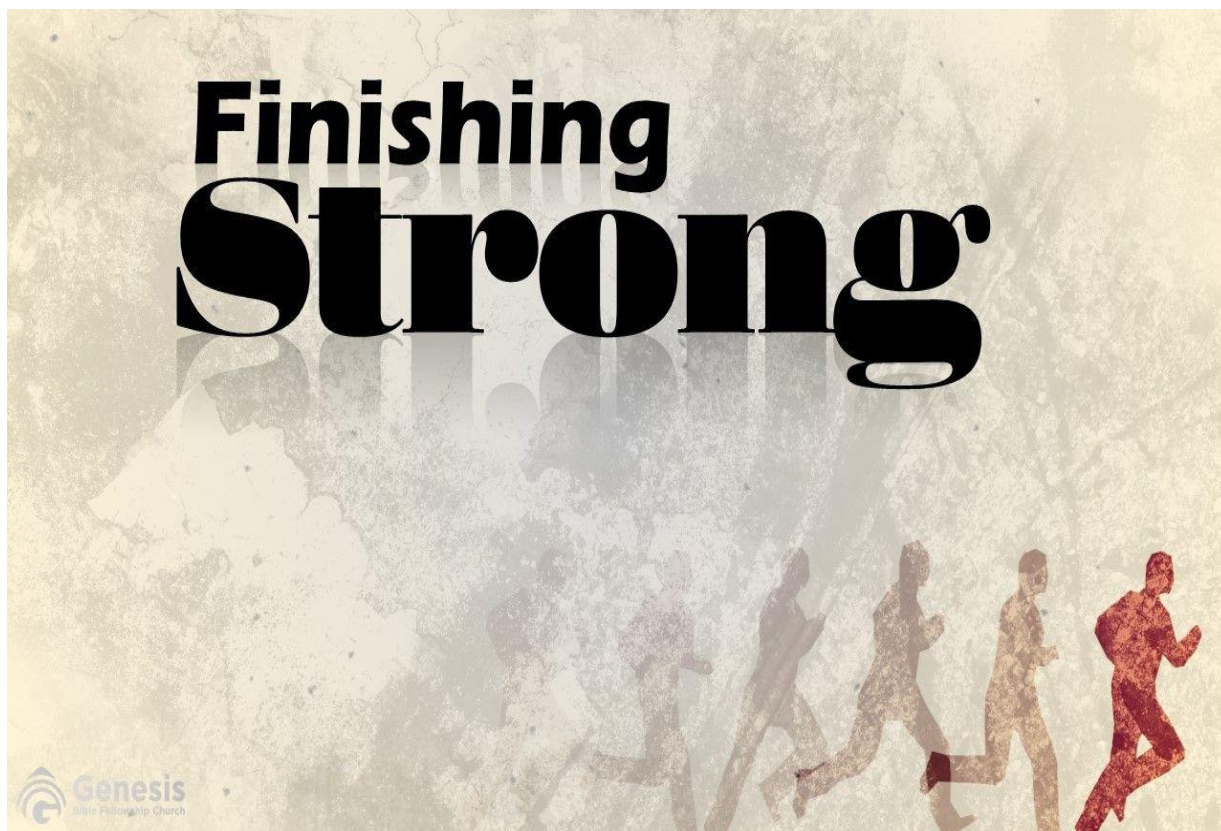




FINISHING STRONG

12 Studies for small groups or individuals



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BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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NOTES TO THE MEMBERS

This study guide is meant for both individuals and groups, and as such, personal preparation is very important for your individual as well as group benefit. To get the most out of the study guide, we advise members to spend time to read and understand the preface before getting deeper into the study topics. Make sure to read the introduction to each section and study to understand the context for each study. For small groups, we encourage individual members to make sure that everyone benefits from each bible study by doing the following:

1. ***Come to the study prepared.*** Pray that God will help you to understand and apply the passage to your life. Read and re-read the Bible passage to familiarize yourself with what the author is saying. Have a good Bible translation that you can understand. Your personal walk with God will make you a better group member and eventually benefit the whole group.
2. ***Be willing to participate in the discussion.*** The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned from the passage. Therefore, plan to share what God has taught you in your individual study.
3. ***During the discussion, stick to the passage being studied.*** Your answers should be based on the verses given, not on outside authorities. We have tried to take the studies from specific passages and not just random verses.
4. ***Be sensitive to other members of the group.*** Listen very carefully when they share what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights. Link what you say to the comments of others so that the group stays on the topic. Also, be affirming whenever you can, as it encourages some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.
5. ***Be careful not to dominate the discussion.*** We are sometimes so eager to share what we have learned that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. Participate in the discussion by all means, but also allow others to contribute.
6. ***Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group.*** Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together.
7. ***Make deliberate efforts to know each member of the group by name.*** Cultivate meaningful friendships where you can discuss different issues of concern beyond studying the bible together.

For Bible Study Group leaders, there are guidelines on page [iii] on how to effectively lead each study in the leaders' notes.

GUIDELINES FOR GROUP BIBLE STUDY

For the Bible Study Coordinator

The effectiveness of group bible studies lies in the ability of the coordinator to manage the groups and follow up on their activities. The following are some of the suggestions that can help you coordinate bible study at the campus level:

- 1) Divide the members into small groups of 5 to 7 people, depending on classroom allocation or accommodation arrangements, and let them choose a day of the week and time when they can study the bible together. Alternatively, each branch can set one day of the week when all groups can be doing Bible study for easy monitoring.
- 2) Appoint a leader for each group and orient them on how to lead a group bible study.
- 3) Make sure that each group has a study guide which they can use each time they meet.
- 4) Follow up on group activities and provide the necessary guidance or clarification on the questions they may find difficult to answer.
- 5) Ensure to have Bible study during the main SCOM service at least 2 to 3 times a term/semester. Divide the members into smaller groups to study a given topic and have them share their responses at the end before the facilitator summarizes the lessons.

For the Leader

Leading a Bible discussion can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. But it can be intimidating, especially if you've never done it before. If this is how you feel, you're in good company. When God asked Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he replied, *O Lord, please send someone else to do it!* (Ex 4:13). But God's response to all of his servants – including you- is essentially the same: *“My grace is sufficient for you”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). To get the most out of the study as a group, the leader needs to adequately prepare before the study time. Below are a few hints on how to lead a Bible study:

Before the meeting

- 1) Study the passage prayerfully and let God speak to you through it.
- 2) Go through the questions and study to learn what God may be saying to you personally and to the group. In this guide, there are basically three types of questions:
 - a. **Observation** - Questions about the facts of the passage.
 - b. **Interpretation**- Questions of meaning or understanding of facts.
 - c. **Application** - Question for personal or group application of the facts. There is usually a temptation to leave out application or personal questions, but make sure all application questions are answered because they are the main reason we are studying the Bible.
- 3) Take note of all difficult words and look for their meanings in advance to be able to clarify them to the members during the study.
- 4) Pray for the study and each individual in your group.

