

# Learning for L.I.F.E. Bible Studies

God's Story or God's Word gives us LIFE (John 6:63)! His Word is more than enough (Psalm 62:5). And just as He speaks to me, He can and will speak to You (John 10:27-28, Jeremiah 33:3). As a matter of fact, He desires to commune with you (Psalm 149:4)!

These series of Bible Studies will help you experience LIFE more abundantly (John 10:10); fully equipped, enlightened and empowered so that you may better love, know, reflect and serve God (Hebrews 13:21).

It is my prayer, that God's Story and its impact on My Story, will serve to transform Your Story so that you too can experience greater knowledge, understanding, wisdom, renewal and a desire to then share the good news with others!

God can and will speak to YOU! God's Word can be alive and active for YOU! YOU can receive revelation! YOU can obtain discernment! You can possess Godly wisdom! And through the light of GOD'S story, YOUR story can be transformed!

Learning for Your  
Liberation Inspiration Fortification Edification

## HOW TO BENEFIT FROM THE LIFE LESSONS

The LIFE Bible Studies seek to arrive at the heart of the Bible for women of color, which is to develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

To that end, all of the Bible Studies are organized under four major categories: LOVE GOD, KNOW GOD, REFLECT GOD and SERVE GOD. And within each of these categories you will find activities, devotionals, and reflective prompts and questions designed to equip, enlighten and empower you.

The Format for the LIFE Bible Studies is as follows:

**Be Equipped** - Each series begins with an opportunity for you to explore and make meaning of God's Word for yourself. This section is designed to get you in the Word. It is designed to support a greater understanding of God's Word and to provide space for you to receive revelations and insights regarding God's Word as led by the Holy Spirit.

**The format of the "Be Equipped" section is as follows:**

- **Receive:** You will be prompted to pray, asking God to prepare your heart and mind to receive the right message as you read His Word.
- **Read:** Excerpts from The Bible are provided. These texts or passages of scripture have been selected as a representation of the particular theme or topic being explored. You will then be asked to engage in some way with the text, using one of the Study Approaches described in the Resources section of [mauriministries.org](http://mauriministries.org)
- **Reflect:** This time of reflection provides questions and prompts to encourage the passage(s) to speak to you, to become alive for you (Hebrews 4:12).
- **Record observations and application:** You are encouraged to record your insights and questions as well as the ways you will apply what you've learned to your life.

**Be Enlightened** - Each series contains several LIFE Lessons in which I share My Story or my journey through God's Word. The LIFE Lessons are designed to provide an example of how I've come to make sense of God's Word through prayer, through the study of His Word, through music, through reflection, through the guidance of others, and through living (or attempting to live) His Word. It is my desire that my experiences and insights support to deepen your understanding and application of God's Word along your life's journey. I invite you to experience My Story as a reflection of God's working in my life.

**The format for the LIFE Lessons is as follows:**

- **Introduction** – This section provides the context in which the LIFE Lesson was written and identifies the themes or concepts to be addressed.
- **Scripture** – This serves as the foundational text for the Lesson. It can also serve as a text for your memorization as you seek to hide God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).
- **Lessons Learned** – This section provides insights, understandings, and revelations that I've received from the Word of God.
- **Lessons Lived** – This section provides practical and actionable practices you can employ to support not only the understanding of God's Word but the living of His Word (Luke 11:28).
- **Reflections** – This time of reflection provides questions and prompts to encourage the passage(s) to speak to you. The following questions are included in every LIFE Lesson with additional questions provided that speak directly to the theme or concept being addressed.

- How does the [identified scripture] speak to you?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
  - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?
- **Playlist** – Here I provide songs that have served to encourage me. The songs selected are deemed relevant to the theme or concept being addressed and it is my desire that they encourage you as you process, digest, and apply what's been shared. I encourage you to listen, and let the music infiltrate your soul. And I also encourage you to read the lyrics and obtain a message from the music.
- **Prayer** – I close every LIFE Lesson with a prayer, and I encourage you to pray it as well.

**Be Empowered** – Here's the exciting part! Each series ends with an opportunity for you to practice crafting and sharing your story. I know, I know, this might be scary for some, but in this section, I provide various activities and reflective exercises to support the writing, re-writing and/or sharing of Your Story. This section provides you the opportunity and platform to practice and practice will only make for better practice as we're all a work in progress. Let's learn and grow together!

