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*Program
Study Guides*

**For
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God is at Work in Baptism

God is still at _____ in this uncertain world, and He's busier than you might think. Today, we're going to explore how God works in our _____. God isn't dead; He's not even _____. He's not like a man who must _____. God is at work all day, every day. The Lord Jesus said, "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is _____ before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more _____ than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7). God cares for us enough to hear our _____, and God cared enough to enrich our lives with His inspired word, the Bible.

James 1:17-18 says, "Every good thing given and every perfect _____ is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting _____. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of _____, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." God gives us the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. God supplies our needs, because He _____ for us.

We can thank God every day for the _____ that He gives us, giving us new life that will last eternally. First Peter 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great _____ has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in _____ for you." God prepares us in this life for the life to _____. God causes our _____ birth in Christ, so that we can be His children forever.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Epistle to the Colossians 2:12-13. This passage discusses God's working in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and God's working in our salvation, and shows how that they are put together.

Aren't you thankful that Jesus was willing to die, that how God raised Him from the dead, and how He forgives our sins.

I sometimes hear people say baptism is a _____. Some think of a ritual as a customary practice or religious formality that people go through in a prescribed way. They believe that rituals are works of _____ and mistakenly think of baptism as an act of "righteousness based on works." They think baptism has _____ to do with salvation. No one believed this until the 16th century. Prior to that time people understood that God grants forgiveness at the _____ of baptism. People often think of baptism as something _____ do. In reality, baptism is something that _____ does!

Colossians 2:12-13 explains, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through _____ in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were _____ in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you _____ together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." Who _____ us with Christ in baptism? Who _____ us up with Christ in baptism? Who _____ us? In baptism we're responding in faith to the working of God!

Longer quotations may not appear in the Study Sheet, but can be read in the accompanying transcript.

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Baptism is indeed a _____ of faith in God's power, God's working. It's a response to God's _____, to Jesus's sacrifice, and to God's _____ in raising Christ from the dead. In baptism we _____ ourselves to God's work and to His will. If God could raise Jesus up from the dead, He can _____ our sins. We're showing our faith that He can work on us!

God causes us to be saved and to be _____ again. The apostle John wrote, "He came (Jesus) to His own, and those who were His own did not _____ Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the _____ to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). God gives a new birth to those who receive Him. To receive Him is to _____ what He says about being the Son of God is true. To believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God means you're willing to _____ Him.

When Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus and confessed that He was a teacher from God, Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that unless one is born again he cannot see the _____ of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is _____? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot _____ into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5). Without a birth of water and the Spirit, we cannot enter the kingdom and be saved. All of the ancient writers said that this passage was speaking of _____, which unites water and the Spirit in the new birth.

From John 1, we learned that we have to have _____ to be a child of God; and from John 3 we learned that we must be _____ of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. How does the Spirit work in our new birth? First Peter 1:22-23 says, "Since you have in _____ to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring _____ of God." The Holy Spirit inspired the word and works through the word of God; the _____ is given to us to save us and to cause us to be born again. James 1:18 explains, "In the exercise of His will God brought us forth by the word of _____, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

The Spirit works through the word to _____ our new birth. How then does the water _____ with the word? Ephesians 5:25-27 reveals how Jesus sacrificed Himself to cleanse those who enter the kingdom, which is the _____. He said, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her (that is, make her holy), having cleansed her by the washing of _____ with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." We're cleansed and sanctified by the washing of water _____ the word. The love and sacrifice of Christ works _____ the washing of water with the word. The washing of water is a reference to _____, and the word to the gospel which _____ us to be baptized.

In Titus 3:3-7 Paul explains, "For we also once were _____ ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the _____ of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of _____ which we've done in righteousness, no, but according to His _____, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His _____ we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

When we're born again the Lord _____ us to His church. In Acts 2:41, the Bible says about those who responded on the day of Pentecost, "So those who received his _____ were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." The baptized were _____ to the apostles. Acts 2:47 says, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." This number is a clear reference to the number that's in the _____. The Lord adds you to His church when you are baptized. That's when you are forgiven and when God _____ you. Being born of water and the Spirit allows us to _____ the kingdom of God (John 3:5). We're not born of _____ will; we are born again by the will of _____, when we receive the Lord and are obedient to His will. When we are baptized, the Lord adds us to His church. Sometimes people talk about "joining" the church, but people by their own _____ do not join the church. If you're in the Lord's church at all, it's because the _____ Himself added you.

