9:27–30A NET

## The Importance of Faith

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### By faith we stand firm

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] I do not mean that we rule over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because *by faith you stand firm*. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:24 NET

### Faith produces obedience to God

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, and he went out without understanding where he was going.* HEBREWS 11:8 NET

### Faith produces work in service to God

[PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] We continually recall before God our Father *the things you have done because of your faith* and the work you have done because of your love. 1 THESSALONIANS 1:3A NCV™

### Faith is vital to prayer, for God to grant requests

*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.* MATTHEW 21:22 GNT

They [Israelite soldiers] cried out to God during the battle; *he responded to their prayers because they trusted in him.* 1 CHRONICLES 5:20B NET

### If we have faith nothing will be impossible

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why couldn’t we cast it [a demon] out?” <sup>20</sup>He told them, “It was because of your little faith. I tell you the truth, *if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you.*” MATTHEW 17:19–20 NET

The “mountain” signifies a seemingly insurmountable difficulty, here presumably alluding to difficulties encountered in advancing God’s kingdom.

Jesus is emphasizing genuine or quality faith, rather than amount of faith. If we have such faith nothing will be impossible, both in our service of God and in confronting issues in our lives. As such we are to have faith (and pray) that what we understand to be in accordance with God’s will, will take place.

## Hope in God

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Hope for a believer involves an assurance of their future, based on the truth of God's promises – rather than merely being an unfounded optimism.

### Set your hope on God's care

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF GOD:] He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. *On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.* 2 CORINTHIANS 1:10 ESV

[PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Command those who are rich in the things of this life not to be proud, but *to place their hope, not in such an uncertain thing as riches, but in God, who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment.* 1 TIMOTHY 6:17 GNT

### Set your hope on Jesus Christ's return and what will follow

[PAUL:] At the same time we can expect *what we hope for – the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.* TITUS 2:13 GW

Therefore, get your minds ready for action by being fully sober, and *set your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.* 1 PETER 1:13 NET

### Hope is vital for faith

[PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] *Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel ...* COLOSSIANS 1:5 NET

Now *faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.* HEBREWS 11:1 NET

The hope Christians have is not a groundless longing, but a confident assurance. Such hope stimulates and supports ongoing faith, which has as its focus that for which we hope.

Pray for the persecuted

What tips could you give to a younger Christian on how to “live by faith”?

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How does trusting in God help you?

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What is something that you need to learn to have faith in God to do?

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What does putting your hope in God involve doing?

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Why is hope important for faith? Can you think of any other reasons why hope is important?

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## II. What Not to Do

To live a life of faith, we need to avoid things which cause us to lack faith in God. These include doubt, fear, worry and trusting in other things. Some verses which encourage believers not to be afraid or worry are amongst the best-loved verses in the Bible.

### Do Not Lack Faith

#### Do not be lacking in faith

Now a great windstorm developed and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup>But he [Jesus] was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to die?” <sup>39</sup>So he got up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Be quiet! Calm down!” Then the wind stopped, and it was dead calm. <sup>40</sup>And he said to them, “*Why are you cowardly? Do you still not have faith?*” [MARK 4:37–40](#) NET

#### Do not doubt

Immediately, Jesus reached out, caught hold of him [Peter], and said, “*You have so little faith! Why did you doubt?*” [MATTHEW 14:31](#) GW

[JAMES, SPEAKING OF ONE ASKING GOD FOR SOMETHING:] *But he must ask in faith without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind.* [JAMES 1:6](#) NET

The “wave” imagery depicts weak faith that wavers between belief of sorts (as shown in asking) and unbelief (as shown in doubting).

### Do Not Be Afraid (I): Instructions

#### Do not be afraid – trust in God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *When I am afraid, I trust in you. <sup>4</sup>In God – I boast in his promise – in God I trust, I am not afraid. What can mere men do to me?* [PSALMS 56:3–4](#) NET

*Jesus said, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me.* [JOHN 14:1](#) NCV™

## **Do not be afraid – be strong and courageous**

[GOD, TO JOSHUA:] *“Be strong and courageous, because you’ll be leading this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous to ensure that you obey all the instructions that my servant Moses gave you—turn neither to the right nor to the left from it—so that you may succeed wherever you go. ... <sup>9</sup>“I’ve commanded you, haven’t I? Be strong and courageous. Don’t be fearful or discouraged, because the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” ... <sup>18</sup>... Only be strong and courageous.”* JOSHUA 1:6–7, 9, 18B ISV

## **Do Not Be Afraid (II): Reasons**

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### **God is far more powerful than our enemies**