During Study

- 1) Create a free and cheerful atmosphere where each member feels free to participate.
- 2) Have the passage read aloud, preferably by one person, or more if it is long. You may also choose to let several people read the same passage in different versions.
- 3) Make a brief introduction to the study (one is included at the beginning of each study).

Proceed with the questions. Be flexible. Rephrase the questions, if need be, but keep the discussion centered on the passage.

- 4) Stick to the Bible as your authority and focus on the passage of study.
- 5) Watch the time so that you cover the study adequately.
- 6) Give attention to group dynamics.
- 7) Pay attention to the memory verses and reflections at the end of the study questions, and create room for the group members to memorize the verses or act on any task given.

Avoid:

- 1) Preaching
- 2) Answering your own questions.
- 3) Letting someone dominate or talk too much.
- 4) Targets and too much cross-referencing.
- 5) Unnecessary arguments.
- 6) Going on for too long, watch the time.

Instead:

- 1) Ask questions to facilitate discussion.
- 2) Encourage more than one person to answer. More members can participate by clarifying, expanding, endorsing, modifying, or disagreeing with the ideas contributed by others.
- 3) Be sensitive to the quiet or shy members.
- 4) Keep the discussion centered on the main passage of study.
- 5) Keep the study moving to the conclusion.

Remember:

- 1) To make enough observations, but not spend all the time on it.
- 2) Allow for good discussion on interpretation.
- 3) Never leave out the Application.
- 4) Aim for each member to leave the study with at least one specific application.
- 5) Encourage members to prepare individually for the next study.

After the Meeting

- 1) Be sensitive to any member's needs that should be attended to and make necessary follow-up.
- 2) Share the topic for the next study so that members can prepare in advance.
- 3) Encourage members to meet each other informally during the week and share their experiences.

PREFACE

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." – 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)

The theme for the 2025/2026 SCOM year, '**Finishing Strong,**' is drawn from **2 Timothy 4:7-8**. The theme aims at challenging students, Associates, staff, and all stakeholders working with SCOM to embrace an eternity mindset and keep the faith at all times as they pursue different life goals and engage in different ministry activities.

Motivation for the theme

One of the core values of SCOM is Excellence. Over the years, students and Associates have been encouraged to pursue and demonstrate excellence in everything they do in order to transform their own lives and impact society. Having witnessed so many students and Associates who have achieved so much through Christ, and many others who have committed themselves and sacrificed so much for the sake of the gospel, the question we want our members to ask themselves is **"what next? After we have achieved our various goals on earth, and sacrificed so much for the sake of the ministry, what shall our own end be?"**

We realize that it is very possible for believers to keep chasing earthly success and be so preoccupied with ministry activities that they lose sight of things that matter the most – one's faith and devotion to God. That is why having concluded the journey under the theme "Pressing on towards the Goal" in 2024/2025 SCOM year, it is only fitting that we explore the crucial aspect of "Finishing Strong," i.e., the need to teach our members, and all believers, that it is not just getting to the finishing line (attaining our goals) that matters, but also, how we get there and the quality of the final results. Therefore, building on last year's momentum, this year's theme seeks to emphasize the importance of process and keeping our faith and purpose of existence to the end in our pursuit of various personal and ministry goals.

As Paul reflects on his life's journey in 2 Timothy 4:7, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,"* we want to encourage our members not to be obsessed with success at the expense of their faithfulness to the Lord. And, considering that our time on earth is limited and full of challenges, we would want to call upon SCOM members, and indeed all believers, to run the race of faith with perseverance and determination, while maintaining focus on the main goal, ensuring that our actions and decisions honor Christ at all times.

Understanding the theme

For us to properly understand the theme, we need to understand what each term means:

1. **Finish:** simply means completing a task or bringing something to its intended end.
2. **Strong:** means not easily broken, spoiled, changed, or destroyed.

Going by these definitions, finishing strong in a broader sense can signify the ability to complete a task or journey with resilience, courage, stability, perseverance, and determination, and yet without bitterness or regrets, having fulfilled all the necessary requirements and overcome every obstacle along the journey. In the context of the verse, finishing strong, therefore, means doing everything we can to

fulfill our intended purpose on earth while staying committed to Christ and biblical principles, even when faced with obstacles, fully realizing that maintaining one's faith in Christ is a fight worth fighting – because there is a reward at the end.

Focus areas

While many issues can be addressed through this theme, the main focus areas for this year will be:

1. **Increased understanding of and adherence to organizational objectives and processes** – encouraging concerted efforts and unified approach in pursuing ministry objectives.
2. **Effective evangelism and discipleship** – ensuring that SCOM members attain salvation and maturity in the faith, and building communities of strong and resilient disciples of Jesus Christ who are equipped to disciple others.
3. **Cultivation of the right disciplines** – encouraging faithfulness in all our dealings and guiding members to respect established practices and processes, empowering them to achieve individual and ministry objectives, effectively and efficiently.
4. **Anticipation of Christ's return** – constantly reminding members of Christ's second coming as a motivation for staying faithful to the end.

Our expectations

***In order to finish strong as individuals as well as an organization, we expect that all leaders at the branch, zonal, and sectional levels will do the following:

1. Commit to the right processes and maintain focus on SCOM's strategic objectives in achieving various personal and organizational goals.
2. Prioritize evangelism, intensify discipleship for spiritual stability, and implement empowerment programs to enhance the continuous growth and holistic stability of the organization and its members.
3. Prioritize Bible study and discussions around the subject of “finishing strong” to understand the truths embedded in the theme.
4. Intensify training of members on SCOM's strategic and policy documents and enforce adherence to the same.

We hope that through these Bible Study series, SCOM members at all levels will be encouraged to keep fighting, even when it looks like the finishing line is nearing. As we journey with God through life's ups and downs, we hope that we will encourage one another to persevere to the end and that we will let faith permeate every area of our lives because strong faith is crucial for a strong finish. However, finishing strong requires sustained effort and determination with an understanding that our labor will be rewarded in the end.

There are twelve studies in this guide, which are divided into three sections. To get the most out of the study guide, we advise members to study all the sections. **All Scripture references are taken from the Good News Bible**, unless otherwise indicated. However, we encourage participants to read several Bible versions during study for a deeper understanding of the texts being studied.

We wish you a fruitful study!!!

SECTION A: STARTING TO FINISH

"Commitment is finishing what you started, even when you don't feel like doing it anymore."-Bonnie Pfister

"We are judged by what we finish, not what we start" – fitness quotes

Introduction

Nobody really starts something with the aim of failing or quitting halfway, unless they are forced to or they are doing it just to pass time while waiting for the ‘real deal.’ In most cases, people desire a better ending regardless of how they started. “Happy ending” and “happily ever after” are some of the common phrases people often use to describe the preferred ending of a movie or wedding.