When we are baptized, God _____ us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. This is not merely a _____; it is the dynamic working of God! Baptism is _____ work on us. Romans 6:3-5 says, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His _____? Therefore we've been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in _____ of life. For if we've become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." We are baptized into Christ, into His death, buried with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life.

The word "united" in verse 4 is translated in the King James Version as "_____ together." It says, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Things that are planted together _____ together, produce fruit together, and live together. When we're baptized into Christ, God _____ us together with Christ in His death and in His resurrection. We are planted in Him, and He is planted in us. Through baptism God unites us with Christ; and we are branches on His _____. Baptism is no empty ritual, it's when God plants us together and unites us with Christ.

Galatians 3:26-27 says, "For you are all _____ of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have _____ yourselves with Christ." Until you're baptized, you're _____ of Christ; and once you're baptized into Christ, you're clothed with Christ. There's a great difference, an _____ difference, between being in Christ and out of Christ. God unites us with Christ and makes us His _____ when by faith we are baptized and clothed with Christ.

Through baptism God causes our old self of sin to be _____ from that sin by doing away with our sins. Romans 6:6-7, speaks about what happens in baptism, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our _____ self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be _____ to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." By being united with Christ in His death, you come into contact with His _____ which cleanses us from sin. In baptism our body of sin is done away with, and God does that, and we are free! We're no longer slaves to sin!

Later in chapter six, verses 17 and 18, Paul says, "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become _____ from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." By God's grace we can _____. We can _____ a life that's enslaved to sin and become slaves of righteousness. We change when we're obedient from the _____.

God frees us from sin and makes us His _____. You can't save yourself by yourself; God must save you! He saves us when we in faith and love submit to the standard of _____ that He gives us. The idea that we're set free by faith _____ without any obedience simply ignores this passage.

There can be no doubt that God causes a change in our lives at the time we _____ Him in baptism. That's when we're _____ with and clothed with Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a _____ creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." When God raised you and me up with Christ to walk in newness of life in baptism, everything _____. The old way of life is gone and now we are _____ to serve the Lord, to live in righteousness, and to enjoy all the blessings of Christianity. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with _____ spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." It matters whether you are in Christ or not! In Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We have an abundant life.

Ananias told Saul of Tarsus, "And now why do you _____? Rise and be baptized and _____ away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). When we're baptized, God washes away our sins. Paul had been _____ for three days according to Acts 9:11, but he still _____ to be washed from sin (Acts 22:16). Baptism is _____ we call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. First Peter 3:21 explains, "Corresponding to that, baptism now _____ you—not the removal of the dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." When we are baptized, God saves us and _____ our appeal for a good conscience. He cleanses our souls from sin and gives us that clean conscience. What a great God we have!

When God commands us to _____, we do the believing. When God commands all people to _____, we do the repenting. When God commands us to _____ Jesus Christ with our mouths, we do the confessing. When God commands us to _____ Him with all our hearts, we do the loving. When Christ commands us to _____ ourselves and take up our crosses daily to follow Him, we must act. But when God tells us to "be baptized," that's something that we _____ to by letting someone else act upon us. Physically someone else baptizes us, and we submit to it. Spiritually God _____ upon us; and we submit to it. God works on us in baptism.

God forgives us. God saves us. God sets us free from sin. God unites us with Christ. God causes us to be baptized into His death. God buries us with Christ. God raises us up with Christ to walk in newness of life. God causes us to be born again by His will. God makes us His children. God adds us to His kingdom, the church. All this takes place when we're baptized into Christ.

When someone says, "Well Phil, we don't have to be baptized to be saved," they reveal they have embraced a 16th century doctrine of faith only and missed the point. The New Testament never conceives of a child of God who has not been baptized into Christ. Why not confess your faith in Christ, repent of your sins, and from the heart obey the Lord by putting Him on in baptism. When you do, God will wash away your sins, and make you His child, and add you to His church, and give you newness of life. Won't you consider being baptized today?

What Love Means

The highest _____ of life is to love God and other people, but what does it mean to love? Today, we're exploring the _____ of love. The God of the Bible is the God of love, who loves us despite _____ our weaknesses. Let's be thankful for the Bible because it reveals all that God has done to _____ us now and in the ages to come. God's Word _____ His plans for us and His promises. The more we know about God, the more we'll love Him. By studying God's Word, we'll _____ in our faith and our devotion to Him.