[KING HEZEKIAH, TO HIS ARMY:] *“Be strong and brave! Don’t be afraid and don’t panic because of the king of Assyria and this huge army that is with him! We have with us one who is stronger than those who are with him. <sup>8</sup>He has with him mere human strength, but the LORD our God is with us to help us and fight our battles!”* The army was encouraged by the words of King Hezekiah of Judah. 2 CHRONICLES 32:7–8 NET

### **God is always with his people**

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Be strong and courageous! Do not fear or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who is going with you. He will not fail you or abandon you!” ... <sup>8</sup>The LORD is indeed going before you – he will be with you; he will not fail you or abandon you. Do not be afraid or discouraged!* DEUTERONOMY 31:6, 8 NET

### **God helps his people**

God is our strong refuge; *he is truly our helper in times of trouble. <sup>2</sup>For this reason we do not fear when the earth shakes, and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, <sup>3</sup>when its waves crash and foam, and the mountains shake before the surging sea.* PSALMS 46:1–3 NET

So we can say with confidence, *“The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* HEBREWS 13:6 NET

## Do Not Worry

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### Do not worry – trust God with your concerns

*Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.* <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. [PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7](#) NET

*Leave all your worries with him, because he cares for you.* [1 PETER 5:7](#) GNT

### Do not worry about the cares of this life, for God will provide

[JESUS:] So then, *don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'* <sup>32</sup>For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup>So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own. [MATTHEW 6:31–34](#) NET

## Do Not Trust in Other Things

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### Do not trust in other people, but rather trust in God

*It is better to take shelter in the LORD than to trust in people.* <sup>9</sup>It is better to take shelter in the LORD than to trust in princes. [PSALMS 118:8–9](#) NET

### Do not trust in yourself

*The one who trusts in himself is stupid, but the one who lives wisely will be kept safe.* [PROVERBS 28:26](#) ISV

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.* [PROVERBS 3:5](#) NET

### Do not trust in riches

*The one who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.* [PROVERBS 11:28](#) NET

At what times do you doubt or lack faith? How can you counteract this?

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What would you say to a believer beset with fear, to help them to instead trust in God?

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What will you do the next time you get afraid or worried? (You could pick a verse to learn, in order to recall when faced with fear or worry.)

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Do you trust in anything besides God? If so, what could you do to change the focus of your trust to God?

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Choose a verse from this study to bear in mind for the next time you begin to be afraid or worry. Either rewrite it in your own words or say why you chose it.

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# 23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

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## I. Loving and Fearing God

Love God .....	22
The Importance of Loving God .....	23
Fear God .....	23
Why God Should Be Feared .....	24
The Importance of Fearing God.....	25

## II. Obeying God

Obey God .....	27
How to Obey God .....	28
Follow Jesus Christ.....	29

## I. Loving and Fearing God

Love and fear are two emotions or attitudes that we should have towards God, and arguably they stand alone as such. The Bible states that loving God is of the utmost importance. Fearing God is also shown to be critical. Like loving God, understanding and having the fear of God that the Bible teaches, benefits us in many ways.

Note that both love and fear of God are closely associated with obeying him (the theme of the second half of this chapter). They are very strong, compelling emotions and provide the primary emotional stimuli for obeying God (cf. Deuteronomy 10:12–13) – supplementing intellectual stimuli arising out of such things as faith. Moreover, the Bible indicates that our love and fear of God are actually expressed primarily in obeying him.

### Love God

#### Love God and Jesus Christ

*Love the LORD, all you faithful followers of his!* PSALMS 31:23A NET

Grace be with all of those who *love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.* EPHESIANS 6:24 NET

#### Love for God and Jesus Christ is shown by obeying them

*We show our love for God by obeying his commandments, and they are not hard to follow.* 1 JOHN 5:3 CEV

*Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him.* JOHN 14:23 NET

#### Love for God is linked with loving other Christians

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is God’s child, and *whoever loves the Father also loves the Father’s children.*

1 JOHN 5:1 NCV™

Everyone who loves God will naturally love his children as well.

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## The Importance of Loving God

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### Loving God is of the utmost importance

Jesus said to him, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*”<sup>38</sup>*This is the first and greatest commandment.* <sup>39</sup>The second is like it: ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’<sup>40</sup>*All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.*” [MATTHEW 22:37–40](#) NET

### God and Jesus Christ love those who love them

[JESUS:] *The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him.* [JOHN 14:21B](#) NET

Note that the last clause refers to Jesus Christ revealing himself to those who love him, along with loving them.

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## Fear God

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Fearing God is more than just having reverence for him. A sound appreciation of God’s holiness and wrath, along with his supreme power, produces a genuine fear of incurring his displeasure. But this does not involve anxiety or terror for those who seek to please him and who understand his grace.