In project management, a Start-to-Finish dependency is a type of relationship between two tasks where a predecessor task cannot be completed until the successor task has begun. Adrian Neumeyer puts it simpler: **It** means that you can only finish **task A (predecessor)** once **task B (successor)** has been started. In software projects, for example, a development phase (predecessor task) can only be considered complete once the testing phase (successor task) has been started and the software proves to be working. By recognizing and managing these dependencies, project managers can create efficient workflows and ensure that projects are completed on time and within scope.

Though start-to-finish relationships are not very common in real life, the concept has a spiritual significance for believers in as far as finishing strong is concerned. The concept underscores the importance of growth and progress in our personal walk with the Lord. It emphasizes the need for believers to aim for the finish line in order to complete the work of their salvation. As the Scriptures say, **“The end of a matter is better than its beginning, ...” Ecclesiastes 7:8 - NIV**, meaning that in everything we do, whether spiritual, academic, sports, business, etc., it is not how we started that matters, but how we finish, because that is what people usually use to judge us. Thus, beyond believing and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we must desire to progress and grow into effective disciples who will be able to disciple others while still focusing on the final prize. To finish strong in our spiritual journey, we must decide to finish better even before we start any phase along the path; we must commit ourselves to knowing God better and serving him faithfully while persevering to the very end – death or rapture.

In this section, we will explore what it means to finish strong and what you can do in order to finish strong. As you go through each study, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and apply the Word better so that you will be able to live your life in a manner that will help you finish stronger.

STUDY 1: FINISHING STRONG

Study passage: 2 Timothy 4: 1 - 8

Introduction

Chimwemwe, a dedicated athlete, trained for a marathon but faced a devastating loss just before the event - her mother's death. Despite the overwhelming grief, she decided to honor her mother's memory by running the marathon. With determination and perseverance, she pushed through her pain and finished the race on first position, inspiring others with her resilience. Chimwemwe's story illustrates the importance of finishing strong, even in the face of hardships, a theme echoed in **2 Timothy 4:1-8**, where Paul encourages believers to remain committed to their faith and finish strong despite challenges. As we navigate life's challenges, it is easy to lose sight of our goals or go back on our commitment to God. But as Paul encouraged Timothy, we must endure suffering and keep on doing the work we were called to do until we finish our race, having kept the faith, for there is a reward awaiting everyone who is waiting with love for the Lord's appearing. In this study, we will explore what it means to finish strong in our own lives and how we can do that.

Let's talk: How do you respond (inwardly or outwardly) when you see your friend turning away from the faith or calling?

Study Questions

1. Explain the meaning of "finishing strong" in your own understanding.
2. **Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8:** what was Timothy urged (charged) to do and why (**V. 1 – 4**)?
3. Identify words/ phrases in the passage that indicate that Paul finished strong.
4. What things/challenges could hinder or discourage Timothy from fulfilling his mission? How was he supposed to respond? (**V. 5**).
5. According to verse 6, what was Paul's situation when he wrote this letter to Timothy?
6. What did Paul say about himself despite the situation he was in? (**V.7**).
What do you think gave him the confidence to speak like that?
7. What do you think God called you to do as a Christian? And what does "finishing strong" mean in your own life?
8. Why is it important to finish strong? From the passage, mention things that can help you stay focused on your mission and finish strong as a Christian despite your challenges (**Ref. also 2 Tim. 2: 11 – 14**).

Conclusion

As we reflect on 2 Timothy 4:1-8, let us ask God to give us the strength and perseverance to finish strong, knowing that He will reward us with the crown of righteousness.

Memory verse: 2 Timothy 4:7

"I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith."

STUDY 2: THE SECRET OF REMAINING

Study passage: John 15: 1 – 17

Introduction

A farmer had a thriving orchard with fine green fruit trees. One day, as he walked around the orchard, he noted that one branch had become disconnected from its main trunk. Despite having developed good fruits already, the leaves and the fruits began to wither despite being exposed to water and sunlight. Seeing that there was nothing he could do to revive the branch, the farmer cut it off so that it could dry up and be used as firewood, even though that was not the primary purpose of the branch. This story shows us that the branch was only useful as long as it remained connected to its trunk, a principle that is illustrated by Jesus in **John 15:1-17**. Just as the branch cannot survive without the trunk, we cannot be useful in the kingdom of God without remaining in Jesus.

Let's talk: Have you ever felt far from Christ since you became born again? What happened?

Study Questions

1. **Read John 15: 1 – 17:** What 3 images do you find in verses 1-2, and who do they represent?
2. What does the gardener do to the branches that bear fruit and those that do not bear fruit, and why? What fruit do you think Jesus is talking about? (**Refer also Galatians 6: 22 – 24**).
3. What does it mean to remain united to Christ?
Notice the number of times and the way in which the word 'remain' (or abide) is used in the passage. What does this teach us about the relationship between Christ and a believer?
4. **Read again verses 3 – 8;** whose responsibility is it for one to remain united with Christ?
 - a. What are the spiritual benefits of remaining united to Christ?
 - b. What happens to a believer who does not remain united with Christ?
5. Jesus is referring to himself as the real vine.
 - a. Do you think there are other vines that are not real? Give examples.
 - b. Suggest some of the things you can do to remain united to Christ, the real vine.
6. According to **verses 9 – 17**, what are the requirements and benefits of friendship with Christ?
7. There are 3 categories of branches in the passage: those that bear no fruit, those that bear fruit, and those that bear much fruit:
 - a. In which category would you place yourself and why?
 - b. What is the ultimate purpose of bearing much fruit? (v. 8)
 - c. The Father prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it can bear much fruit (v. 2). In what ways have you experienced the Father's pruning?
 - d. What steps are you going to take in order to bear much fruit and glorify God in your life?

Conclusion

To finish strong in our spiritual journey, we need to maintain a good relationship with Jesus Christ so that we continue to grow and bear fruit that pleases God. Remaining in Christ will also help us remain stable and endure the hardships of this life. This passage invites us into deeper intimacy with Christ, marked by love, obedience, and friendship as we keep running the race of faith.

Memory verse: John 15:5

I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without." John 15:5

STUDY 3: A GROWING DISCIPLE

Study passages: Ephesians 4:17–32; Matthew 28:18–20

Introduction

Spiritual growth is not optional for a life that is surrendered to God. Spiritual growth has nothing to do with the length of the period we have been in the Lord, but rather the depth of our relationship with Christ that leads to the transformation of character and mind. Growth does not just happen; certain conditions must be met for one to grow in their faith. It is a continuous process, not a one-time event. In Ephesians 4:17–32, Paul urges believers to leave behind their former way of life and put on the new self that is created in God’s likeness. To finish strong in our journey of faith, we must desire and commit ourselves to grow into Christ’s likeness every day by getting rid of old behaviors that hinder our spiritual progress and adopting new habits that are in line with God’s nature and character. Jesus expects all believers to be growing disciples who will be involved in making other disciples (Matthew 28:18–20) and thereby becoming agents of transformation in their communities. Will you be that disciple? Study on to find out how.

Let’s talk: Would you say that the number of people in our communities that call themselves Christians matches the spiritual impact that is seen? Explain your answer.