Paul wrote, "If I speak in the _____ of men and of angels, but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am _____. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I _____ nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Love is the _____ of our relationship with God. Without love we're nothing and gain nothing. Without love, we're empty and lonely souls.

Imagine waking up in a world _____ love, a world where people don't care—and they don't care that they don't care. Small offenses would start fights because no one loved enough to _____. People would become selfish and ambitious, stepping on others to _____ themselves. It's a world where the life of the unwanted is cheap, where children and the aged are forgotten, and where people sit silent while evil takes place. A world without love is without _____ and filled with all the ugly substitutions that people find to take love's place.

Our reading today comes from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

What does it mean to love? The love that we're talking about isn't the same thing as physical affection, though many _____ that love. No, "love," as it's used in the Bible, is the surrender of _____ for the best interests of others. Love takes place when people put others' _____ above their own. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Love is more than _____ feelings, though love involves feeling. Love is an intentional _____ of the will; love determines to put self aside to _____ the object of its love. Love sacrifices. Love pays whatever the cost, gives whatever gift, and runs whatever risk to do what is _____ for another. It gladly _____ without complaint. Love will act even when _____ things are required. Love will _____ the harsh and demanding load. Love is like a candle. It makes no noise but softly gives itself _____ to be a blessing to others.

Sometimes love is _____ others. At other times love means allowing the kind will of someone else to _____ us. Love knows how to give, but love also knows how to _____ the love that others graciously give. Peter didn't want the Lord to wash his feet in John 13:8, but his objection to allowing the kindness of Jesus meant he had no _____ with the Lord. Love means allowing others to enter into our lives and to be _____ to us.

Living without love means our _____ will be empty and indifferent. We won't _____ about anything but ourselves. We'll be like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan; we'll pass by on the other side of the road and leave others to _____. A life without love means we'll turn

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_____ to selfishness, wanting only to fulfill our own lusts and desires. We'll be like the rich farmer that was foolish, whose land provided abundantly but all he could think about was hoarding it up for _____. Living without love means we'll forget how to be _____ for what we have or how others have sacrificed to bless us.

Living without love means living without a relationship with _____. First John 4:7-8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and _____ God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Living without love means living with bitterness. Without love we grow _____ at every offense and plot to get even. Without love, _____ will flourish. First John 2:10-11 says, "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no _____ for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Hate fills everything with evil, fear, and violence. A world without love is miserable.

On the other hand, living with love means living with _____ and compassion. We see a _____ and we fill it, we see a _____ and comfort, and we see an opportunity to bless and seize it. God is the great _____ and teacher of love. So let's see how God loves:

First, God's love is _____. John 3:16-17 says, "For God so loved the world, that he _____ his only (or only begotten) Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be _____ through him." The entire gospel comes to focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the _____ for all love relationships—when you love someone dearly, you're willing to pay dearly for that person's responsive love. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest _____ that he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the _____ for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the _____ with others, our love must be like Jesus' love. We must be willing to give up on our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Second, God's love is _____. Psalm 103:8-12 says, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast _____. He will not always _____, nor will he keep his anger forever. He doesn't deal with us according to our _____, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who _____ him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

We can understand a God who would forgive friends who ask for _____. But a God who tenderly searches for _____ and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love! This is the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for _____ people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel _____ from God, don't despair. He's searching for you.

Third, God's love is _____ and beyond measure. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to _____ us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These verses contain comforting _____. Believers have always had to _____ hardships in many forms: persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. These problems could cause them to feel abandoned by Christ. But Paul explains these things cannot separate us from Christ. God profoundly loves His people.

Paul bowed his knees before the Father and prayed “that Christ may _____ in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). If we could but grasp—even a little—the immeasurable love of God for us, we would _____ in our love for Him and for other people.

How then do we love _____? People are not “born lovers” any more than people are born chefs. They have to learn how to cook and they have to learn how to love. You may have the deepest of feelings, but love is a _____, an act of heart and soul. Loving someone means you’ve paid enough attention to the needs and desires of another that their needs and desires become more important than your _____. The Scriptures _____ us why to love and how to love.

Many want to be loved, but they don’t understand the _____ calling of loving others. Love isn’t merely affection that we receive from others; it’s our determination to sacrifice ourselves for the _____ interests of others. We love because we choose to love. We love because we see the _____ of serving God and serving others.

The Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as _____ have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will _____ that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). We show that we’re the Lord’s disciples to the _____ when we love like He loves. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one _____ down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). True Christianity calls us to sacrifice ourselves for others.

If we become distracted with how people treat us, we’ll _____ how we treat others. Love means setting what we want aside so that we can _____ others by filling their needs and wants. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be _____ to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

The devil _____ people to be arrogant, to be easily offended, to take revenge, to slander, and to grow bitter inside. The Lord Jesus leads us to be kind, even when no one else is kind; to be tenderhearted, even when everyone else is apathetic; and to forgive, even when the world hates you. The Lord Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and _____ for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what _____ do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the _____? And if you greet only your brothers, what _____ are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

God calls us to be His _____ and expects us to grow beyond a purely selfish mindset. The Lord God sacrificed Jesus on His own. We don’t cry out for Him to _____ His Son. He gave Jesus because He _____ loved us, He initiated it. First John 4:9-11 says, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God _____ his only Son into the world, so that we might _____ through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also _____ to love one another.”

The Lord God forgave us, not because we _____ it, but because He is so loving. He calls us to forgive—even when people don’t _____ it, because we are His children. He calls us to love our

enemies rather than hate them, to pray for those who persecute us, and to love those who don't love us. Why? Because we are God's children. That's the way God is.

Colossians 3:12-14 says, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if anyone has a _____ against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which _____ everything together in perfect harmony." Have you put on love? Can people _____ the love of God in your heart and in your behavior? Do you care enough to take up a brother's _____ as your own? Do you care enough to sacrifice yourself for a noble cause?

Love means _____ our selfish, self-centered ways so we can sacrifice ourselves to serve God and serve others. Life without love is empty and useless, sad and lonely. People who turn away from the love of God may not _____ how much they have hurt themselves, hurt others, or what precious things they've lost. They lose out on God's love, God's forgiveness, God's ear in prayer, and that room in His eternal house. Do you love God? Will you love God? Will you love others?

After that wonderful love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, comes the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1, which simply says, "Pursue love." To "pursue" means to _____ something until you seize it. Paul isn't speaking here about finding someone to love you; he's _____ us to pursue the practice and the skill of loving others. Pursuing means regularly giving ourselves to do what is _____ for others. First John 3:18 says, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

Love also means spreading our love by _____ others about Jesus and His love. We preach Christ each week because we love you. When people get to know Christ, they _____ to love in the fullest sense. They truly put others _____ themselves. They won't _____ God or others by living sinful lives. God's love and kindness moves us to _____ of our sins and to live moral lives. Love won't let us _____ on sinning against God or others. God loves you greatly and wants you to be His _____. If you open your heart to God's love, and to His Word, you'll _____ your life. You'll draw close to God and you'll become a Christian. Because He loved you, Jesus died upon the cross to make atonement for your sins. Don't reject His marvelous gift of salvation.

Believe in Jesus, turn away from everything sinful, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ. When you're baptized you'll enter into a relationship with God that can last eternally. In baptism God washes away your sins (Acts 22:16) and makes you His child (Galatians 3:26-27). As God's child, He will hear your prayers and give you an inheritance in heaven. If God loved you enough to send His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins, will you love Him enough to commit your heart and life to Him?

Thirsting for God

Why do some have lives _____ with hope and zeal, while others muddle through life empty? Today we're going to explore how to _____ our passion for life. We're here to search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be _____ and to live the Christian life. The Word of God has the _____ instructions for life here and the only instructions for life hereafter.

I love the inspired words of David in Psalm 42:1:2, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my _____ pants for you, O God. My soul _____ for God, for the living God. When can I go and _____ with God?" David knew how much he _____ God and how lost and alone he felt without Him. Are there times in your life when you _____ empty and alone? Perhaps the reason for this emptiness is that you're not as _____ to God as you once were.

Some people live their Christian life with love and purpose, while others _____ aimlessly. Some are passionate about their _____ in Christ, while others just don't care. Some come out of church _____ of hope and zeal, while others who were in the same worship service come out _____. Why the difference? Could it be that many have _____ their passion for God? Today we're exploring the Scriptures and asking, "How can I _____ my passion for God?"

Some folks have never been _____ to God, and they don't know what they've missed. There is simply no _____ in life as necessary and as fulfilling as being close to God. My friend, I pray you'll look deep into your soul and _____ yourself if you have a close, loving relationship with God? Would you like to have one?