Clearly, fearing God moves us to obey him. It also evokes and supplements such things as worship and service, and even trust. When we grasp the concepts involved and willingly do fear God, we learn to gladly do so, even treasuring verses that call us to fear God.

### Fear God to the extent that you tremble before him

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *My flesh trembles out of fear of you, and I am in awe of your judgments.* [PSALMS 119:120A](#) ISV

Worship the LORD in holy attire! *Tremble before him, all the earth!*  
[PSALMS 96:9](#) NET

### Do not fear anything but God

[GOD, TO ISAIAH:] People are saying that others make plans against them, but you should not believe them. *Don’t be afraid of what they*

*fear; do not dread those things.* <sup>13</sup>*But remember that the LORD All-Powerful is holy. He is the one you should fear; he is the one you should dread.* [ISAIAH 8:12–13](#) NCV™

Note that if a person truly fears God, they are practically unable to fear anyone or anything else.

### **God’s people should not live in fear of his punishment**

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them. <sup>17</sup>*Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on Judgment Day; and we will have it because our life in this world is the same as Christ’s.* <sup>18</sup>*There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.* [1 JOHN 4:16B–18](#) GNT

In v. 18 “love” appears to be referring to the love of God that is manifested in the Christian – the love that God has for them and they in turn show to others (v. 16), revealing themselves to be like God or Christ (v. 17b). Knowing and expressing such love drives out anxious fear of punishment from God (v. 18) – particularly as those who live in love live in God, and God in them (v. 16b). Knowledge of such love cannot coexist with anxious fear of God’s punishment; they are incompatible, both logically and experientially. As such we can look towards Judgment Day with courage and confidence (v. 17).

Having a godly fear of God’s punishment is a good thing, as it leads us to spurn sin and to not turn away from God. However, living with God’s love – and under his grace – believers ought not live in anxious fear of God’s punishment.

## **Why God Should Be Feared**

### **God’s surpassing greatness and sovereignty**

*There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might.* <sup>7</sup>*Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.* [JEREMIAH 10:6–7](#) ESV



## God's anger and judgment

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? <sup>8</sup>From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still, <sup>9</sup>when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth.* PSALMS 76:7–9 ESV

## God's holiness

*Who will not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name, because you alone are holy?* REVELATION 15:4A NET

God's holiness involves his separateness from and intolerance of that which is morally impure, with the latter leading to his judgment. Thus God's holiness – awesome in itself – and its grave implications give good reason to fear him.

## The Importance of Fearing God

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### Fearing God is closely associated with obeying him . . .

[A WISE TEACHER:] *Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man.* ECCLESIASTES 12:13B NET

### . . . Fearing God compels one to avoid sin

Moses said to the people, “Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, *so the fear of him may be present with you in order that you don't sin.*” EXODUS 20:20 ISV

### Fear of God leads to life

*Fearing the LORD leads to life, and one who does so will live satisfied; he will not be afflicted by calamity.* PROVERBS 19:23 NET

OT verses (such as this one) which speak of fearing God leading to “life”, generally have in view: life as opposed to premature death; and/or a fullness of life.

### Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!* PSALMS 111:10 ISV

How does one love God? How can you love God more?

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Why do you think that, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” is the greatest commandment?

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What does fearing God involve? What differences are there between fearing God and fearing other people or things?

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Do you agree that fear of God counteracts fear of people or things? If so, why?

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How do you feel about the idea of fearing God? What is good about it?

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## II. Obeying God

The concept of obeying God permeates the whole Bible – the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. It is fundamental to a functional and healthy relationship with God. A related concept is that of following Jesus Christ, which likewise is relevant to all aspects of the Christian's life.

Note that the second half of 21. *Being Right with God – II. Staying Right with God* – begins with key teaching underlining the need to obey God.

### Obey God

#### Obey God always – forever

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I am determined to obey your statutes at all times, to the very end.* PSALMS 119:112 NET

#### We should obey God because of what he has done for us

[A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD'S DEEDS FOR ISRAEL:] *When he led his people out, they rejoiced; his chosen ones shouted with joy. <sup>44</sup>He handed the territory of nations over to them, and they took possession of what other peoples had produced, <sup>45</sup>so that they might keep his commands and obey his laws.* Praise the LORD! PSALMS 105:43–45 NET

We should obey God because of all that he has done for us and moreover because our obedience is in fact one of the chief objectives of all his deeds for us (v. 45a). A corollary of this is that if we do not obey we will forfeit God's blessings which are a key part of all the things he does for us.