### How to Use the LIFE Lessons

To get the most benefit from this journey, I recommend the following:

- **Begin in prayer always.** Pray for God's guidance as He leads you to greater understanding of His Word.
- **Read God's Story first, before reading the LIFE Lessons.** Allow God's Word to speak to you without the bias of my thoughts or the thoughts and opinions of others.
- **Engage with The LIFE Lessons.** Contemplate the reflection questions and let the selected songs for each study fill you as you commit to living the principle(s) being addressed.
- **Share your experience, your questions, your thoughts, etc.** with me and other women committed to this journey via the comment section or on other social media venues such as Twitter and Facebook.
- **End in prayer always.** Pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17). Ask God to guide your journey as you commit to a life surrendered to Him.

May God bless you as you seek to know Him more completely and intimately!

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*LEARNING FOR LIFE: BIBLE STUDY  
WHO GOD IS*

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# KNOW GOD – WHO GOD IS

## Introduction

In my quest to know God, to truly, truly know God, I determined that I would read through the Bible in a year. I would begin at Genesis and then read chronologically, using a lens of the Hebrew language (The Hebrew Greek Alignment Bible) and an African Heritage perspective (The African American Heritage Study Bible).

I was excited, to say the least. I established a set time each day for my study. I arranged the perfect setting: candles, soft music, a beautiful view, and all of my study tools. And on Day One, I opened my Bible and began with Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God..."

Five days later, I was still in this same place. It was at this moment that I realized that completion in a year was a bit ambitious. After all, each verse (or portion of a verse) could evoke a study all its own. Hence, I surrendered my schedule and plan and allowed God to lead (*For more information regarding ways to study the Bible, see LIFE Lessons, Know God, Study to Show Thyself Approved*). I listened intently for revelation and new insights from God. I pondered as long as He asked me to. I made my study more of a quest to **KNOW HIM** than simply to know about Him.

And the journey has been the most amazing, captivating, dizzying, and thrilling journey of my life. The Bible, for the first time, became alive for me! I finally began to understand what it meant to be living and breathing. And as the Word became alive, so did my God!

The LIFE Lessons that follow explore principles and practices that will support you in genuinely KNOWING God. We'll begin with God's Word as you explore the concept of "**knowing and being known**." And after having read and reflected upon God's Story, I invite you to experience My Story as a reflection of God's Word and workings in my life. Finally, I encourage you to engage in various reflective exercises to support the writing, re-writing and sharing of Your Story.

I pray that My Story, in the light of God's Story, will be the catalyst to transform Your Story.

From my heart to yours,

Davenia 

# Introduction

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that women of God may be complete and equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

**God can and will speak to YOU! God's Word can be alive and active for YOU! YOU can receive revelation! YOU can obtain discernment! You can possess Godly wisdom! And through the light of God's Story, YOUR Story can be transformed!**

I have a great desire to run and shout from the rooftops about the way God has been moving in my life. And while I believe that God has called me to share my testimony using my gifts as a writer, I don't want to become another voice interpreting God's Word for you (as so many others had become for me). Sure, I'm humbled by the opportunity to share, and I'm excited to engage in dialogue and exchange with you. But truth be told, if you only read God's Story and received insights and revelations from Him alone, I wouldn't be offended. I'd actually be delighted because God's Word is all you need. His Word is more than enough. And just as He speaks to me, He can and will speak to you. In fact, He desires to speak to you. God's Story provides you the opportunity and guidance to take that step into His Word.

Every LIFE Lesson begins with God's Story. I have selected passages and stories directly from the Word of God that I think are related to the topic being explored. I then invite you to read and explore God's Word for yourself.

I've provided a method that you can use as you grow in knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Use it or not. Just don't miss the point of getting into God's Word. The method, adapted from Pastor Damien Johnson of the Seabrook Seventh-day Adventist Church, is as follows:

- 1. Receive:** Ask God to prepare your heart and mind to receive the right message as you read His Word. Pray this prayer as you examine God's Word.
- 2. Read:** Read selected passages from God's Word to gain more knowledge, understanding and wisdom.
- 3. Reflect:** Allow the passage(s) to speak to you by meditating on the words. Ask and answer the following SPACES questions:
  - a. Is there **Sin** to confess?
  - b. Is there a **Promise** to claim?
  - c. Is there an **Attitude** to change?
  - d. Is there a **Command** to obey?
  - e. Is there an **Example** to follow?
  - f. What do you **See**, and how does it apply to your life?
- 4. Record observations and application:** Record your insights and questions as well as the ways you will apply what you've learned to your life.

It is my prayer that God's Story and its impact on My Story will transform Your Story so that you too can experience greater knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and renewal, as well as a desire to share it with others.

## Be Equipped – Who God Is

1. **Receive:** Ask God to prepare your heart and mind to receive the right message as you read His Word. Pray this prayer as you examine God's Word.