Our reading today comes from the book of Philippians 4:4-7.

Have you ever had that kind of thirst that _____ a drink of water now? I've been out hunting and walking through the forest loaded down with equipment and desperately needing a _____ of water. Or I've been mowing the lawn in the summer; and my face is red, and I'm so thirsty I could drink from a garden _____. Much of Judea in ancient times and in this day is still a _____ country. The people who live in dry areas _____ how essential it is to have water to drink and to be clean. They know what it's like when something so necessary is _____. The hills of Judea contain numerous cisterns that _____ rainwater for the dry seasons. They knew water is essential to _____, and they must have it.

Like water, a relationship with God and the Lord Jesus is essential to _____. Think! When was the last time you were _____ for God? When did you last _____ to be close to God? When did you last _____ to pray, to worship, to praise, and thank Him? When was the last time you _____ reading the Bible or hearing a sermon from God's holy word? It's so easy to _____ what you need to be healthy and right with God.

Some take for granted that God is always going to be there, that He always cares, and always makes Himself available whenever they _____ Him. Some have room in their lives for God when they _____ and they need Him, but they ignore God until some need arises. Their relationship with God is part-time.

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Their lives say to God, "I want you when you can _____ me, but don't get used to being a part of my life." They aren't really close to God. They haven't taken up their _____ daily to follow Him.

Part-time Christians don't want to be _____ unless they want something from God. They have a _____ relationship. Would you like to be married to someone who only wanted you when he or she needed you but didn't _____ about being with you any other time? Close relationships are always two-ways. Christianity is a heartfelt, _____ relationship with the Lord. We must not let our _____ for God grow stale.

If you want a relationship with God that is vibrant and living and full of love and joy, you must _____ beyond having God around only when you need Him. The Lord Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when he was _____ by the devil. He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every _____ that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We need God daily just like we need food daily.

Many people _____ themselves out of real life by focusing on everything around but God. They listen to the talk shows; they go to the movies; they know their soap operas; they read newspapers and magazines; they know every sports figure; but they haven't _____ a single book of the Bible in years. No wonder their lives are _____ with doubts and misunderstanding. By pushing the Bible away, they're pushing the Christian life and pushing God away.

The Bible is no ordinary book; it's God's book and God's way of teaching and training us how to _____. It teaches us how to love, how to forgive and how to be forgiven, how to react to suffering, how to grow on the inside, how to discipline ourselves, how to live without hurting other people, and how to make the _____ of our lives. The Bible gives us hope and promise; it gives us joy and peace; it lifts us up; it comforts; it corrects; it trains; and it makes us _____ people. The Word of God is what gives us new life and causes us to be _____ again.

Look what the apostle Peter says in the Bible about the Bible. This is an amazing _____! "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the _____ for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable _____ but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains _____.' And this word is the good news that was _____ to you" (1 Peter 1:22-25). God's Word is the _____ to being "born again." No other book can _____ your past and give you the promise and hope of living forever! The more you read the Bible, the more you'll know and be _____ to God. The more you read the Bible, the more you'll have the abundant _____ that's found in Christ Jesus!

So, start paying _____ to God and to His Word. Our passion and our feelings for God _____ as we remove ourselves from God. People don't _____ to get away from God; they simply drift away unconsciously. The Bible says, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have _____, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we _____ so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-3). A person can slowly just _____ reading the Word of God, stop praying, stop worshipping at church. Before long he or she has drifted away from the God who loves them.

Desperate situations sometimes _____ us up and lead us back to God; and we finally realize that we have no one else and nowhere else to go. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I have been driven many times to my _____ by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." It's reassuring to remember God _____ do things that men cannot do. There is really only one _____ God who can hear and answer prayer; and that is the God of the Bible! I know it's not politically correct to say things like

that; but political correctness is not the measure of _____. Political correctness is often the world's way of _____ God. When people listen to the world and _____ God, they end up ruining their lives. The world didn't die for your sins; did you hear that, the world didn't die for your sins, Jesus did. Every social _____ in this whole world comes from people who ignore the will of God. We need God. We need His hope, His promises, and His laws to live good and peaceful lives. There is simply no other way than the Lord's way.