#### We should obey God because he is our God . . .

[GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *I am the LORD your God; follow my statutes, observe my regulations, and carry them out.* EZEKIEL 20:19 NET

#### . . . It is no good expressing commitment without obeying

[JESUS, TO THOSE WHO MERELY PROFESSED HIM AS THEIR LORD:] *Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do what I tell you?* LUKE 6:46 NET

## How to Obey God

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### Persistently read God's commands

*It [a copy of God's law] must be with him constantly and he must read it as long as he lives, so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and observe all the words of this law and these statutes and carry them out.* DEUTERONOMY 17:19 NET

This instruction is given for the king, but is relevant to all people.

### Do what you learn of God's law and word

*For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.* EZRA 7:10 ESV

[JESUS:] *Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock.* MATTHEW 7:24 NET

### Ask God to help you follow his commands

*Teach me, O LORD, the lifestyle prescribed by your statutes, so that I might observe it continually.* <sup>34</sup>*Give me understanding so that I might observe your law, and keep it with all my heart.* <sup>35</sup>*Guide me in the path of your commands, for I delight to walk in it.* <sup>36</sup>*Give me a desire for your rules, rather than for wealth gained unjustly.* PSALMS 119:33–36 NET

### Submit yourself to God

*So submit to God.* JAMES 4:7A NET

To persistently obey God, we need to first submit to him.

### Obey God wholeheartedly

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Arrogant people smear my reputation with lies, but I observe your precepts with all my heart.* PSALMS 119:69 NET

### Note: God's and Jesus Christ's commands are not too difficult

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *This commandment I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it too remote.* DEUTERONOMY 30:11 NET

[JESUS:] *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* <sup>29</sup>*Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I*

am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
<sup>30</sup>For *my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.*

MATTHEW 11:28–30 NET

The term “yoke” probably alludes to that which lay across the necks of oxen. In saying that the “yoke” and “load” of following him is “easy” and “not hard to carry” (v. 30), Jesus may be referring to the fact that as he is “gentle and humble in heart” (v. 29) he will not require anything that is beyond us.

## Follow Jesus Christ

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### Follow Jesus Christ

[JESUS, TO PETER AND ANDREW:] *“Follow me, and I will turn you into fishers of people.”* <sup>20</sup>*They left their nets immediately and followed him.*

MATTHEW 4:19B–20 NET

To follow Jesus Christ involves not just simply following his commands, but also following him and his example. In doing so, we follow Christ not only as our leader, but also in companionship with him. This concept is an important aspect of discipleship.

### Be a disciple of Jesus Christ

Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *“If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples ...* JOHN 8:31 NET

A disciple is one who seeks to learn and follow the teachings of another, even to the extent of becoming like the teacher (as reflected in the following subsection).

### Follow Jesus Christ’s example

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *For I have given you an example – you should do just as I have done for you.* JOHN 13:15 NET

### Make Jesus Christ your Lord

But *set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts* and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess.

1 PETER 3:15 NET

What is one thing you could bear in mind or do that would help you obey God better?

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What measures could you take to more effectively read and learn God's word?

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What are the main attractions that tempt you to not obey God? Choose one thing (not necessarily from this chapter) that diminishes such attractions.

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What does being a disciple of Jesus Christ involve?

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Choose one aspect of Jesus Christ's example that you should imitate better. What is a situation you are likely to encounter in which you could do so?

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# 24. Connecting with God

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## I. Being Close to God

Seek God .....	32
Focus on God.....	33
Meet with God and Live before Him.....	33
Know God .....	34

## II. Praying to God

The Power of Prayer .....	36
Praying before God .....	37
Making Requests .....	38
God's Response to Requests.....	39

## I. Being Close to God

Being or growing close to God involves consciously seeking God and focusing on him. Additionally, we can actually meet with God and also should live throughout each day in awareness of his presence. In growing close to God, we come to know him – the importance of which is emphatically stated by the Bible.

### Seek God

“Seeking” typically entails intense effort, which is very much applicable to seeking God and fellowship with him. Seeking God also requires prayer, worship and obedience – along with persistently focusing on God, as per the following section, *Focus on God*.