*Dear Heavenly Father, I ask that Your Holy Spirit guide me in all truth as I begin to study Your Word. Cause the obscure and confusing things to become clear. Give me deeper levels of insight and application in my daily living. Let this insight and understanding of Your Word multiply my hunger, thirst and delight for Your Spirit and Your Word in the deepest places of my soul. Bless me with the courage and strength that I need to heed Your Word and to follow it faithfully. In the most holy and precious name of Jesus, I pray, AMEN.*

2. **Read: Conduct a word study of the concept – To know and be known.**

Then engage in the following:

- Identify the definitions and meanings of the word.
- Identify where the word is used in the Bible and pay attention to the following:
  - Where does the word first appear?
  - How often does it appear?
  - In which books of the Bible is it found? In which books is it used most frequently?
  - Which writers or characters use the word?
  - Where is it used?
  - In what context is it used?
  - How does each writer/character define or describe the word?

3. **Reflect:**

- Summarize the main lessons learned.
- How does the phrase "to know and be known" expand your understanding of who God is?
- How does the phrase "to know and be known" and what you've learned apply to your daily life?
- How will you apply what you've learned to your life going forward?

4. **Record:** Record observations and application: Record your insights and questions as well as the ways you will apply what you've learned to your life.

What are your personal **LIFE** Lessons?

- **Liberation:** What new insights gained have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
- **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
- **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
- **Edification:** How might you share your story to edify others and bring glory to God?

Model Receive, Read, Reflect and Record From Pastor Damein Johnson, Seabrook Seventh-day Adventist Church

# Be Enlightened – In the Beginning God

My journey to read the Bible and to better Know God began in Genesis 1. My plan was to get through Chapter 1, but as I started to read, I got stuck right here on Genesis 1:1, ***In the beginning God***. I must have read this line a thousand times, a text I usually pass over quickly, taking for granted that God is the Creator and we are His creatures. But it was this reading, at this moment, that I realized I had completely missed the message from God about Himself contained in this one little verse. Reading it this time brought forth new insights and a deeper intimacy with Him.

## Scripture

Genesis 1:1 – ***In the beginning God*** created the heaven and the earth.z

## Lessons Learned

Good writers know that the opening line of a book must capture the reader's attention, whet their appetite for more, and compel them to read on. The mood and the theme are introduced, and the main character's nature, point of view, and voice are established.

The Bible's opening doesn't begin with a long preamble or introductory statement. Instead, we are thrust into the Biblical story, with the opening line, ***"In the beginning God,"*** which grounds God's existence as a foregone conclusion. The Bible doesn't set out to discuss or defend God's existence and authority. It simply states as fact that God was and God is. God alone was and existed before the heavens and earth, man and the hosts of angels, and even before time itself. ***"In the beginning God"*** also gives us the assurance, confidence, and faith in the God who is (Revelation 21:6). ***"In the beginning God"*** affirms His dependence on nothing outside of Himself. It declares that there never was a time when God did not exist, and there never will be a time when He will not be. ***"In the beginning God"*** created everything out of nothing, spoke and it was so, formed man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into humanity the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). ***"In the beginning God"*** is a bold declaration of God, His power and His wisdom (Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31).

## ***"In the beginning God"***

## Lessons Lived

A story that ends in the same place it began is typically called a cyclical narrative. So we can characterize the Bible as a cyclical narrative, a story that begins and ends with God (Genesis 1:1, Revelation 22:20-21). And this is how our story, in the light of God's story, should be as well. Our stories should begin and end with God, for without God, our lives have no meaning, no hope. The middle of our story would simply be filled with pointless drama and action.

So the beginning and the end of our stories are covered. The middle is where we come in and serve as co-authors. It's here in the middle where we reach the climax or turning point of our stories and where our values will be tested. It's here where we decide if we will live for the protagonist or the antagonist. Life in the middle is our time to shine!

And if the middle of your story is good, it will serve as a witness to others. They'll be curious to know how your story began, and they'll look forward to how it might end.



**"In the beginning God"** should give you the courage to make the middle of your story great! Make the middle matter. Choose to be on the winning side and live the middle in confident trust of the One who paged your beginning and the One who has secured your ending.

### Reflections

- How does Genesis 1:1 speak to you?
- What are your thoughts regarding God being the beginning and the ending of your life story?
- What characteristics of God are most meaningful to you? Site Bible verses to support your characterizations.
- How might you "live in the middle" to secure your ending with God?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
  - **Edification:** How might you share your story to edify others and bring glory to God?

### Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from my playlist that remind me of Who God Is. Listen and allow the music to infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- God of Wonder by Third Day Worship – [God Of Wonders Third Day Worship Video w lyrics](#)
- Our God is an Awesome God by Rich Mullins – [Our God is an Awesome God!](#)

### Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, You, oh Lord, are the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who shows no partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17). You are abundant in strength, and your understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5). I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forevermore. You are great, my Lord, and greatly to be praised (Psalm 145:1-3). You are alpha and omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 21:6), and I put my trust in You! In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

# Be Enlightened - God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

I'm still at the phrase, "***In the beginning God.***" As I began to understand that God is the Creator of the universe and that God is, was, and is to come and that God is my beginning and my end, I sought to know Him even more intimately. Who exactly is this God who was there in the beginning? And that question led to my study of the Trinity. Now, I won't pretend to fully understand the doctrinal intricacies of the Trinity. And again, these studies aren't designed to be deep theological inquiries; rather, they are glimpses of my understanding and the revelations received from God's Word and its impact on my life.

With that said, the way that I've come to understand the Trinity is to compare it to the composition of an apple. The apple is made up of three parts – the core, the flesh and the skin. Each component has different purposes and characteristics, and each can be separate, but each part is an apple.

I think of God the same way, but way, way deeper and bigger. There is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with each of the Trinity being completely and truly divine. There is plurality within God's Oneness. Each person is distinct in the roles they take on in God's works and in the ways they relate to one another and each of us. Yet, amidst the distinctions of the Three, God is One essence, not a jumble of parts put together to form God. They each are God, reflecting a perfect, loving fellowship of Three in the being of One.

## Scripture

**John 15:26** – "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

## Lessons Learned

My feeble attempt to understand the Trinity led me to apples. So don't take my word for it. Spend time in the Word, gaining your own understanding of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Hopefully, these texts can get you started.

## God the Father

- Creator: Genesis 1 and 2
- The Giver and Sustainer of Life: Isaiah 2:22, Job 34:14-15, Isaiah 42:5
- Compassionate and Gracious: 2 Corinthians 1:3, Psalm 86:15, 116:5, Ephesians 2:7-8, 2 Peter 3:9
- Transforms: Proverbs 21:1, Philippians 1:6, Revelation 21:5, Jeremiah 18:1-6, Ezekiel 11:19, 36:25-27, Psalm 51:10, Galatians 2:20
- Is Wise/Wisdom: Job 12:13, Isaiah 40:28, Romans 11:33, Psalm 104:24,147:5, Daniel 2:20
- Is Love: John 3:16, I John 3:1,4:7-8,16,19, Song of Solomon 8:6-7
- Is Just and Merciful: Daniel 9:4, Psalm 86:15, 103:8, Lamentations 3:22, Exodus 34:6, Ephesians 2:4-5, Titus 3:5,
- Is Faithful: Deuteronomy 7:9, Lamentations 3:23, I Corinthians 10:13, I John 1:9, Numbers 23:19, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 10:23, Psalm 33:4, 36:5, Exodus 34:6, I Peter 4:19
- Omnipresent (in our midst): Zephaniah 3:17, Jeremiah 23:24, Psalm 46:1,139:7-12, Hebrews 13:5
- Omniscient: Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 139:1-6, Isaiah 55:8-9

- Omnipotent (Is Power): Psalm 24:8, Jeremiah 32:27, Ephesians 1:19, Romans 1:16, Philippians 4:13, I Corinthians 10:13, Isaiah 40:28, I Chronicles 29:11-12, Revelation 19:6
- Steadfast: Malachi 3:6, James 1:17, Hebrews 13:8, Numbers 23:19, Isaiah 40:8, Psalm 102:25-27, Deuteronomy 7:9
- Is Truth: I John 1:5, Hebrews 6:18, John 1:1, Proverbs 30:5, Psalm 25:5
- Forgiver of Sin: I John 1:9, Isaiah 55:7
- Redeemer: Romans 6:23, Zephaniah 3:17, Jeremiah 50:34
- He is Righteous: Psalm 145:17, Job 4:17
- Infallible – Psalm 136
- Holy: Isaiah 6:3
- Deliverer: I Samuel 14:39
- Supreme: Psalm 50:1
- Eternal: Genesis 21:33
- Victorious: Revelation 5:5
- He is Sovereign: Genesis 17:1, Psalm 103:19, 115:3, Daniel 4:35, I Timothy 6:15
- Our Provider: Philippians 4:19, Romans 8:32, James 1:17, Genesis 22:14, Psalm 37:4, 104:14-15
- Our Healer: Psalm Exodus 15:26, Psalm 103:3
- Our shield and exceeding great reward: Genesis 15:1
- The Beginning and the End/Infinite – Revelation 1:8, 21:6, 22:13, Psalm 147:5