We can draw close to God by making Him a _____ in our lives every single day. Every day make _____ for God. Spend time in Bible study, not just _____ but study, and prayer. Don't simply read the Word of God, study it and meditate upon it and learn from it and _____ it. Psalm 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his _____ is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He's like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its _____ in its season, and its leaf doesn't wither. In all that he does, he _____." God wants to feed your spirit with his word and give you the very insights that you _____ to prosper in every area of your life.

God also wants you to draw close to Him by opening your _____ to Him in prayer. First Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." God is not saying pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No one could do that. Instead God is telling us to stop quitting on prayer. Some folks _____ praying altogether. That's what God doesn't want.

Some folks think they're _____ God by praying, but God doesn't feel that way. In fact He _____ us to pray, to ask, to seek, and to knock. He's ready to answer, to give, and to help us _____ what we're seeking. Prayer was God's idea, so let's rid ourselves of the notion that God is too _____ for us or gets bothered by our prayers. God loves you and wants to _____ your prayers. He wants to hear what is on your heart.

If you want to be closer to God, let me suggest a simple _____ every single day. "What is it?" It's this: count your _____. Remember the _____ blessings that God has given to you. Remember God saved you from sin, delivered you from the domain of darkness into the _____ of His beloved Son. Remember the _____, the love that Jesus showed by His suffering for you and me. Remember how God has _____ your prayers. Remember how the Scriptures gave you hope and comfort. Remember the _____ God has given you to deal with the challenges of life. He's been blessing you through the _____. Just look how God has helped you and is helping you now.

Counting your blessings is so _____ for our spirits and attitudes. The Bible teaches us, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, anything worthy of praise, _____ about these things" (Philippians 4:8). Dwell on them, focus on them. Focusing on the negative will take our _____ off of God. But focusing on what God has done for us will _____ us to stay close to God. When we concentrate on the positive, we _____ more thankful to God. Every day we need to stop and say to God, "thank you, thank you, thank you for all You do for us."

There is one more thing about God's blessings that we must remember. God has lovingly prepared a _____ for us, one that gives us hope. The Bible says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he's caused us to be born again, born again to a living _____ through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in _____ for you, you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). As Christians we have the true and living

hope in the true and living God. We have all the blessings of God in this life and we have heaven too! In Christ we are of all people most _____.

If there is anything keeping you from being close to God, get _____ of it. Is there anything in your life _____ you of your energy and time, so that you don't have time for God? Some people day after day shut the Lord out of their lives. Hebrews 12:1;2 says: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and _____ which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the _____ that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the _____ that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Many things in our lives can _____ us up. Some things are not sinful in and of themselves, but they so distract and rob us of our time with God, that we lose _____ of the Lord who loves us. We also have to think about sin. Sin, ALL sin, _____ us from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot _____; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot _____. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your _____ have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." If you want to draw close to God, you have to _____ the sin out of your lives. I hope you'll do that today.

A middle school in Oregon faced a unique problem. A number of the girls began to use _____. Then they would put it on in the restroom and then press their lips against the mirrors, leaving dozens of little lip _____. This went on several days. Finally the principal decided she had to do something to stop this _____. So, she called the girls to the restroom with the custodian. She explained lip prints caused a major problem for the custodian, who had to _____ the mirrors every day. To demonstrate how difficult it was, she asked the custodian to clean one of the mirrors. He took out a long-handled brush, dipped it in the toilet, and scrubbed the mirror. Since that time there were no more lip prints on the mirrors. If we could see the _____ that's in sin, we wouldn't be so attracted to it. God hates sin. He calls it iniquity, because it twists and ruins lives.

God loves you and wants something better than sin provides. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Our Father in heaven wants us to live with joy and purpose. We can live abundantly when we give our hearts and lives to the Lord. So put your trust in the Lord Jesus. Believe His Word. Turn away from sin. Sin may give you pleasure for a moment, but it will rob you of your soul. Now out of love and faith, with a penitent heart, confess Christ as your Lord and the Son of God and be baptized or immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the time that God forgives our sins. It's also the time that we enter a relationship with God. I hope that you'll do that today.

Is the Truth Important?