#### Seek God wholeheartedly

Now *seek the LORD your God wholeheartedly and with your entire being!* [1 CHRONICLES 22:19A NET](#)

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *With all my heart I seek you. Do not allow me to stray from your commands!* [PSALMS 119:10 NET](#)

#### If you seek God wholeheartedly, you will find him

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *But if you seek the LORD your God from there [in exile], you will find him, if, indeed, you seek him with all your heart and soul.* [DEUTERONOMY 4:29 NET](#)

#### Seeking God should be accompanied by obedience to him

*He [Asa] ordered Judah to seek the LORD God of their ancestors and to observe his law and commands.* [2 CHRONICLES 14:4 NET](#)

#### Seeking God brings great blessings

Even young lions sometimes lack food and are hungry, but *those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.* [PSALMS 34:10 NET](#)

*The LORD is good to those who trust in him, to the one who seeks him.* [LAMENTATIONS 3:25 NET](#)



## Focus on God

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### Keep thinking about God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *I remember you while I'm lying in bed; I think about you through the night.* PSALMS 63:6 NCV™

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *For I am ever aware of your faithfulness, and your loyalty continually motivates me.* PSALMS 26:3 NET

### Keep thinking about what God has done

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *I recall the old days; I meditate on all you have done; I reflect on your accomplishments.* PSALMS 143:5 NET

## Meet with God and Live before Him

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### Come before God, meeting with him

[MOSES, TO LEADERS OF ISRAEL:] ... when *all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God* in the place he chooses, you must read this law before them within their hearing. DEUTERONOMY 31:11 NET

Like the Israelites came before God, believers can both corporately and individually come before God, in awareness of his presence, to meet with him. Individual Christians typically do this daily – reading the Bible, praying and even meditating.

### Live before God . . .

Paul said, “Brothers, *I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.*” ACTS 23:1B ESV

We are to constantly live before God in the sense of living in awareness of his presence, companionship, help and discernment of our lives. As such we should think, speak and act accordingly.

### . . . “Walk” with God

*He* [Noah] *walked with God.* GENESIS 6:9 NET

To “walk” with God involves living before him. It suggests a personal and interactive relationship, inclusive of such things as prayer and trust in God.

## Know God

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### Know God and Jesus Christ

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I write to you, children, because *you know the Father*. I write to you, parents, because *you know the One who existed from the beginning* [Christ]. 1 JOHN 2:14A NCV™

[GOD:] If people want to boast, they should boast about this: They should boast that they *understand and know me*. They should boast that they *know and understand that I, the LORD, act out of faithfulness, fairness, and justice in the earth* and that I desire people to do these things,” says the LORD. JEREMIAH 9:24 NET

We are to understand and know God – which includes appreciating that he acts in “faithfulness, fairness, and justice”.

### Knowing God is linked to obeying his commands

Now *by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments*. <sup>4</sup>*The one who says “I have come to know God” and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person*. 1 JOHN 2:3–4 NET

### Knowing God is linked with loving and caring for others

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, *let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God*. <sup>8</sup>*The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love*. 1 JOHN 4:7–8 NET

*He* [King Josiah] *upheld the cause of the poor and needy*. So things went well for Judah.’ *The LORD says, “That is a good example of what it means to know me.”* JEREMIAH 22:16 NET

Knowing God is manifested in caring for the poor and needy, amongst other things. Note that like 1 John 4:7–8 above, this verse may be implying that one who knows God reflects his character and deeds.

### Knowing God is vital for understanding

Wisdom begins with respect for the LORD, and *understanding begins with knowing the Holy One*. PROVERBS 9:10 NCV™

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What does "seeking God" involve doing?

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What do you think about during times of inactivity (e.g. travelling on the train)? What could you do to remind yourself to focus on God in such times – as well as at other times?

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Do you need to make better provision in your daily routine for meeting with God? If so, what could you do?

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How is knowing God similar and/or different to knowing another person?

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What can we do to know God better?

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## II. Praying to God

See also: *II. Praying in Hard Times*, Ch. 39

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges and one of the greatest responsibilities of being a Christian. It is also one of the main sources of vitality for our lives as Christians, and is critical to our effectiveness in our endeavors for God’s kingdom. At the end of our lives, quite possibly many of us will see prayer as the main thing that we should have done more often. As the saying goes: “Life is short; pray hard.”

### The Power of Prayer

#### Prayer is very powerful

*The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.* <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months! <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest. JAMES 5:16B–18 NET

#### If we ask God for things, he will give them (or do them)

[JESUS:] *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.* <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. MATTHEW 7:7–8 NET

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.* <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them. MATTHEW 18:19–20 NET

The tremendous promises of answered prayer in this subsection are obviously not an automatic guarantee that every request will be granted. Amongst other things, such prayer must be consistent with God and Christ’s purpose and will – which Jesus may have in view here with his reference to those asking being “assembled in my name” (v.20). Nevertheless, such wonderful promises should greatly encourage us to pray fervently and persistently.