#### **God the Son**

- In the form of God (Philippians 2:6, John 10:30, Colossians 2:9)
- Took on the likeness of man (Philippians 2:7, Galatians 4:4, I John 4:2)
- Relates to us and our struggles (Mark 6:3, Hebrews 4:15,
- Redeemed Us (Hebrews 2:9, Ephesians 1:7, Galatians 1:4, Galatians 3:13, Isaiah 44:22, John 3:16, John 10:10)
- Mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 9:15,
- Is Holy and Righteous (I John 3:7, I Peter 5:15-16, Acts 3:14, Hebrews 7:26)
- Is Pure (I John 3:3, Hebrews 7:26, 2 Corinthians 5:21, I Peter 1:19)
- He loves (Ephesians 3:18-19, 5:1-2, Romans 8:35, 2 Corinthians 5:14, John 13:34, 15:13, John 8:1-11)
- He forgives (Colossians 3:13, Luke 5:24, 7:48-49, Ephesians 1:6)
- He is compassionate (Philippians 2:1-2, Colossians 3:12, II Peter 3:9)
- Died for our sins (I Peter 3:18,
- Was a servant: (Mark 10:45, Acts 4:27, Philippians 2:5-8, John 13:4-8, 12-17, Isaiah 49:3-7)
- Spoke truth: John 18:38, Mathew 22:16, Revelation 1:2
- Met the needs of the people: Matthew 15:29-31, Mark 6:31-44
- He Healed (John 4:46-47, 5:1-9, Mark 1:23-28, 30-31, 40-45, Matthew 8:5-13, 23-34, 9:1-8, Luke 8:43-48)
- Performed Miracles: (John 2:1-11, Luke 5:1-11, Matthew 8:23-27, 14:15-21)
- Restored Life: (Luke 7:11-18, Matthew 9:18-26, John 11:1-46)

#### **God the Holy Spirit**

- Primary work is to bring glory and honor to Christ – John 15:26, John 16:13-14, I John 4:2, Romans 15:19
- He is eternal – Hebrews 9:14
- Gives us life – Psalm 104:30, Romans 8:11, John 6:63

- He Inspired and enabled the writing of the Bible – 2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16
- Knows fully the things of God – I Corinthians 2:11
- Reveals the things of God to us – 2 Corinthians 2:9-12, John 16:13, Heb. 3:7; 10:15, I Peter 1:12, Job 32:8
- Guides us – Romans 8:1-2, Galatians 5:16-18, 25, Acts 8:26,29, Acts 16:6, Romans 8:14, Matthew 4:1,
- Reconciles us all into one body – I Corinthians 12:13
- Speaks to us (spokesperson for God of prophecy): 2 Samuel 23:2, Acts 1:16, I Timothy 4:1
- He witnesses – John 15:26
- He loves – Romans 15:30
- Call us to work – Acts 13:2, Acts 8:26-40
- Empowers us – Numbers 27:16, I Samuel 11:16, Acts 1:8, Acts 4:31, Acts 6:10, I Thessalonians 1:5, Luke 1:35, I Corinthians 2:4, Zechariah 4:6-7
- Helps us pray/intercedes on our behalf – Romans 8:26-27
- Gives us gifts/talents – I Corinthians 12:6-11 (gifts to be used to minister I Peter 4:10)

### Lessons Lived

In essence, the Trinity helps me be the version of me God intended. And because I'm such a hot mess, I need all the help I can get. See, because I was born and shaped in iniquity, I could never stand before God the Father on my own. His greatness, His power, and His very presence would overwhelm and consume me (Exodus 33:20). I'd never be good enough, holy enough, worthy enough to please Him (Romans 3:23). My worship would always pale in comparison to the glory and honor due His name (Isaiah 64:6).

But praise God for His Son who bore my sins, died a horrific death, and then rose again to sit at the right hand of God the Father (Luke 22:69). Jesus, the Son of God, serves as my mediator. Now, when God looks at me, He doesn't see my filth and flaws, the defects or the damage. He sees me purified, washed by the blood of the Lamb. I can be presented before Him as one who is holy. And not only that, Jesus, the Son of God, made what seemed utterly impossible possible. He faced temptations, withstood scorn and shame, was misunderstood, experienced pain and sorrow, yet He walked, talked and lived as One Who is righteous (John 1:14). He loved and served (Luke 22:27). He adds nothing and everything (Luke 9:58). And He showed me how I should "live, move and have my very being" in Him while here on this earth (John 13:13-16).