Most people think that religious truth is relative and determined by what _____ think. Surveys say that only _____ percent believe in absolute truth. Is the truth important? The Lord Jesus in a prayer to the Father said, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your _____ is truth” (John 17:17). Those who are _____ to God must be sanctified or set apart for the truth. God wants His people to be _____ and to know the truth, to love the truth, to practice the truth, and to proclaim the truth everywhere. The Scriptures describe the priest and scribe Ezra, “For Ezra had set his heart to _____ the law of the LORD and to _____ it, and to _____ His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). That’s what we _____ to do with our faith in Jesus Christ. Today, we’re asking the question, “Is the truth important?” Courts convene with a jury _____ to determine the truth about a person’s guilt or innocence. Doctors give blood tests, take X-rays and MRIs, and examine patients to figure out what is truly causing the physical _____. Officials photograph the finish line and time athletes to a thousandth of a second to see who truly _____ the race. Is truth important to courts, doctors, or athletes? Of course.

When some, however, turn to religious matters, they _____ whether truth is important or even knowable? They hear so many voices, they become _____. Frankly, some find being confused or even deceived is _____ than knowing the truth. It seems people feel comfortable ignoring the _____ important truths. One day the only truth that will matter is the truth God has spoken; it will affect the _____ destiny of our souls. We must know what the will of the Lord is, if we are to _____ Him and to live with Him forever.

Our scripture reading today comes from The Gospel According to John 18:33-38.

The book of Proverbs was written by a father to his young adult son, teaching him the _____ necessary to find “favor in the sight of God and man.” He wanted his son to have a safe _____ that would keep him out of trouble. Solomon said, “My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart _____ my commandments; For length of days and years of life, And peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth _____ you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So that you will find _____ and good repute, In the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your _____, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be _____ in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from _____. It will be healing to your body, And refreshment to your bones” (Proverbs 3:1-8).

For Solomon, truth was very important. He said, “Do not let kindness and truth leave you—bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:3). Solomon _____ the “truth,” whether it was truth about morals or truth about God Himself. He knew there were some things that you _____ understand about life and about God. Trust in God and in the truth are inseparably _____. When people leave the truth, they _____ disbelief in what God says. Moses reminds us, that “God is not a man, that He should _____, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not _____ it? Or has He _____, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). God doesn’t lie; it’s against His very _____ to ever utter a false statement. This explains why Psalm 119:160 says, “The _____ of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”

Longer quotations may not appear in the Study Sheet, but can be read in the accompanying transcript.

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We can _____ the Word of God to give us what is true, that is, what is consistent with reality and what is actually the case. Solomon advised us, “Buy truth, and do not _____ it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23). Truth is worth our every effort; we should _____ it until we find it. David said, “the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring _____; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant _____; and in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:9-11).

The mindset of our time is to _____ truth as subjective and disposable. We often _____, “What’s true for you is true for you, and what’s true for me is true for me.” Such a _____ of truth makes it confusing and even worthless. Some are _____ the truth behind altogether. It’s startling that the one who speaks the truth about morals is made into a villain today, while an evildoer is made into some kind of _____. Only the devil and his followers would do that.

The devil wants to _____ everything upside down, making evil into good and good into evil. Paul warned the young preacher Timothy, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not endure sound _____, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their _____ passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:1-4). We’re seeing Paul’s prophecy fulfilled today. Religious beliefs are more _____ today than at any time in history. “Designer” churches are popping up everywhere, so people can _____ whatever appeals to them. Such churches are created more after the _____ will than the will of God. They’ve lost sight of putting God’s will at the very _____ of all that they do.

When people leave God’s Word for their own philosophies and desires, they leave the _____. They leave the wisdom and goodness of God behind. God’s Word is _____, yes, because God knows everything and is good. He doesn’t lie, and He means what He _____.

Paul said, “But we have _____ disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to _____ with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Paul wasn’t interested in hiding anything or twisting his words around to _____ anyone. He wasn’t underhanded but told things like they were. You can count on what he says, and you can count on God.

To tamper with the Word of God is to distort it in order to make it say what people _____ it to say rather than to listen to what it actually does say. When someone changes God’s Word to fit their own desires, they show that they don’t believe or respect God. Some falsely _____ the Word to their agenda, and others get fooled by their deception. Such cunning to advance a distortion to God’s Word is in Paul’s eyes disgraceful and underhanded. Paul said that we must _____ be ignorant of the devices that Satan uses (2 Corinthians 2:11).

One of Satan’s devices follows a common _____. Satan, first, loves to create _____ in the Word of God. You’ll remember He asked Eve, “Did God _____ say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:2) Satan knew what God had said; and he didn’t want information but he wanted to _____ Eve to doubt what God had said. Doubt is always the first _____ to apostasy. The devil knows that if he can get you to _____ God’s love, wisdom, and truth, that he can get you to follow him to destruction.