## Praying before God

### Pray before God, in his presence

[SOLOMON, TO GOD:] Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to *the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, ...* 1 KINGS 8:28 ESV

[NEHEMIAH:] I fasted and *prayed in the presence of the God of Heaven.* NEHEMIAH 1:4B ISV

To pray “before” God (cf. 1Ki 8:28 ↑) effectively means to pray in his presence (cf. Neh 1:4b ↑), being mindful of his presence.

### Pray to God as a caring father

Therefore, *this is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.* MATTHEW 6:9 ISV

Is there anyone among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* MATTHEW 7:9–11 NET

Having a holy and loving Father in heaven should inspire us to make requests of him, doing so in awareness of him being such a Father. Note that the term “evil” (v. 11) is used here in a relative sense, in comparison to God and his standards, rather than in a general sense.

### Pray in the Holy Spirit

But dear friends, use your most holy faith to build yourselves up, *praying in the Holy Spirit.* JUDE 1:20 NCV™

Having the Holy Spirit, believers are to pray “in the Holy Spirit”. As such we are to consciously rely on the Holy Spirit’s help, to empower and guide us in our prayers.

### Be reverent when praying

[PAUL:] *I kneel in prayer to the Father.* EPHESIANS 3:14 CEV

Kneeling in prayer – “fall to my knees and pray” (NLT) – is indicative of reverence for God, and submission to him.

## Making Requests

### Ask for things in Jesus Christ’s “name”

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] On that day, you will not ask me for anything. Truly, I tell all of you with certainty, *whatever you ask the Father for in my name, he will give it to you. ...* <sup>26</sup>*On that day, you will ask in my name.* JOHN 16:23, 26A ISV

In Jewish thought, a person’s name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and purpose/s. As such, to ask in Jesus Christ’s “name” is to do so in accordance with all that his name signifies. It is prayer that is compatible with Jesus Christ himself and his purposes – and made on his authority.

When praying, people often use the phrase “in Jesus Christ’s name” (or “in Jesus’ name”) to signify that they are asking for something in Jesus Christ’s “name”. The usage of the phrase does not by itself mean that the prayer is necessarily in accordance with Jesus Christ’s “name”. Along with being conscious of and acknowledging Jesus Christ’s authority and role in our making of requests to God, the content of the prayer is also at issue. Thus asking for things in Jesus Christ’s “name” concerns both how we ask and what we ask.

Bear in mind that the deeper one’s relationship with Jesus Christ becomes, the better-equipped one becomes to make requests of God in Jesus Christ’s “name”.

Note that in the above verses, “On that day” (vv. 23, 26a) refers to the time following Jesus’ ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost –inclusive of the present age.

### Ask earnestly and persistently

*I cried out with all my heart, “Answer me, O LORD!* PSALMS 119:145A NET

Jesus told his disciples a story about how they should keep on praying and never give up: ... LUKE 18:1 CEV

### Do not doubt but believe that what you ask will be granted

Now early in the morning, as he [Jesus] returned to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup>After noticing a fig tree by the road he went to it, but found nothing on it except leaves. He said to it, “Never again will there be fruit from you!” And the fig tree withered at once. <sup>20</sup>When

the disciples saw it they were amazed, saying, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” <sup>21</sup>Jesus answered them, “I tell you the truth, *if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen.* <sup>22</sup>*And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive.*” MATTHEW 21:18–22 NET

Belief is vital in petitioning God, particularly in regard to things that seem impossible, as Jesus figuratively points out (v. 21). But belief is not merely making yourself “believe” what you do not really believe. Instead, it involves an understanding of God’s will and genuinely trusting in God to fulfill his will (cf. ZBC).

### **Give thanks when asking**

Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, *through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.* PHILIPPIANS 4:6 NET

## **God’s Response to Requests**

### **God answers those who obey and please him**

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, *if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God,* <sup>22</sup>*and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him.* 1 JOHN 3:21–22 NET

The clause “if our conscience does not condemn us” (v. 21) refers to having a clear conscience before God, from obeying and pleasing him (v. 22b).

### **God grants anything we ask that is in accordance with his will**

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] And this is the confidence that we have before him: that *whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* <sup>15</sup>*And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.*

1 JOHN 5:14–15 NET

How does one “pray in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20)?

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What is meant by “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? How can we do this?

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What is the significance of asking for things in Jesus’ name?

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How do you think fasting helps in praying?

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Will you receive whatever you ask for in prayer, if you believe? Explain your answer.