Knowing my tendency to forget the law and the example of Jesus and my inclination to be drawn to sin, God the Father sent God the Spirit to dwell within me, serving as that reminder of how I should live (John 6:63). God the Spirit reveals truths to me (I Corinthians 3:16), guides me (John 14:26), rebukes me (John 16:7-8) and empowers me (Romans 8:26-27).

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Three persons, One God, working together for my good. AMEN!

### Reflections

- How does John 15:26 speak to you?
- How do you describe or have come to understand the Trinity?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?

- **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
- **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
- **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
- **Edification:** How might you share your story to edify others and bring glory to God?

### **Playlist**

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from my playlist that remind me of Who God Is. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- Holy, Holy, Holy by Shane and Shane – [Shane & Shane: Holy, Holy, Holy \(We Bow Before Thee\)](#)

### **Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, how awesome You are! Thank You for being my Creator, my Example and my Waymaker! Thank you for understanding my shortcomings. And despite my mess, thank you for ensuring that I, Your creation, have an example of how I should live and a guide to help me so that I can be presented as holy and unblemished before You. I love You with all my heart, body and soul. In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

## ----God the Father: I AM The Greatest

This has been one of the most difficult posts to write, which is frustrating since I had assumed it would have been the easiest. I'm talking about Who God Is, for Pete's sake! This should be a piece of cake. I mean, He's God! How could the words not just tumble out of me like the gymnast Simone Biles at the 2021 Summer Olympics? You'd think my biggest worry would be how to cut the study from fifty pages to two.

What might the problem be, you ask? The problem is that I can't find sufficient words to describe or explain God's depth, breadth, or magnitude. All the words that come to mind, every word that I've googled or cross-checked via the thesaurus, seem inadequate and overused in their descriptions of so many lesser things.

- Hearing your newborn infant cry for the first time...PRICELESS.
- Flying in a machine, suspended in thin air, making a journey of three thousand miles in five hours (alive, I might add)...INCREDIBLE.
- The taste of a strawberry dipped in chocolate... SIMPLY AMAZING.
- Cheering your favorite football team (Let's go Panthers, 2017 – Woo-hoo!) onto a Super Bowl victory... EXTRAORDINARY.
- Muhammed Ali's calculated and measured analysis of his opponent before even throwing the first punch followed unexpectedly by unfurled jabs mingled with killer right hooks for yet another TKO! And then the infamous Ali Shuffle and a confident declaration, "I am the Greatest!" ... ASTONISHING.
- Being wrapped in the arms of the love of your life as he whispers, "I loved you then, I love you still. I love you now, and I always will"... BREATH TAKING.

See my dilemma now? If these adjectives can be used to describe parenting, flying, food, football, boxing and love, then how could they possibly be adequate enough to describe my God, who is far more incredible, amazing, extraordinary, astonishing, extraordinary, or breathtaking than any experience or emotion I've ever had?

### **Scripture**

Deuteronomy 6:5 – You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

## Lessons Learned

I then sought the Word of God for the characterizations desired, and there He was: God revealed. God in all His splendor and glory. God exceedingly, abundantly beyond anything you or I could ever imagine!

<b>WHO GOD IS... (Supporting Bible Texts):</b>	
<b>CREATOR: Genesis 1 and 2</b>	<b>THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR: Revelation 22:16</b>
<b>HOLY: Isaiah 6:3</b>	<b>INFINITE: Psalm 147:5</b>
<b>ALPHA: Revelation 1:8</b>	<b>DELIVERER: I Samuel 14:39</b>
<b>OMEGA: Revelation 21:6</b>	<b>VICTORIOUS: Revelation 5:5</b>
<b>THE BEGINNING AND THE END: Revelation 22:13</b>	<b>SUPREME: Psalm 50:1</b>
<b>SOVEREIGN: Genesis 17:1</b>	<b>KING OF ALL KINGS: I Timothy 6:15</b>
<b>REDEEMER: Jeremiah 50:34</b>	<b>OMNIPOTENT: Ephesians 1:19</b>
<b>OMNIPRESENT: Jeremiah 23:24</b>	<b>JEHOVAH-JIREH: Philippians 4:19</b>
<b>ROSE OF SHARON: Song 1:17</b>	<b>UNCHANGING: Deuteronomy 7:9</b>
<b>RIGHTEOUS: Job 4:17</b>	<b>INFALLIBLE: Psalm 136</b>
<b>JEHOVAH: Psalm 83:18 (AKJV)</b>	<b>OMNISCIENT: I John 3:20</b>
<b>ETERNAL: Genesis 21:33</b>	<b>TRANSCENDENT: Isaiah 55:8-9</b>
<b>YAHWEH: Genesis 2:4</b>	<b>LOVE: I John 4:8</b>
<b>JEHOVAH-NISSI: Exodus 17:8-16</b>	<b>THE TRINITY: I John 5:7-8</b>
<b>LILY OF THE VALLEY: Song 2:1</b>	<b>THE GREAT I AM: Exodus 3:14</b>

Despite my love of writing, I still can't string the words together in such a way that would make your heart skip a beat; that would tap into all of your senses; that would captivate you and thrust you into realms of spiritual stirrings unlike anything ever experienced before. So I reached out to a wonderful artist and friend, Angela Bryant-Brown and borrowed her amazing rendition of Lord You Are Holy.

