



## IMITATING CHRIST — BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

[This is a continuation of the Bible Study *Is My Heart Really Unforgiving?* Winter 2014 Quarterly]

### Color Key

**Black:** Text of Bible Study

**Purple:** Additional comments and Bible passages

**Red:** Answers/possible answers to questions

**Blue:** Bible passages with key words (for this study) underlined

**Note:** All definitions are taken from the Miriam Webster Dictionary (online).

**Opening Prayer:** *Lord, I praise You for giving me this day. You work through those who praise You. You accept our praises. Your saints in heaven and on earth worship You with their praises. Some days it's hard to be in an attitude of praise, but when I praise You, I smile. When You hear my praise, You smile. What a life of love You have given us. Let my heart learn to praise You even when my attitude isn't where it should be, so that I can share Your salvation and Your wonder with others. Amen.*

## LIVING, LOVING, and PRAISING THE LORD

**Sue** had been a Christian all her life. She went to the same church her forefathers had helped establish when they first came to America. ... But she stayed away from working on the missions committee because she didn't want to work with some of those people at the church. They seemed never to do anything the way she thought would be best.

**Marisol** was a Sunday School teacher. She knew all the Bible lessons backwards and forwards. ... But she knew she hadn't been a good mom when her kids were little. She fretted over what damage she might have caused to their adult lives.

**Aisha** was a pray-er. She kept a prayer journal of things and people to pray for. It gave her great satisfaction to check off those prayers when they were answered. ... But she couldn't understand why some of those prayers never were answered. Should she continue to pray for them? What was wrong? Although she had checked off that many prayers had been answered, some had just been on the list too long.

**Hailey** was working on a new committee at church. The committee prayed for God's will to be done with their project. Some in the church were excited at the presentation. Others wanted nothing to do with it and even wanted the committee to quit. The Spring 2015 *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*

committee went again to the Lord in prayer ... but what should they pray now?

### What Do I Think?

It has been said, "Praise makes you different." How does this work for me? Answers will vary. Possible answers: When I praise, I'm not angry. When I praise, I remember what God has done for me. When I praise, I know I am joined to the body of Christ. When I praise, I am joyful. How could it make a difference for Sue? \_\_\_\_\_ Marisol? \_\_\_\_\_ Aisha? \_\_\_\_\_ Hailey? \_\_\_\_\_  
**Answers will vary.**

For what things do I praise God most? **Answers will vary.**

When do I pray? Do I plan my praise daily? Even when I don't feel like it? **Answers will vary. Many pray in the morning. Many pray all day. Praise isn't always planned, but if we don't plan to include praise in our prayers, we may go through periods of drought when we aren't praising at all — when we don't feel like it — when we need to praise God the most.**

### What Does God Say?

**Romans 4:16–17 (NIV)** Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only

to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. Since God calls into being things that were not, he can put into our hearts tight things to think, feel, and say. We need to rely on His promises and say them — Ito ourselves and others and to God.

**Psalm 32:6–11** (ESV) Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

**Proverbs 17:22** (ESV) A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** (ESV) In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

**Romans 4:7** (ESV) Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;

**Ephesians 4:32** (NIV) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** (NIV) Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

*See also:*

**Psalm 63** (ESV) O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is

no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

**Psalm 95** (ESV) Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.” Therefore I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter my rest.

**Isaiah 58:10–12** (NIV) and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

**Galatians 5:22** (ESV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

### **What Does This Mean for Me?**

Do I praise God when things aren't going well?

Why should I? **Answers will vary. Possible answers: I need to pray to be connected to God.**

**God tells me to pray at all times and in all circumstances. Prayer leads to a peaceful heart. Prayer leads me to forgive as God has forgiven me.**

Do I speak well of others who have hurt me?

**Answers will vary. Possible answers: Most of us have a tendency to tell what others have done wrong to us when we should be going to the Lord to ask for His guidance to readily forgive them as He forgives us.**

Whom do I hurt most when I don't? **One who does not speak well of others hurts himself most, damages his own reputation, and gives his heart and words over to sin.**

It is good to be humble, but some think that means to speak judgmentally about oneself. Do I speak in a demeaning way about myself? **Answers will vary.**

**Possible answers: God created and forgives each of us, tells us we are chosen, loved, and His children. Just as we should not speak unkindly about another of His creations, we should not put ourselves down, either. This does not mean we should elevate ourselves above others, but we shouldn't put ourselves down in an effort to be "humble."**

How do I encourage others? **Answers will vary.**

Does what I say rely on how I am feeling that day — sometimes praise, sometimes self-loathing, sometimes criticism, sometimes \_\_\_\_\_?

**Answers will vary. Relying on feelings to tell me what to do or say in a given situation will often lead me into trouble — with relationships and circumstances. I need to stay away from that temptation to sin.**

How can that change? I can make a list of passages that talk about how God feels about each of His children — how He feels about *me*. (There are hundreds.) **If time permits, look up these passages to get started on your list. What does each one say to you? This is "homework," unless you have a lot of time for the study.**

**II Cor. 5:17–18      Romans 6:11      Psalm 34:1–4**  
**I Peter 5:6–9**

**Phil. 4:8–9**

**I John 3:12–20**

**Proverbs 31:10–30      Jeremiah 29:11–13**

**I Corinthians 2:7      James 1:19–20**

**Galatians 5:22–23      Matthew 5:13–16**

I can read my list on a regular basis.

