

**LIVING
RELATIONALLY**
through
TRUTH

A Bible Study for the Wives of Church Officers

JANE ROSS





Presbyterian Church in America

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible study that you are holding has been in the making for over forty years. Only once in my life was I accused of doing something quickly, and at my age I can't remember what that was! The study's contents are the culmination of influences in my life over seventy years: my parents' godly witness, hymns sung at church, Cru and Navigator Bible studies during my single years, solid preaching and teaching in our Presbyterian churches, and the wealth of Reformed books in my husband's amazing study.

But by far the most important and consistent influence in my life has been the Lord Himself. The One who set the stars in place condescended to orchestrate the people, the scriptures, and the circumstances to draw me to Himself. And He has drawn *you* to Himself as well. He already knew and loved us *before* we were knit in our mothers' wombs. After living a perfectly obedient life to His Father's will on our behalf, Jesus experienced a horrific death on a cross to pay for our sins. He is now seated in glory at His Father's right hand with all rule and authority. All of this He accomplished because of His eternal love for His Father—and His love for each of us. He has one purpose for our lives: that we may be conformed into His image. And He hasn't left us alone in this process. He asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit, who never leaves nor forsakes us, to dwell in our lives.

Why am I taking the time to remind us of many truths we already know? Because none of us is adequate within ourselves to be godly women, much less wives of church officers. The demands of family, church, and work seem overwhelming at times. That's why we need to remind ourselves often of the rich truths of how very much we are loved by God and that our only adequacy is in Christ.

We need to focus on the One who is eternal, whose Word is trustworthy. Because we have so many voices speaking into our lives today (and AI at our fingertips thinking for us), I have structured this message into a Bible study format. We must invest time interacting with these eternal truths so that our minds and natures interact with the Word. God's Word remains "living and active and . . . able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

As mentioned in the Preface, one of the most spiritually effective exercises I worked through was the sin tree diagram. God was calling my husband Mike to be a pastor, and I didn't want to hinder that work with a sinful, self-centered heart. David's words in Psalms rang true to me:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You (Ps. 51:10-13).

This psalm was David's response to Nathan's pronouncement that God was aware of his sin with Bathsheba and his efforts to cover it up. Despite his most egregious sins of adultery and murder, David still had a heart for others to come to know the deep, forgiving, restorative love of God.

We need persevering spirits and joyful hearts with our calling to bring others to faith and to teach God's Word, remembering all the Lord has done for us. So, as I considered the order for the lessons, it seemed right to study our triune God before dealing with our sinful natures. As we grow to understand the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit who is Love, we can both rest securely in God's love and actively deal with the sin that so easily entangles and frustrates us. Through the Spirit's presence within us and the ordinary means of grace afforded to us—the Word, prayer, the Sacraments, and the fellowship of the saints (Acts 2:41-42)—we are enabled to put those sins to death more consistently. We are freer to use the spiritual gifts entrusted to us to accomplish the good works the Lord already has planned for us to walk in each day (Eph. 2:10).

Therefore, from the outflow of cleaner—*not perfect*—lives, we can interact more graciously with our husbands, our children, and other church family members. The study is divided with the first part focusing on our relationship with God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and the second on our relationships with others. After planning the lessons on specific relationships, I realized the study needed to start with the reminder that all these relationships are dependent upon our conversion.

Jesus described this process to the very earnest and religious Nicodemus: “Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:7). Unless our souls are regenerated and converted by God's Spirit, we are left dead in our sins. We are unable to interact effectively with the Truth. We will be extremely frustrated if we try to accomplish any change in our lives apart from God's powerful, good, and comforting Holy Spirit. Thus, the first lesson is “Relating to the God of Salvation.” I have also added a short transitional lesson between the first and second sections of the study which provides an opportunity to reflect on the *provision* we have in God's personhood *before* we enter the *practice* of those truths within ourselves and with others.

I have seen the Lord's faithfulness over forty years of active ministry. Even though there were difficult circumstances and relationships to work through, God's undergirding love and goodness has remained constant. Because He is faithful, the Lord calls us to a walk of faith: “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). We cannot please God *unless* we walk by faith. Choosing to walk by faith acknowledges that God exists and that He is good, no matter what our present circumstances look like. As we seek Him, we can depend on Him to reward us in ways which glorify Him and are best for us as He conforms us into His Son's image. Therefore, underpinning all the lessons in this Bible study is the theme of *faith*.

Reflecting on four decades as a pastor's wife, I recognized common topics the Lord used to train my thinking. He has ingrained them in my soul to flesh out in daily life. Jesus modeled these practices in His lifestyle, and He expects us to embrace them as we follow Him by faith.