Study Questions

1. Define the terms disciple and a growing disciple.
2. **Read Ephesians 4:17–32:** How does Paul contrast the life of the heathen (unbelievers or Gentiles) and that of a true believer?
3. **From verses 25–32,** identify the godly behaviors that true believers must show. How do these reflect spiritual growth?
4. Why is it important for one who has believed in Jesus to change their old ways of living?
5. What are some of the obstacles to spiritual growth? What can help you to continue growing in faith and in character? For example, how can one get angry without sinning?
6. **“And do not make God’s Holy Spirit sad; ...” (V. 30).** In what ways do believers make the Holy Spirit sad, and what are the consequences? **(Refer also to Hebrews 3: 7 – 19).**
7. Apart from changing one’s negative behaviors, in what ways are kindness and forgiveness important elements of our spiritual growth?
8. **Read: Matthew 28:16–20:** What command did Jesus give the eleven disciples? In what ways can you take part in making disciples of Jesus Christ?
9. How can the principles in Ephesians 4 shape our relationships and Christian witness?
10. What are you currently doing/going to do to become an effective disciple and witness of Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

Paul draws a sharp contrast between the life we once lived and the life we are now called to live in Christ. To be a growing disciple is to live a life that continuously reflects the heart of Jesus towards his disciples – Jesus wants his disciples to prioritize their relationship with him (personal devotion –

Luke 10: 38 -42) and carry out his mission through the power of the Holy Spirit (making other disciples – Matthew 28: 18 – 20; Acts 1: 8). It means constantly getting rid of the old self, putting on the new, and walking in love, truth, and grace in order to draw others to Jesus, and realizing that as we respond to the Great Commission, we do so not in our own strength, but under the authority and presence of Christ. Let this study be more than just information, but let it transform your mind and character into the likeness of Christ. May we grow deeper in faith and wider in impact as we become disciples who make disciples!

Memory verse: Ephesians 4:30

“Do not make God’s Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God’s mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free.”

STUDY 4: ENDURING FAITH: BOW OR BURN?

Study passage: Daniel 3: 1 - 30

Introduction

In Daniel 3, we encounter one of the most powerful examples of unwavering faith in God whilst living in a secular society. Nebuchadnezzar sets up a statue and declares that anyone who does not bow to the statue and worship must be thrown into a blazing furnace. 3 Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are faced with a life-or-death decision: bow to a golden idol or burn in the fire. Their refusal to worship the statue reveals a bold trust in God's sovereignty, regardless of the pressure or consequences. This story challenges us to examine our own faith in the face of life's battles. What do we do when our faith is tested? To finish strong, we must have faith that endures to the end. And like the three boys, we must choose to stand firm, trusting that God is always with us even in the fire.

Let's talk: Share experiences (if any) of a time or season when you were tempted to compromise your faith in order to succeed or get through a difficult situation.

Study Questions:

1. **Read Daniel 3:1 – 23:** Who were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and why were they in Babylon at this time? (Refer to Daniel 1: 1 – 7).
2. Narrate the story in your own words.
3. What orders did King Nebuchadnezzar give to all his officials, and what was going to happen to anyone who disobeyed the orders? (V. 6).
4. 3 Jewish men refused to bow and worship the golden image which the king had set up (V. 1). What do you think was the reason for their refusal?
5. Look at the king's reaction in verses 13 – 15 and 19 - 23;
 - a. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar was so angry at their refusal to worship the idol? Do you think his main conflict was with the 3 men? Explain.
 - b. What possible temptations do you think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced when they were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar?
6. How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answer the King despite all his rage and threats? (V. 16 – 18)? What does their answer reveal about their faith and understanding of God?
7. **Read Daniel 3: 24 – 30:** In the end, the 3 men chose to burn in the blazing furnace instead of bowing down to the image to save themselves (V. 22, 23).
 - a. In what ways did God honor/reward their commitment to Him?
 - b. What impact did their faith and devotion to God have on Nebuchadnezzar and his entire kingdom?
 - c. In what ways did God's actions in this passage reveal his nature/ power/ ability?
8. What dangers or struggles are believers of today likely to face for choosing to please God? Share experiences of how you (or someone you know) were tempted to compromise your faith to save yourself or get what you wanted.
9. What lessons have you learnt from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego about enduring faith?

And what practical steps are you going to take in order to build the kind of faith that will endure to the end despite the challenges you may face along the path? Please share.

Conclusion

Faith is not only tested in fire furnaces (hardships or sufferings, etc.), — it is also tested in successes, comfort, or security. Our classrooms, workplaces, and relationships can be areas where our faith can be tested. Despite the threat on their lives, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow and chose to burn instead. Their response to the king amidst the temptations was rooted in deep trust in God's sovereignty and total surrender to God's will and control.

True faith is not just believing God *can* deliver—it is continuously trusting Him even when He doesn't. True faith is seen in our understanding that God does not always prevent the fire – sometimes He allows the fire, but he promises in His word to walk with us through the flames so that they don't consume us. When we are faced with fires in our own lives, we should believe that God is able to save us. But if He does not save us when we expect Him to, we should not compromise our faith; instead, we should ask for his grace to sustain (keep) and help us endure to the end.

Memory verse: *Daniel 3:16-18*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered, Your Majesty, we will not try to defend ourselves. If the God whom we serve is able to save us from the blazing furnace and from your power, then He will. But even if he doesn't, Your Majesty may be sure that we will not worship your god, and we will not bow down to the gold statue that you have set up."

SECTION B: FIGHTING A GOOD FIGHT

“Life is a hard battle anyway. If we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. But I will not allow my life’s light to be determined by the darkness around me.”—Sojourner Truth.

“This is the only time in history when I get to fight for God. This is the only part of my eternal story when I am actually in the battle. Once I die, I’ll be in a celebration mood in a glorified body in a whole different set of circumstances. But this is my limited window of opportunity, and I’m going to fight the good fight for all I’m worth.” – Joni Eareckson Tada.

Introduction

In Section A, we discussed the ‘what’ of finishing strong, i.e., meaning, and some of the things we can do in order to finish strong. In this Section, we will explore some of the things we need to understand in order to finishing strong. There are several places in the scriptures where faith is represented as a fight or a race, 1 Timothy 6: 12, 2 Timothy 4: 7, Hebrews 12: 1, 1 Corinthians 9: 24 – 27; and how we fight or run the race matters.

The word “finishing” suggests an ongoing process. It means that one started and continually did something, and they are now coming towards the end of it. Usually, when one is going towards the end, they are tired and worn out from the journey and the challenges they faced along the way. Some give up just before victory, while others push themselves until they get to the end. However, not everyone who finishes is declared the winner; some are disqualified for failing to fulfill all the necessary requirements or violating the rules of the game. Finishing strong, therefore, demands that a person should remain at their best, and keep fighting like they were just starting; turning to every battle with wisdom and strength, because the battles are real and fierce. Winning one battle does not necessarily mean winning the war; as such, one needs to keep fighting and fighting well. Fighting a good fight is both picking the right battles and fighting in the right manner (by the rules). Not all battles are for us to fight – some need to be avoided because they are not worth it, while others, it is only God who can fight for us. There is great wisdom in knowing which battles to fight, avoid, or hand over to God.