### **EXERCISING FAITH**

#### **What Do I Think?**

How do I distinguish between *discipline and punishment*? **Answers will vary. Discipline is meant for training and our good. Punishment is restrictive or punitive action for wrongs committed.**

When faced with a task, what do I do to prepare? **Answers will vary. Some may just "take things as they come" or "do what comes naturally." Others will make a plan of action: an outline, a tentative plan, or a plan outlining every detail.**

When on a diet or exercise regimen, what problems arise? **Fatigue, boredom, anger, other commitments, temptations**

How do I combat those problems? **I can't always; prayer; distract myself by other activity or more training (when exercising)**

What happens if I give up? **The goal will not be met.**

What happens if I don't? **Slimmer body, more toned body, healthier body**

#### **What Does God Say?**

**Ephesians 6:10–20** (NIV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all

the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

**Proverbs 3:11–12** (NIV) My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

**Matthew 9:5–6** (ESV) For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- he then said to the paralytic -- "Rise, pick up your bed and go home."

**Romans 15:1–2** (NIV) We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.

**I Corinthians 9:24–27** (NIV) Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

**Galatians 5:7–10** (NIV) You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.

**Galatians 5:16, 22–26** (ESV) But I say walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have  
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crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

**Philippians 4:11b–13** (ESV) I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all thing through Christ who gives me strength.

**Hebrews 12:7–11** (NIV) Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined — and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

**James 1:2–7** (NIV) Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds,<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

**I Peter 5:8** (ESV) Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

*Additional verses:*

**Nehemiah 4:11–17** (ESV) And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among

them and kill them and stop the work.” At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.” So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.” When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

**Hebrews 12:1–3ff** (NIV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

**Matthew 11:28–30** (NIV) “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

### ***What Does This Mean for Me?***

Running the race with armor? How is this done? **Cite the Matthew 28 passage in the additional verses.**

Why do I need the armor to run? From what do I need protection? **Answers may vary (devil, self-indulgence, laziness, hard heartedness are possible answers)**

What is my plan for running the race? **Answers will vary.**

What is the Holy Spirit’s plan for my race?

**Answers will vary and most likely refer to Bible passages in this study.**

If I don’t think I can “run,” how can I still “rise up and walk”? **Answers will vary.**

**Possible answers: Some may feel they are not ready to run the race because they are only taking baby steps at this time. Others may have been through a recent crisis (health, death, circumstances) and feel exhausted. Each one is still running the race — no matter how she feels or what her energy level is.**

How does running or walking joyfully free me to be forgiving? to live forgiven? **(Look at previous Bible passages.)**

## **LIVING THE ABUNDANT LIFE—LIVING FORGIVEN**

### ***What Do I Think?***

To me, *living forgiven* means \_\_\_\_\_. **Individual answers should be encouraged.**

I know I can do this — even if I haven’t in the past — because **God loves me, died for me, forgives me, strengthens me, makes His home in me, gives me the fruit of the Spirit, sanctifies me, justifies me (other answers are possible).**

### ***What Does God Say?***

**Matthew 6:14–15** (NIV) For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

**Matthew 5:3–12** (NIV) “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the

same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**John 14:16–18** (ESV) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

**Romans 8:26–28** (ESV) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**I Corinthians 3:16–17** (ESV) Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

**II Corinthians 3:12–18** (ESV) Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

**Colossians 1:11** (ESV) May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

**Jude 1:24–25** (ESV) Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you

blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

## **WE ARE A FORGIVEN PEOPLE!**

*See also:*

**Ecclesiastes 8:15** (ESV) And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

**Hebrews 10:34** (ESV) For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

**3 John 1:4** (ESV) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

**1 Peter 2:1–5** (ESV) So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

### ***What Does This Mean for Me?***

I can study Luther's Small Catechism — Third Article of the Creed: “I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength ...”

I can study the Scriptures: “I’ll say what God says about me and refrain from negativity.”

I can forgive quickly — pray immediately to forgive — even when I don’t really want to. God can change my heart through His Spirit, through His Word, and through my listening to Him.

I can receive others with joy — even if they aren’t my favorite people.

I can accept forgiveness: I won’t let guilt or false humility eat away at me.

I can trust God to fulfill His promises. When I don't forgive and accept forgiveness, I'm not really trusting Him.

I can press on to win the race — in full armor!

I can realize the Devil will be there to fight me. I will pray to be prepared.

I can live the abundant life — no matter what my mood is: I can have Joy in Sorrow — in frustration — in thankfulness and blessings — Joy in Each Day.

A joy-filled heart is what God desires for me. His Joy leads to peace. His Peace and Joy lead to a forgiving heart. His forgiveness and a forgiving heart lead to a joy-filled life — a forgiving life. I can live forgiven!

**Living forgiven here on earth is not to fight against those who don't agree with us, and not only to glorify our God in heaven, but to devote our lives to pleasing God, to learning to seek His face, to learning to think as God thinks, and to see ourselves and others through His eyes — in His peace and His joy.**

### **Closing**

**Closing Prayer:** *O Lord, You have given me life. You have given me freedom to forgive as You have forgiven me. I praise You for teaching me that Your yoke is easy and that my burden is light. I praise You for letting me see the joy in people and things who may not seem appealing — at first. I praise You for teaching me to love, for You are love. I praise You for teaching me that You can always lead me to follow You better. I praise You that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Let others see a hint of how You love them when they see me for, as Your child, I am to be Your reflection. What greater joy can there be? I praise You, O Lord, for never giving up on me and for being my wonderful, holy, and gracious God. Amen*

**Sing** or say a hymn of praise together before you leave: “Where Charity and Love Prevail” (LSB #845) or “We Praise You, O God” (LSB #785, LW #494, TLH #568).