Click Here and Be Blessed! [https://youtu.be/qQZQMm\\_IDOI](https://youtu.be/qQZQMm_IDOI)

For more music by Angela Bryant-Brown, visit <https://www.reverbnation.com/angelabryantbrown>

## Lessons Lived

Are you shouting yet? Just knowing that the One who loves you and Who has a plan for your salvation is more amazing, beyond bigger, exceedingly greater, exponentially mightier than anything, than everything, than all things here on earth and in the universe beyond!

Imagine the happiest, most memorable, best experience of your life. Recount how that moment made you feel: happy, full of joy, tickled pink, over the moon ecstatic? Now multiply those feelings times 10,000. And guess what, it still doesn't compare to the love affair you can have with God.

Get to know Him today, as your Redeemer, your Savior, your King of all Kings. And I won't tell if you play the video again while giving God all the praise, honor and glory due to His Holy Name!

## Reflections

- Which of the characteristics of God as described above or in the video resonate with you most? Why?
- What additional characteristics best describe God and what He has meant/means to your life?
- How does having a better understanding of Who God is impact your perspective of life?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
  - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

## Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from my playlist that remind me of Who God Is. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- I Am – [I Am – Eddie James \(Worship Song with Lyrics\)](#)

## Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I come before You today filled with praise and thanksgiving! I enter Your gates with thanksgiving and into Your courts with praise! (Psalm 100:4) I thank you, my great God, for being in my midst because You are a mighty one who can and will save me. Although I'm not worthy, thank you for rejoicing over me with gladness and when I am out of sorts, thank You for quieting me with Your love (Zephaniah 3:17). Thank you for wiping all my debt clean and for offering me eternal life (Romans 3:24). In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.



## -----Jesus, God's Son: Falling In Love With Jesus

One of my favorite songs is Falling in Love with Jesus by Jonathan Butler. And perhaps it's because I am a romantic at heart. I recall "falling in love" as early as third grade. I was "in love" with Clifford Johnson. This straight-A student would have no notes because I was daydreaming about Cliff. My homework was covered in hearts, with Cliff and Davenia inscribed inside them. I sang those silly little jingles like, "Cliff and Davenia sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love. Then comes marriage. Next thing you know, they're pushing a baby carriage." I followed Cliff around the playground. I carried his lunch tray. I gave him my Twinkies and my Nutter Butter Cookies (way before peanut allergies, that is). I was "in love." That is before he tied my ponytails together around the monkey bar and left me stranded on the playground until Ms. Ruby, my teacher, rescued me. Really, we had no clue about love, and sadly many of us today are still clueless.

### Scripture

- John 15:9 – "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in my love."

### Lessons Learned

See, if third-grade crushes were the only examples of love we had, we'd be lost. That's why the Bible gives us a clear example of what it means to "be in love." God the Father sent us God the Son to demonstrate just what love looks like. Jesus loved us so much, He gave up heaven, came here to this cruddy earth, endured scorn, rebuke, hostility, temptation, shame, and our sin; experienced separation from His Father; died a criminal's death on a cross, and was denied the dignity of a decent burial. And you know what? He did all of this for me! Jesus loved me so much that He sacrificed everything so I could have the opportunity to spend eternity in Heaven with Him! Now that's love! Because Jesus loved me so much, He was willing to die for me! How many "Cliffords" out there are willing to give up everything and die for you? Go ahead. I'm waiting. Can't think of any, can you? Nope. Because this kind of all-consuming love can only come from the One Who is Love!

### Lessons Lived

When I start to comprehend Jesus' love for me, I get giddy. Just like with Clifford, I want to please Him. I want to "meditate" on His goodness day and night. I smile for no reason, or none that's obvious to others. I have a pep in my step and a gleam in my eye. I'm so filled up with the love of Jesus. I desire to be just like Him. I begin to love like Him, serve like Him, He and I become one. So go ahead. Fall in love with Jesus. It'll be the best love affair ever imagined!