In 2 Timothy 4:7, Apostle Paul made a bold statement that showed fulfillment/ satisfaction, completion, and perseverance when he said, ***“...I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (NIV).*** The Good News translation simplified the language by saying, ***“...I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith.”*** Finishing strong demands fighting a good fight, and indeed doing the best in the face of challenges. What battles are you currently facing? How are you fighting them? In this section, we will focus on the reality of the battles, how to fight well, and what can help us to fight a good fight.

STUDY 5: BATTLES TO BE FOUGHT

Study passage: Exodus 14: 1- 31

Introduction

When Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said somewhere, “...*So put on God’s armor now! Then **WHEN the evil day comes**, you will be able to resist the enemy’s attacks; and after fighting to the end, you will still hold your ground*” (6: 13). Paul and indeed various Bible translators were very careful with the use of words to communicate the inevitable nature of battles in our lives. Notice that it is not **IF** (conditional) but **WHEN** (certainty), because everyone will face **evil days** in this life - it is just a matter of time. Battles or challenges are real; *palibe angazembe ziphyinjo m’moyo uno* (nobody can escape challenges in this life).

The Jews had just been successfully freed from Egypt after God, through Moses, showed His extraordinary power in delivering them. When they thought that they were finally out of problems, a real death-trap situation arose. The Egyptian army was following them, and they had nowhere to run with the Red Sea in front of them. What was supposed to be a great victorious moment had turned into a death-trap. For Moses, the challenge was not just external from the Egyptians, but also internal from the grumbling Israelites. That is the reality of battles; they do not see time and situation. To fight well, you need to be aware of the battles you are engaged in and the enemy you are fighting against so that you can plan well. How ready are you for your battles, because they will surely come? Let us look into the Israelites’ situation in Exodus 14.

Let’s talk: share your understanding of spiritual battles and give examples.

Study questions:

1. **Read Exodus 14:1-31** by choosing five people to role-play the characters of Narrator, God, Moses, Pharaoh, and the Israelites. Let the characters read the passage in a dramatized manner.
 - a. What challenges did the Israelites face?
 - b. How did Moses and the Israelites react to the challenges?
 - c. What did their reaction reveal about their trust in God?
2. Identify words or phrases that stand out to you regarding the Israelites’ struggles and why.
3. What was God’s plan and purpose in allowing the Egyptians to pursue his people? (V. 3-4). What role did Pharaoh and his army play in fulfilling God’s plan and purpose? (V. 5-7, 9).
4. Despite the people’s reaction, what did God do to save them from the Egyptians and assure them that He was with them? What did Moses and the people need to do to escape from the Egyptians? (V. 15-18).
5. Mention the internal and external battles that the Israelites needed to overcome to experience the salvation of God. What impact did God’s miracle at the Red Sea have on Moses and the people? (V.30 – 31).
6. The Israelites were terrified and cried out to the Lord for help (V.10), and yet they wished they had remained in Egypt to continue serving as slaves instead of appreciating God for their deliverance (V. 11 – 12).
 - a. What does this teach us about our enemy and the nature of spiritual battles?
 - b. In what ways do we often ask God for help while still arguing in our hearts and doubting his ability to save us?
7. When faced with challenges and battles in your life, how do you usually react? How difficult or easy is it for you to follow God’s will and trust him to save you in such moments?

8. Contrast the Israelites' reaction in verses 11-12 and Moses' reaction in verses 13-14; what do you think made the difference?
9. If you knew that God was the one allowing the battles that you were facing in your life for His own glory, how differently would you react to them?
10. Share any scenario when you experienced God granting you victory over your battles?

Conclusion

In this life, we will face battles regardless of time, situations, and our standing with God. Battles will come our way both at our highest moments and lowest moments. These battles will sometimes be initiated by God (like in the case of the Israelites in this passage), sometimes the battles are brought by the devil, sometimes by the people around us, and yet sometimes by ourselves. But two things are common and true: firstly, God allows them regardless of the source; secondly, victory over them brings glory to God. Therefore, for every battle that we face in our journey of faith, we should not be afraid or lose hope. Instead, we should look to God for help, fully trusting that He knows everything and that He is able to deliver us. We should keep fighting while marching forward, because going back is not an option in the race of faith. Jesus said to his disciples: ***"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"*** (John 16:33-NIV). These words should comfort and encourage us that victory is ours despite the battles we face because Christ already won the war.

Respond in prayer

- In pairs, please share internal or external battles that you are trusting God to see you through at the moment. Pray for each other.

Memory verse: Exodus 14:10.

"When the Israelites saw the king and his army marching against them, they were terrified and cried out to the Lord for help."

STUDY 6: DOES THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS?

Study Passage: 1 Samuel 13:5-14

Introduction

When I was younger, I heard questions like, what if someone steals a Bible and uses it to preach to people. Is that a sin? How about stealing money and giving it to the Church? Such questions or thoughts are made on the idea that *'the end justifies the means'* - that if the end result of what you did is good or right, then it does not matter whether the method you used was wrong. There are a lot of situations where people justify their wrongdoing because the results are good. But does God care about the processes, or He just look at the results? In the Old Testament, the responsibility of offering sacrifices was given to priests or prophets. But in 1 Samuel 13: 5 – 14, King Saul offered sacrifices to God in place of Samuel, and he suffered great consequences, even though the act itself was necessary. Saul only cared about the importance of the sacrifice without considering the rules and responsibilities for offering sacrifices. Due to fear or panic, we are sometimes tempted to make decisions that are contrary to God's will. We should therefore learn to exercise patience and follow the right processes to get the results we are looking for.

Let's talk: Please share any story you can remember where someone did a wrong thing for a good reason.

Study Questions:

1. **Read 1 Samuel 13:5 - 14:** Narrate the story in your own words.
2. According to verses 8-9; 11-12, what pressurized Saul to go ahead and offer the sacrifice? Do you think Saul's reasons were valid or not? Explain your answer.
3. Samuel said, "*That was a foolish thing to do (V. 13).*"
 - a. Why did Samuel call King Saul's action "*foolish*?"
 - b. What consequences did King Saul face for his foolish action? (V. 13 – 14).
 - c. How do these verses depict God's value for obedience over religious activities?
4. What do you think would have happened if Saul had not offered the sacrifice? What would you have done if you were in Saul's situation?
5. Give an example of a situation when doing the wrong thing seemed to be right to save yourself or someone else's situation? What was the outcome?
6. In which areas of your life do you think you need to focus on obeying God more rather than fulfilling a duty?