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# 25. Exalting God

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## I. Instructions

Glorify and Honor God.....	42
Do Not Dishonor God .....	43
Praise and Thank God.....	43
How to Give Praise and Thanks (I): General .....	44
How to Give Praise and Thanks (II): Rejoicing.....	44

## II. Reasons to Exalt God

Aspects of God's Being .....	46
Aspects of God's Character .....	46
What God Does in the World .....	47
What God Does for His People .....	48

## I. Instructions

We exalt God by doing such things as glorifying, honoring, praising and thanking him. Exalting God is a very common theme in the Bible and should also be a prominent part of our lives. In fact the Bible tells us to praise and thank God constantly. The significance of exalting God is underlined by the first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism which says: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

### Glorify and Honor God

#### Give glory to God

[PAUL, TO THE ROMAN CHURCH:] Then you will all be joined together, and you will *give glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.  
ROMANS 15:6 NCV™

#### Honor God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *I will honor your name continually!* PSALMS 86:12B NET

#### Glorify and honor God by praise and thanksgiving

[DANIEL:] Then *I gave praise to the Most High God; I gave honor and glory to him who lives forever*. God's rule is forever, and his kingdom continues for all time. DANIEL 4:34B NCV™

[DAVID:] I will praise God in a song and will *honor him by giving thanks*. PSALMS 69:30 NCV™

#### Glorify and honor God by how you live

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do everything for the glory of God*. 1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 NET

Whoever mistreats the poor insults their Maker, but *whoever is kind to the needy honors God*. PROVERBS 14:31 NCV™

God's people are identified with him and so their lives are in a sense a reflection on God. Thus they should seek to do everything in a way that will bring glory and honor to God.

## Do Not Dishonor God

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### Do not dishonor God by your actions

[AGUR:] But if I am poor, I might *steal and bring disgrace on my God*.

PROVERBS 30:9B GNT

By ungodly actions God's people can bring dishonor to God. This is particularly so when the actions are known to others, as it publicly reflects badly on God as the one to whom his people belong.

### Do not blaspheme God

*You must not blaspheme God ...* EXODUS 22:28A NET

Blaspheming God is to speak – or act – in a way that detracts from the honor of God.

### Do not treat God with contempt

*The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to trust me in spite of all the miraculous signs I have done among them? ... <sup>23</sup>None of those who treat me with contempt will see it!"* NUMBERS 14:11, 23 GW

To treat God with contempt is demeaning and dishonoring to God. Note that v. 23 refers to not seeing the promised land.

## Praise and Thank God

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### Praise God constantly

Through him [Jesus Christ] then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. HEBREWS 13:15 NET

[DAVID:] *I will praise the LORD at all times; my mouth will continually praise him.* PSALMS 34:1 NET

### Give thanks to God always

Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–18 ESV

## How to Give Praise and Thanks (I): General

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### In righteousness

*Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.*

PSALMS 33:1 ESV

For our praise and thanksgiving to be valid and acceptable to God, we must strive to live lives that are “righteous” and “upright”.

### Wholeheartedly

[DAVID:] *I will thank the LORD with all my heart!* PSALMS 9:1A NET

### Through prayer

In the same way that he [Daniel] had always done, *he knelt down in prayer three times a day, giving thanks to God.* DANIEL 6:10B CEV

### Through singing

*Sing praises to God. Sing praises.* PSALMS 47:6A NCV™

## How to Give Praise and Thanks (II): Rejoicing

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To rejoice is to be glad or joyful. By focusing on God, his promises and the wonderful things he has done, we cannot help but be filled with joy – and so we rejoice. This is typically done in conjunction with praising and thanking God.

### Rejoice when giving praise and thanks to God

*Sing to God! Sing praises to his name! Exalt the one who rides on the clouds! For the LORD is his name! Rejoice before him!* PSALMS 68:4 NET

*You godly ones, rejoice in the LORD! Give thanks to his holy name.* PSALMS 97:12 NET

### Rejoice in God always

[ETHAN, SPEAKING TO GOD OF WORSHIPERS:] *They rejoice in your name all day long, and are vindicated by your justice.* PSALMS 89:16 NET

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!* PHILIPPIANS 4:4 NET

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What effect does praising and thanking God have on you?

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What measures could you take to help yourself consistently praise and give thanks to God?

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What is one thing in your everyday life that you would approach differently if you kept in mind the command to "do everything for the glory of God" (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31)?

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How does a person "rejoice"? What does it involve doing?

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What are some ways that believers today may be prone to dishonor God?

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## II. Reasons to Exalt God

The Bible is bulging with good reasons for which to exalt God. Generally speaking, these compelling reasons or things for which to exalt God, concern what God is like and what he does.