- Jesus *forgave* sinners. Jesus told the woman who washed His feet at the Pharisee's house that her sins were forgiven and that her faith had saved her (Luke 7:48, 50).
- Jesus respected *authority*. As Jesus spoke to the Jews, He declared that He always did what was pleasing to His Father (John 8:29).

- Jesus had *integrity*. Jesus lived and spoke the truth because He is the Truth and the only way to God (John 14:6).
- Jesus gave *thanks*. Soon after hearing of His cousin John's death, Jesus faced feeding the five thousand. He gave thanks for the meager five loaves and two fish that He had to feed the multitudes who were hungry (Matt. 14:10-19; John 6:9-11).
- Jesus *humbed* Himself. Jesus emptied Himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

Word associations help me remember key points. I realized that Jesus's practices form a helpful acronym for *faith* that I can easily recall and hope will help you as well.

Forgiveness: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, *forgiving* each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). Because I have been forgiven for so many offenses, I need to quickly offer forgiveness to guard my soul from bitterness.

Authority: "For I also am a man placed under *authority*, with soldiers under me" (Luke 7:8a). I need to respect the Lord's authority and those in leadership positions. Where I'm in leadership, I need to seek the Lord's guidance to care well for the souls under me.

Integrity: "He who walks in *integrity* walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out" (Prov. 10:9). I need to be honest about my sins, so I can deal with them and be at peace within myself and helpful to others.

Thanks: "In everything give *thanks*; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18). I need to give thanks in every circumstance of life, acknowledging that God is sovereign and will use all things for His glory and for my good.

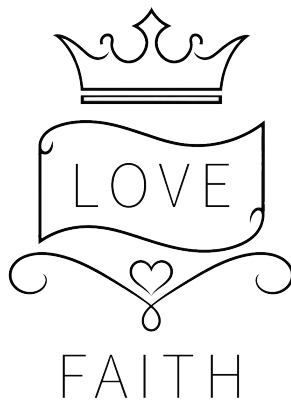
Humility: "Therefore *humble* yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). I need to acknowledge God's wisdom and love for me so I can humbly embrace His plans for my life that glorify Him and encourage me.

These behaviors comprise the walk of faith we are called to flesh out in everyday circumstances. Reflecting on Christ's manner of lifestyle, I have questions to guide my thoughts in the situations the Lord has placed me which you may want to use too.

- Is there someone I need to forgive? (even myself?)
- Is there an authority I need to respect?
- Am I being honest before the Lord and with others?
- How am I called to give thanks in this situation?
- How am I to respond with humility?

Our God truly cares for us, His children. He has provided a way for us to be redeemed through Christ's atoning work and the Spirit's sealing grace. Our lives are covered by His banner of love (Song 2:4). Ultimately, our lives must bring glory to our triune God. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth" (Ps. 115:1).

Below is a visual tool reminding us of Christ's life-giving choices represented in the FAITH acronym: His preeminence over all, His banner of love over us, and all for God's glory. My heart's desire for each of us is to live in continual communion with Christ through His Spirit's presence within us, bringing honor and glory to our heavenly Father. May we feel strengthened in Christ's love and grace to embrace our calling as officers' wives. May we recognize the Lord's provision for our every need through His Word, through His Spirit's presence within us, and through the saints around us. And may we be a source of love and encouragement to our husbands as they fulfill their God-ordained calling to serve the Church. All is for our majestic God's glory and kingdom purposes.



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This study was written to be used in relation with other women. If the study is used with a small group, I suggest six women at the most, to allow for ample discussion time. Groups can meet either weekly or monthly. The study can also be used in a one-to-one setting, which offers more flexibility with meeting times. You may use the study independently, but you will lose the value of discussion and relationship by doing so.

Since this study is divided into eight lessons with a transitional lesson in the middle, it can be used for either eight or nine gatherings. If the transitional lesson is used as a focus for a meeting, it offers the opportunity for reflection and prayer. Otherwise, you can work on the transitional lesson independently and briefly discuss it together with Lesson 5.

The first section of the study is titled “Our Security in the Godhead,” and the second section covers “Our Sanctification in Christ.” The first four lessons focus on our relationships with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, after a lesson on our assurance of salvation. The last four lessons deal with understanding our sinful nature and how working through it in God’s truth and love affects our relationships with our husbands, our children, and our church family.

The lessons are divided into five days to allow readers to take your time in the Word of God each day. Feel free to do the study at your own pace, but I do not recommend trying to read and answer the questions of a complete lesson in one sitting. Each lesson contains the following:

- Verse(s) for reflection, which may be used for memory verses,
- A personal connection to the lesson’s topic taken from my life or from another woman,
- A lesson from Scripture that illustrates the topic (All scriptures are taken from the 1995 version of the *New American Standard Bible*, unless stated otherwise.),
- A prayer focus for the lesson,
- Questions, comments, and applications throughout the lesson, based predominantly around topics of faith,
- Questions with an asterisk are recommended for group discussion,
- A “For Further Study” section to encourage you to apply what you have studied in the lesson, and
- A conclusion to recap the main points of the lesson.

Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29) and “Follow Me!” (Matt. 9:9). May our hearts be renewed and refreshed in His love, joy, and peace as we follow Him.

LESSON 1: RELATING TO THE GOD OF SALVATION

Verses for Reflection:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

– Ephesians 2:8-9

Day 1

Those of us who have traveled internationally know the *primary rule*—keep your passport on your person at *all* times. As a retired schoolteacher, I take great pride in keeping rules. So, as our jet approached Munich Airport in June of 2019, I secured my passport in hand to go through the entry line quickly. We didn't want our German pastor friend waiting for us.

After deboarding the jet, we were loaded onto a transport bus to ride to another location. This process became enjoyable; sitting across from me were two college freshman girls. As we chatted, they told me that one of their fellow travelers had mistakenly grabbed his mom's passport. He stayed over in Pittsburgh for his mom to send his passport by next-day air. "Oh, yes," I self-righteously mused to myself, "not only keep your passport on your person at *all* times but make sure it's your own!"

When we arrived at our destination, we jostled our bags up an escalator to join the line forming quickly for non-European citizens. Mike reminded me to have my passport handy. Glancing down, my passport was *not* in my hand. Mike immediately read the frantic look on my face. "It's got to be in your purse," he emphatically stated. I made a ruse of looking through my purse as my mind raced back to the last place I had seen it. "Oh no," I thought, "it's on my seat in the plane!" I had placed it there when I grabbed my bag from the overhead bin. My hands literally shook as I fumbled through my purse a second time. My mind raced through a scenario of heading back to the jet and pleading shamelessly to retrieve my passport. Could that even work? Besides, I would have to confess that I hadn't kept the *primary rule*.

No sooner had I imagined this pitiful scene than I heard "Jane Ross." My eyes riveted toward a flight attendant with my passport in her hand! I rushed over, clutched her forearms in gratitude, and blurted out, "Oh, thank you." She responded politely in her native accent, "Enjoy Germany." No need to re-board the plane to locate my passport. It was given to me—it was in my hand!

Have you ever been overwhelmed with thankfulness when you received a gift you didn't deserve? We find such a story of a penitent woman who unashamedly expressed her gratitude to Jesus in Luke 7.

There was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and . . . weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee . . . saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner" (vv. 37-39).

In response to Simon's thoughts, Jesus stated that one who is forgiven more loves more. Jesus then compared Simon's actions to those of the immoral woman.

"Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (vv. 44-48, 50).

Luke did not explain how this woman heard about Jesus, but her actions conveyed her humility and extreme gratitude for all that Christ meant to her. She sought the One who proclaimed that His Father feeds the birds of the air and we are more valuable than they. Jesus admonished those of little faith to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things necessary to life would be provided (Matt. 6:25-34). Even though she had not kept the *primary rule* to love God with all her heart, she was driven to find the One who spoke the words of life and whose gift of eternal life is more important than food. She responded to the calling she felt in her soul: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" (Isa. 43:1b).

No wonder she wept and kissed her Savior's feet. Her Deliverer and Protector acknowledged her value and recognized her courageous faith. Before those who knew her reputation, Jesus authoritatively proclaimed, "Your sins have been forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:48, 50). She was free—no more guilt, a new standing in the community, and peace with God. Jesus fully deserved her lavish display of praise and thanksgiving. He was worthy of her love, worship, and obedience. It was time to enjoy living from a kingdom perspective!

Charles Spurgeon comments on Jesus's parting words to this penitent woman:

"Go in peace." . . . May pardoning love put us at peace concerning all our sins! O pardoned one, thou lovest much, for thou hast had much forgiven; let thy thoughts all run to love, and none to fear. Fret not about the past. . . . The hand that was pierced has blotted it all out. . . . Go in peace. What a rest it is to be rid of the burden of sin, and to know of a certainty, from the teaching of God's own Word, that your sins are forgiven you! This is peace which passeth all understanding.¹

Do you truly feel forgiven for *all* your sins? Do you sense deep peace in your soul so that you are never afraid of your Savior? This woman did. Even though she lived two thousand years ago, we are bound as sisters through our common faith in Christ.

1. *How did Christ's love and authority uplift this woman? How was God's humility displayed through Jesus's interaction with her?
2. With whom do you more easily identify: the forgiven immoral woman or the unappreciative Pharisee? Why?
3. In what ways might you express your faith, thankfulness, and humility toward Christ?

Tomorrow, we will focus on what it means to be "born again." On the following days we will study three aspects of salvation: God's role, our response, and the evidence of true salvation.