Conclusion:

The end does not justify the means. Giving at Church or anywhere else is a good end, passing examinations and getting certificates/degrees is a wonderful end, getting promoted at work makes a great testimony, getting married is a beautiful end, building a beautiful house is an admirable end, and the list can go on. But the question is, how do we get there? God will not cleanse our dirty money because we want to give it to support his work. He will not bless our marriage just because we were wedded in Church when we are getting married to the wrong person, e.g., someone else's spouse. He will not accept our sacrifices when our motives are wrong or celebrate our degrees and promotions when get them through crooked means. We should therefore work hard and follow the right procedures to get what we want in life. We should not focus so much on achieving our goals at the expense of our relationship with God; we should always know that obedience to God is better than our sacrifices.

Respond in prayer

- Close your eyes and reflect on what you have, the things you have achieved so far, and everything you do for God. Would you honestly say that your motives were pure and that you got them through the right means? Take a moment to talk to God in a personal prayer.

Memory verse: 1 Samuel 13:13.

“That was a foolish thing to do,” Samuel answered. “You have not obeyed the command the Lord your God gave you...”

STUDY 7: MASTERING THE RULES OF THE GAME

Study Passages: Nehemiah 1, 2, and 3

Introduction

One of the realities of SCOM is that it is an organization. Organizations, by nature, work through structures and procedures which are written down for everyone to know and follow. Without following the right procedures, the organizational part of our Christian ministries and Churches suffer greatly. The truth remains that for any organization to achieve its vision, it requires effective and functional structures. For SCOM to properly function at your school or zone, you need to follow school rules, have a committee, and a program to guide your weekly activities. For a Church to function, it requires obeying the laws of the country, having its own rules, and having leadership in place at all levels. To be able to finish strong, one has to master the rules of the game, that is, running the race according to set rules. One has to do the right things in the right manner. Nehemiah was very successful in his project of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem because he had mastered the rules of the game. He knew what to do at what time, who to contact for the things he needed, which rule to follow to achieve his goal, and what strategy to use to get things done. Being organized and strategic is godliness. To fight a good fight, we need to strategize, know the rules, and follow them on top of praying to God for guidance. It is easier to pray when we already know what needs to be done, but maybe we don't know how.

Note: Long Scripture reading ahead, get organized!

Let's talk: Why is it important for Christians to understand the rules and systems of the country or institution they belong to?

Study Questions

1. Choose 3 people to read **Nehemiah chapters 1, 2, and 3**. According to the passage,
 - a. Where was Nehemiah, and what was his job? (1: 1, 11).
 - b. What problems did the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from exile face? (1:13).
 - c. What did Nehemiah do when he heard the news about Jerusalem? (1:4).
 - d. Where did Nehemiah present his request for support, and what was his request? (2:5-8).
 - e. What challenges did Nehemiah face when he was about to start the project, and how did he respond? (2: 19 – 20).
 - f. What strategy did Nehemiah use to finish the project on time? (Ch. 3).
2. Analyze Nehemiah's prayer in Ch 1: 5 – 11. What does his prayer reveal about his faith and understanding of God and his commands?
Do you think his understanding contributes to his success in any way? Explain.
3. Nehemiah had a well-set plan, and he knew exactly what he needed even before presenting his request to the emperor. Prove this statement from Chapter 2. What did the plan include?
4. It took 4 months of praying and planning from the day he heard the news about Jerusalem to the day he presented his request before the emperor (Ch. 1:1; 2: 1). What is the role of praying and planning in fighting a good fight?
5. Nehemiah asked for two letters from the emperor (Ch. 2: 7-8), one to allow him free passage through some provinces and another to ask for timber for his project. How does this prove that he was a man who understood the systems and followed procedures?
6. Discuss the importance of a good combination of faith (praying and fasting) and practical wisdom (good planning, following procedures, seeking help from the right people) in Nehemiah's ministry.

7. Mention some of the rules and regulations of your school/ university/ workplace, church, or home. How does knowledge of the rules help you to minister well in that place and deal with the battles you may face in your journey of faith?
8. How well do you balance your faith and practical wisdom in your ministry, studies, work, business, and relationships?
9. Share some practical strategies you can use or procedures you need to follow to fulfill God's mission in your branch, zone, or Church. Pray for God's wisdom to effectively apply them.

Conclusion:

The Kingdom of God is both spiritual and practical. To fight a good fight of faith and succeed in our ministry, we need a good balance of faith and planning. Nehemiah applied this truth and the knowledge of the systems of his time to advance God's agenda of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. It is a shame that sometimes those who belong to darkness seem to be wiser and more organized in handling their affairs than the children of light (Luke 16: 8). As believers, we should not be ignorant of how the world or our various institutions operate. Just concern, faith, or prayer are not enough to beat life challenges and successfully get us through to the finish line. We need to be intentional in seeking understanding of the rules that govern our institutions and the world at large, and be able to plan accordingly with faith, prayer, and wisdom to ably fulfill God's mission for our lives and complete our race. So, pray, know the rules of the game, strategize, and follow procedures.

Memory verse: Neh. 2:4-5.

"The emperor asked, 'what is it that you want?' I prayed to God of Heaven, and then I said to the emperor, 'If Your Majesty is pleased with me and is willing to grant my request, let me go to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I can rebuild the city.'"

STUDY 8: CULTIVATING RIGHT DISCIPLINES

Study Passage: Daniel 6: 1 - 27

Introduction

Discipline is simply defined as doing the right thing at the right time and in the right manner. Fighting a good fight requires a lot of discipline. Think about professional boxers, for example; they have to keep on training even when there is no fight, watch their diet, and avoid certain behaviors to keep their bodies in good physical shape, otherwise they may not be able to survive the punches in the ring. Daniel is a perfect example of a man who lived a disciplined life both spiritually and professionally. Without discipline, he could have died before his time. A good fighter is very good at discipline. To be disciplined is to be focused, fixing eyes on the goal. Daniel demonstrated his discipline through his devotion and consistency, and he was triumphant in his battles. How disciplined are you?

Let's talk: How would you feel if the people you live/ work with decided to monitor everything you do in private or public? Would you change the way you behave or not?

Study Questions:

1. **Read Daniel 6:1-27:** What distinguished Daniel from the other Governors, and how did the king honor him? (V. 1 – 3).
2. Describe Daniel's character according to verses 3 -5, 10, 16 – 20. What elements of discipline do you see in his character?
3. Disciplined people are not always liked by others. What problems did Daniel face in doing the right things, and how did he respond?
4. Notice the King's reaction in verses 14, 16 - 20. Why do you think the king reacted that way? What impact did Daniel's life have on the king?
5. How was Daniel honored by God as a result of his loyalty and discipline? (V. 21-28). What does this teach us about the value of cultivating right disciplines?
6. ***"... Daniel was reliable and did not do anything wrong or dishonest (V. 4).*** In which areas of your life can such a thing be said about you?
7. Mention the importance of cultivating the right disciplines in life.
8. What disciplines do you need to cultivate in order to fight well and finish strong in your spiritual life, studies, business, work, and relationships? What practical steps are you going to take?
9. What obstacles can you face as you pursue such disciplines? How do you plan to overcome them?