Satan, second, _____ what God says. Eve admitted they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that they would die if they did so. But Satan said, "You shall surely _____ die" (Genesis 3:4). Satan wants people to _____ he knows better than we do and even better than God. He wants us to think that he has the _____ track to what is really true, so he contradicts God. The desire to know His secrets, to be one of the elite, to buy into his arrogance, has led many unfortunate souls down the _____ to perdition. Jesus said, "He [that is, the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not _____ in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own _____, for he's a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). You can expect the devil to challenge God at every point.

Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister said, "If you tell a _____ long enough, loud enough, and often enough, the people will believe it. The secret to get someone to _____ a lie is constant repetition. Just tell it over, and over, and over again." The devil has told the same lies for thousands of years, and _____ are still gullible enough to believe them. Satan will tell you what he thinks you want to _____. Eve was deceived by this lie; and Adam was not. Adam knew that eating the fruit was _____, but he followed his wife in rebellion to God. For this reason, Adam actually committed the _____ sin.

Satan, third, produces an _____ version of "truth." He said to Eve, "God knows that when you eat of it that your _____ will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The devil's alternate always _____ truth with error. There's enough truth to _____ persuasive, but his message is full of misrepresentations and distortions. Knowing good and evil meant _____ against God and suffering the consequences of the evil. The devil didn't _____ that. He acted like it was desirable, but Adam and Eve ended up _____ forever from the garden of Eden. They ended up in sin.

Satan often pretends to be _____, yes. Paul described him as he does some _____ teachers he talks about, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an _____ of light. So it's no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as _____ of righteousness. And their end will correspond to their _____" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The devil wants everyone to believe that he's got some better way and God is trying to _____ them. He wants them to think that God is somehow _____ them. His strategy is to get people to _____ upon him [that is, Satan] for real "progress." He says he has a better way than Christ or the church. Remember, he's a liar.

There's nothing _____ than New Testament Christianity. The entertainment religions don't have anything better than congregational _____ in worship. The church growth experts don't have a plan better than _____ the truth in love. You can't _____ on God's way or God's will. The devil will always ask questions to create _____, he'll always contradict the Bible, and he'll always provide some kind of alternative; but the devil delivers a counterfeit religion. Don't fall for it.

Paul warned the elders at Ephesus, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to _____ for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking _____ things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30). Through the centuries men have taught _____ doctrines that contradict God's Word and lead people into error and to be lost.

What can we do about it? Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be _____, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Check your preacher out. Ask if he is preaching what God says in the Scriptures or if he's just giving his _____ opinions.

A sweet lady—not a member of the church of Christ—recently told me how much she _____ the program *In Search of the Lord's Way* and how she watched it every Sunday. I thanked her. She explained, "Well, the preacher where I go to church doesn't use the Bible much; he tells lots of _____. I like it when you preach the _____." My friends, as long as there is breath in my body, I intend to _____ God's Word out of the scriptures and not the opinions or stories of men. I'm not interested in alternative religions and their experiences; I want God and His Word to be the _____ of truth for my life. I can count on that. The apostle John, "For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you're _____ in the truth. I have no greater _____ than to hear my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 3-4). There is no greater joy, no greater blessing than having _____ in and following God's word. Truth is important, because it assures us that our _____ are truly forgiven, that Jesus truly will come again and raise us from the dead, and that we have a home in heaven. That is the most important thing of all!

How we _____ the truth of God's Word matters. True disciples make their home in the words of Jesus. The Lord Jesus said to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you _____" (John 8:31-32). When you have _____ than the truth, you have too much; when you have _____ than the truth, you have too little. You need _____ the truth and nothing but the truth. When people won't _____ to God, they'll believe anything that makes them feel good. Solomon's advice to his son is valuable for us too: "Don't let kindness and truth leave you—bind them around your neck, and write them on the tablet of your heart."

Truth is precious. Nothing will set you free but the truth found in God's word! Peter said, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:22-23). It's not enough to simplify, or to simply know the truth, we must obey it as well. We obey the gospel of truth by placing our faith in Christ Jesus, repenting of our sins, by confessing the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and by being baptized (that is, immersed) in water for the forgiveness of our sins. It's in the faithful response of baptism that God causes us to be born again. God at that time gives us newness of life (Romans 6:4). My friend, have you obeyed the truth? Have you been born again?