### Aspects of God's Being

#### God's glory

*"Praise the glory of the LORD in heaven above!"* EZEKIEL 3:12B GNT

#### God's greatness

*Praise him for his surpassing greatness!* PSALMS 150:2B NET

#### God's power

*Praise him for his mighty acts!* PSALMS 150:2A NET

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think,* <sup>21</sup>*to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* EPHESIANS 3:20–21 NET

#### God's wisdom and knowledge

*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways!* <sup>34</sup>*For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? ...* <sup>36</sup>*... To him be glory forever! Amen.* ROMANS 11:33–34, 36B NET

### Aspects of God's Character

#### God's holiness

*Praise the LORD our God! Worship on his holy hill, for the LORD our God is holy!* PSALMS 99:9 NET

God's holiness – in which he is set apart from all others in his purity and righteousness – should evoke awe, praise and worship.

## God's love and faithfulness

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *I will give you thanks before the nations, O Master! I will sing praises to you before foreigners!* <sup>10</sup>*For your loyal love extends beyond the sky, and your faithfulness reaches the clouds.*

PSALMS 57:9–10 NET

## God's mercy

People who are not Jewish *praise God for his mercy* as well. ROMANS 15:9A GW

This has in view what God has done for all people through Christ.

## What God Does in the World

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### God's creative work

*"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, since you created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created!"* REVELATION 4:11 NET

### God's provision of water and food

*Offer to the LORD a song of thanks! Sing praises to our God to the accompaniment of a harp!* <sup>8</sup>*He covers the sky with clouds, provides the earth with rain, and causes grass to grow on the hillsides.* <sup>9</sup>*He gives food to the animals, and to the young ravens when they chirp.*

PSALMS 147:7–9 NET

### God's reign

[JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then I heard what sounded like the voice of a vast throng, like the roar of many waters and like loud crashes of thunder. They were *shouting: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All-Powerful, reigns!"* REVELATION 19:6 NET

"Hallelujah" is a call to praise God, often used itself as an expression of praise to God.

### God's word

[DAVID:] *In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise,* <sup>11</sup>*in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.* PSALMS 56:10–11A ESV

## What God Does for His People

### God's salvation through Christ and the associated blessings, . . .

[ZECHARIAH, SPEAKING OF THE SALVATION THAT WOULD COME THROUGH JESUS:] *Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to save his people.* <sup>69</sup>*Our God has given us a mighty Savior from the family of David his servant.* LUKE 1:68–69 CEV

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world.* EPHESIANS 1:3 NCV™

The phrase “in the heavenly world” may be indicating that the blessings are ones that we will experience in the afterlife. Alternatively, the phrase is possibly emphasizing the heavenly and eternal dimension of spiritual blessings that we have now.

### . . . in which one should rejoice

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] You have not seen him, but you love him. You do not see him now but *you believe in him, and so you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,* <sup>9</sup>*because you are attaining the goal of your faith – the salvation of your souls.* 1 PETER 1:8–9 NET

### God's deliverance from difficulties, . . .

[DAVID:] *I will thank you, LORD, because you are good.* <sup>7</sup>*You have saved me from all my troubles, and I have seen my enemies defeated.* PSALMS 54:6B–7 NCV™

### . . . in which one should rejoice

At that time they [God's people at the end of the age] will say, “Look, here is our God! We waited for him and he delivered us. Here is the LORD! We waited for him. *Let's rejoice and celebrate his deliverance!*” ISAIAH 25:9 NET

Pray for the persecuted



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What is one of the things that you find most amazing about God?

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Choose a verse (not necessarily from this study) that particularly inspires you to praise God. Explain why it does.

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What is something that has occurred recently that you could praise or thank God for?

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State one thing about God or one thing he has done, that you can readily rejoice in.

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Make a list (to refer to in your prayer times) of things for which to praise and/or thank God, including concepts and even verses from this and the previous sections.

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## 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, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
- 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. 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 Judgment
  - II. The Afterlife

#### Part D. God and His Own People

- 16. The Standing of God's People**
  - I. Basics
  - II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ
- 17. Keys to God's Interaction**
  - 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

## 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. **Worshipping 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

### Part G. Relating to People

31. **Love**
  - I. Loving Qualities
  - II. Antitheses of Love
32. **Justice**
  - I. Justice in Action
  - II. Being True
33. **Wisdom**
  - I. Being Wise
  - II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge
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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CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

**Christian Solidarity Worldwide** – [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

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

**Open Doors** – [www.opendoors.org](http://www.opendoors.org); [www.opendoors.org.au](http://www.opendoors.org.au)

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

**Religious Liberty Commission** – [www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc)

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also [www.idop.org](http://www.idop.org).

**Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin** – [rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com](http://rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com)

This site provides weekly prayer bulletins.

**The Bible League** – [bl.org.au/get-involved/bibles-for-the-persecuted](http://bl.org.au/get-involved/bibles-for-the-persecuted)

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