Conclusion

Cultivating the right disciplines is not an easy task; there is a price to be paid. One has to be willing to face various obstacles, and yet they must remain consistent and keep growing in those disciplines. Disciplines are intentional; one cannot just wish or pray them into his/her life. We probably know of some brothers or sisters who were once on fire for God, but they backslid because they could not maintain important spiritual disciplines like prayer, bible study, fellowship, service, etc. To cultivate means to try to acquire or develop certain qualities or skills. To finish strong, you need to identify the gaps in your life and make every effort to develop relevant qualities/ behavior patterns or skills to address those gaps. And consistency is key; you need to keep on practicing the disciplines you have cultivated until they become part of you. Praise God because His grace is sufficient to see you through to the end; you only need to ask.

Respond in prayer

- Reflect on the areas where you lack discipline and ask God to help you cultivate the right disciplines and give you grace to finish strong.

Memory verse: Daniel 6:10

“When Daniel learnt that the order had been signed, he went home. In an upstairs room of his house there were windows that faced toward Jerusalem. There, just as he had always done, he knelt down at the open windows and prayed to God three times a day.”

SECTION C: ANTICIPATING THE MASTER'S RETURN

"Blessed is the servant whom his master will find so doing when he returns." – Matt. 24:46 (KJV)

"Remember: we are not living our lives for the applause of people. We are living our lives, doing our best to follow Jesus, with the goal of one day hearing "well done good and faithful servant." - Unknown

Introduction

There are special days in life which attract significant attention and preparedness among people, especially when something is happening for the first time. The anticipation that such a specific day is coming usually causes us to engage in some specific activities in line with the mood of the day. Different people have different motivations for pursuing goals in life. For one girl, her dream was to wear a graduation gown before a wedding gown, and she always looked forward to these two events with great anticipation. She said just the thought of the joy she would experience helped her to remain focused and overcome the challenges she faced along the way. Apparently, she had witnessed the graduation ceremony of her friend's sister, and she wanted to be the first in her family to graduate, and she did it.

As we conclude the 'Finishing Strong' bible study series, we want to bring to the attention of all believers that a great day, which is far better than the graduation day, is coming – our Master's return. Our greatest hope as believers is that we will get to spend eternity with our Lord on the other side of life – whether we go to him or He comes for us first. The scriptures tell us that in eternity, our mortal bodies will put on immortality (no dying) and that there will be no sorrow, no more crying or pain, as all the worries, concerns, and struggles of this life will be left behind. The thought of spending eternity with Christ and sharing in his joy should cause us to look forward to that time with great anticipation. Otherwise, all the singing, dancing, preaching, and even giving to the work of God will be meaningless if we have no hope of seeing Jesus and being with him in his glory.

But what do we do as we wait for that time? In Matthew 25, Jesus shares two parables in which he teaches the need for believers (his bride) to get dressed for service and keep their lamps burning until He (the groom) arrives. He gives an example of a man who went on a trip and gave specific instructions to his servants on what they needed to do while he was gone. He expected that when he returned, his servants would be ready to welcome him and give an account of what they had done while he was away. To finish strong, we need to always keep in mind that Jesus is coming again and get ourselves ready to meet with him whenever he returns or calls us home. But since we do not know when he will return, we need to make sure that we do not fall asleep while waiting for him – we should keep ourselves busy by being actively and faithfully engaged in the kingdom service while making sure that our wedding gown is always ready and clean.

However, waiting is not easy. It requires a lot of patience to keep waiting, especially when you don't know the exact time the person or the thing you are waiting for will come. Many people gave up because they felt they had waited for too long and they could not bear it any more. That is why we need to constantly remind ourselves that one day our master will surely come, so that we can be alert. The older generation would testify that "Jesus is coming soon" was a popular theme during crusades or gospel rallies in those days. But now, it appears like Jesus is delaying in coming, and the focus has shifted to miracles and breakthroughs. While the miracles and breakthroughs are good, they should not be the end in themselves. As we pursue different goals and pray for miracles and breakthroughs, we should also desire something that is much better – to see Jesus face to face. And the thought of his return should motivate us to live right and endure to the end because we know that there will be a reward.

STUDY 9: READINESS FOR THE MASTER'S RETURN: A PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Study Passage: Matthew 24: 36 - 51

Introduction

One of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith and hope of all believers is that one day Jesus Christ will come again to take the saints to heaven, where there will be no more sorrow or pain. Knowing that the Lord will come one day helps us to be ready at all times by focusing our attention on the things that matter the most. However, it does not mean that everyone who believes in the Lord's return will be ready on the day of his return; some will be left behind. The unfortunate part is that the message of Jesus' second coming is rarely preached nowadays, and that is why every believer must always watch how they live and make a personal commitment to getting ready for that day, regardless of what the majority are doing or saying. How prepared are you for the Master's return?

Let's talk: Share experiences of a time when you agreed to meet someone, but they didn't show up at the agreed time, and you could not reach them on the phone. How did you feel and what did you do when they finally appeared?

Study Questions

1. **Read Matthew 24: 36 - 44.** What will the coming of the Son of man be like? (V. 37-39).
2. Notice that two people will be doing the same things, but only one will be taken away (V. 40- 41); what does this teach us about personal responsibility?
3. What must we do to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Son of Man, and why? (V. 42 – 44).
4. **Read verses 45 – 51.** Describe a faithful servant according to the passage. How will the master reward such a servant?
5. Who is a bad servant and what will happen to him on the day of his master's return?
6. Who do the faithful servant, the bad servant, and the master represent?
7. In what ways is the master's return similar to the coming of the Son of Man?
How does the fact that the master will come back one day when no one expects affect the way we should live or motivate us to finish strong?
8. What are you doing in readiness for Jesus' second coming? Would you consider yourself to be a faithful servant or a bad servant?

Conclusion

The second coming of Jesus Christ is not a made-up story. It is something that will surely happen and, therefore, something we must be looking forward to. Getting ready for Jesus' coming is not a one-day event and has nothing to do with a particular church we belong to; it is a personal commitment and responsibility. We need to continuously examine ourselves so that our running will not be in vain.

Respond in prayer

- Reflect on how you have been living your life until now and ask God to help you become a faithful servant as you wait for your Master's return.

Memory Verse: Matthew 24: 42

"Watch out, then, because you do not know what day the Lord will come."

STUDY 10: ON THAT DAY

Study Passage: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 -5: 11

Introduction

Members of the Thessalonian Church believed that Christ's return would happen very soon and did not understand what would happen to their fellow believers who had already died. They expected to still be alive at Christ's return and were therefore concerned that those who had died before Christ's return would miss out on his coming. In 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 5: 11, Paul sought to assure the Thessalonian believers that the dead would be resurrected first to meet the Lord and that they too should look forward to the day when they would be caught up in heaven to meet him. Likewise, we should also look forward to that day when we will see the Lord, either in death or at the rapture – there is no way of escaping any of the days. Finishing strong means that we are always prepared to face any of these days without fear, surprise, or regret. But for those that are not ready, just the thought of dying or rapture makes them uncomfortable or afraid. For such people, the days will come with a lot of drama. To avoid surprises or drama on our last day, whether death or rapture, we should prepare ourselves now when we still have a chance, because we never know what will happen tomorrow.

Let's talk: How easy or difficult is it for you to talk about death? Please explain.

Study Questions:

1. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 18.** What truth about death do you learn from verses 13-15? How should the understanding of this truth affect the way we mourn our loved ones?
2. Describe the order of the events that will occur on the day of Christ's return (V. 16 – 17).
3. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5: 1 – 11.** What 2 analogies does Paul use to explain what will happen on the day of the Lord? Why do you think they are perfect examples to describe that day?
4. No one will escape death or rapture (V. 4). What should you do so that the day will not come as a surprise to you, and why? (V. 4, 5).
5. What instructions does Paul give for living in the light? What weapons must we put on to defend ourselves against darkness, and why? (V. 6 - 10).
6. What should believers do to one another as they wait for that day? (4: 18; 5:11). What does this teach us about our responsibility towards fellow believers?
7. What responsibility do we have towards our loved ones, knowing that we may never see them again after they die?
8. How does this passage help you to face your own fears about death?
9. In what ways does thinking about your dying day or the Lord's return help you to fight a good fight of faith?

Respond in prayer

- Talk to God about your fears concerning your own or your loved one's death and pray that you or they will be made ready for that day.

Conclusion

Dying, we shall all die, but how we die matters. If we are fortunate enough, Christ will find us alive when he returns, but only those that are ready will be caught up with him into the sky. As the Scripture says, ***God does not take pleasure in the death of a sinner (Ezekiel 33: 11).*** We should therefore live right in order to finish well, and also act right by warning everyone we know so that they too should finish well.

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5: 4

"But you, brothers are not in darkness, and the Day should not take you by surprise like a thief."

STUDY 11: HEAVEN OR HELL? THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Study Passage: Revelation 21: 1 – 8

Introduction

It is said that when you go to prison, that's when you appreciate the value of freedom. While people are sent to prison for various crimes with different sentences, not everyone who is in prison is really guilty; for some, their only crime was not having money to bribe the judge or a good lawyer to defend them. It is possible for one to go to prison, complete their sentence and come out a much better person than before. Unfortunately, it is not so with hell because only real sinners go there. Unlike prison, where people can come out alive and start life afresh, nobody should wish to go to hell to appreciate heaven because hell is a place of no return. W. H. Auden said, "Nobody is ever sent to hell; he or she insists on going there." We all have been given the opportunity to choose where we would want to spend eternity. In Revelation 21: 1 -8, the Apostle John shows us a picture of two destinies for God's people and the sinners: a new heaven and earth and the lake of fire. The question is, where will you spend eternity after death or rapture? Remember, only those who win victory (finish strong) will receive the heavenly Father's reward (V. 8). Decide now.

Let's talk: Share your imagination about heaven and hell. Where would you rather be?

Study Questions:

1. **Read Revelation 21: 1 – 8 in different versions:** What did John (the writer of Revelation) see?
2. Describe the new Jerusalem in your own words. Who was the city prepared for?
3. What will be the experience of those who will dwell with God in the new Jerusalem?
4. Three key things are worth noting about heaven; discuss the significance of each of the following:
 - a. New Jerusalem coming down from heaven (V.1 -2).
 - b. God living among mankind (V. 3 - 4).
 - c. God making all things new (V.5).
5. Would you choose heaven if everything remained the same, or if there was no God? Explain.
6. **"Whoever wins the victory will receive this from me: ..." (V. 7):**
 - a. What victory is God talking about?
 - b. What will the winner/overcomer receive, and why is that significant?
 - c. Notice the word 'whoever/ the one/ He that overcomes,' what does this tell you about the people who will receive the reward?
7. Describe the final place for all sinners.
8. Not all the sins we know are listed in V. 8. Does this mean that some sins cannot take you to hell? Please explain.
9. In what ways has this study changed your view about heaven and hell, and what new choices are you going to make going forward?

Conclusion

Heaven is real, and so is hell. No matter how much the wicked may seem to prosper and enjoy in this life, we should not envy or imitate them because their end is destruction. Asaph struggled in his heart when he saw the wicked prospering while he was suffering, but when he entered the presence of God and understood their end, he began to view his problems differently (Psalm 73: 3, 2 -20). You may be struggling in this life, but keep fighting a good fight and pray that you will make it to heaven because the problems you are facing today cannot be compared to hell.

Memory Verse: Revelation 21:8

"But cowards, traitors, perverts, murderers, the immoral, those who practice magic, those who worship idols, and all liars - the place for them is the lake burning with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

STUDY 12: FAITHFULNESS REWARDED

Study passage: Matthew 25: 14 – 30

Introduction

In our opening study, we looked at Paul's reflection on his own spiritual journey as he was getting closer to the end of his life: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, **I have kept the faith**"* (2 Timothy 4: 7). This is a statement of a fulfilled man, one who was not afraid to face death because he knew he had completed his assignment and kept the faith despite the battles he faced. What was remaining was for him to receive a crown of righteousness as his reward for remaining faithful to the end. In these days, it is not easy to remain faithful amidst so many challenges and pressures of life. Sometimes, we want others to be faithful when we are not. But being faithful and doing what we know is right will bring us real joy and satisfaction. In addition, faithfulness will always be rewarded. We may not know when the reward will come, but we can be assured that it will. As we await our own departure from this world, we must keep fighting a good fight and pray that we will keep the faith to the end. Our desire should be to hear the master say: "***Well done, good and faithful servant, come on in and share my happiness!***"

Let's talk: What is your understanding of faithfulness? How do you know that someone is faithful?

Study Questions:

1. **Read Matthew 25: 14 – 30.** What did the man/master give his servants before going on a trip? What differentiates the third servant from the first two servants?
2. What was common about the three servants, despite being given different amounts of money?
3. What happened when the man returned from his trip? (V. 19). What does it mean to settle accounts?
4. Describe the reward given to the first two servants. The amounts of silver they received and earned were different, and yet they received the same reward (V. 21, 23). What do you think was the reason?
5. What excuses did the third servant give for not multiplying the money he was given, and what was his punishment (V. 24 – 30)? Do you think he deserved that kind of punishment? Explain your answer.
6. Reflect on your personal commitment to your studies, work, or family, especially when no one is around to check what you are doing. Would you say you are faithful or not?
7. Which areas of your life do you feel God is calling you to make changes and become more faithful?
8. What lesson(s) about faithfulness have you learned from this study? And what adjustments are you going to make to remain faithful?

Respond in prayer

- Confess to God about the areas you have not been faithful and ask him to help you remain faithful.

Memory Verse: Matthew 25: 21

"Well done you good and faithful servant!" said his master. "You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!"