### Reflections

- How do the texts I John 4:8 and I John 4:16 speak to you?
- How does the revised reading of I Corinthians 13:1-8 speak to you?
- How do you define unconditional love?
- How does the biblical meaning of unconditional love compare to society's definition of love?
- What are your thoughts regarding the concept that God and Love are one? How might this impact your perception of Who God is and what Love means?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?

- **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
- **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
- **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
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### Playlist

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- Falling In Love with Jesus by Jonathan Butler – [Falling In Love With Jesus – Jonathan Butler](#)
- Jesus Loves Me – Whitney Houston – [Whitney Houston: Jesus Loves Me](#)

### Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I come before You today an empty vessel, longing to be filled with Your Holy Spirit. Teach me to love as You have loved me. Help me keep Your Word so that I may experience the love of the Father forevermore (John 14:23). Thank you for the gift of forgiveness, for even a sinner like me (Romans 5:8), and I pray that nothing – not death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation – separate me from your love (Romans 8:38). In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

## -----The Holy Spirit: He Leadeth Me

Musician Phil Spector experienced a remarkable rise and a more astonishing fall. Spector was a visionary, creating a sound never heard before, thus enjoying fame and wealth. However, in an interview with Telegraph magazine (2002), he indicated, "People tell me they idolize me, want to be like me. But I tell them, 'Trust me, you don't want my life.' It hasn't been a very pleasant life. I've been a very tortured soul. I have not been at peace with myself." Spector, like many of us, lost that lovin' feelin'.

### Scripture

John 14:16-17 – "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."

### Lessons Learned

How easy it is to lose that lovin' feeling. When I first came to Christ, I was in love and on fire for God. I studied my Bible. I went to church. Gospel music filled my car during my long commute. I would readily testify of God's goodness and invite everyone I encountered to come to know Jesus. But after some time, "life got in the way." I treasured sleep more than my morning devotion time. I focused more on "my work" than growing my faith. I got complacent, comfortable, and the "ooey-goey loving feelings" began to wane. Sickness crept in. Several prayers seemed to go unanswered. And then doubt began to sneak up on me. "I did everything you asked." I thought, "So why am I going through this?" My problems seemed bigger than God's promises.

But God, in His infinite wisdom, knew that we, because of our humanness, would need a reminder of God's love and presence (John 15:26). He knew that we'd forget His promises, and we'd begin to question that which we could not see and touch (John 10:22-25, John 14:8-11). We would need a comforter that we could feel. We would need a holy nudge when we got off track. So God gave us the Holy Spirit.

Look at the example of John, the disciple. John followed Jesus faithfully. He was one of the twelve chosen disciples (Matthew 4:21). He was referred to as one of the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). He was referred to as the beloved of Christ (John 21:7). And he was the only disciple present at the crucifixion and was commissioned by Jesus to watch over Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25-27). During John's ministry, he also spread the gospel message throughout Samaria (Acts 8:14) and Asia Minor (Revelation 1:11).

Eventually, John was captured as part of a persecution campaign by the Roman Emperor Domitian. John was ultimately sentenced to Patmos (Revelation 1:9), a small, rocky and barren area where many criminals of Rome were sent to serve out their prison terms. The conditions were harsh, and often prisoners had to work in the mines with little food and protection against the elements.

Exile on Patmos separated John from the church of Ephesus, cut him off from the work of in Asia Minor and silenced his preaching. His banishment could be characterized by isolation and loneliness, separation from people he cared about, and a disruption to the routines of daily living. Patmos brought John to a standstill, the prime circumstances for "losing that lovin' feeling."

## Lessons Lived

Given his circumstances, John could have fallen into a state of discouragement and despair, and self-pity and sadness. But instead of Patmos being a place of exile, Patmos became a point of spiritual connection and communion with God. It was here in the midst of chaos and hardship that John received revelation from God, a vision of Jesus, and a glimpse of his eternal future while he was in the Spirit (Revelation 1:2). Remember, John was present at Pentecost and experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). John had heard Jesus' words in John 14:26: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

So it was here at Patmos that John, through the comfort and teaching of the Holy Spirit, was able to hold on to that lovin' feeling. Despite despair, he was assured of God's presence and plan through the working of the Holy Spirit.

And just as the Holy Spirit was available to John, the Holy Spirit dwells within each one of us and is available for our comfort, for our guidance, and for a reminder that God is ever-present and has a plan for our salvation. Sometimes, the noise and busyness of life can block out God's voice. But like John, it's in our returning and rest that we can reconnect and experience peace (Isaiah 30:15). It's in the quietness that the Holy Spirit can reconnect us, recharge us, and revive us.

The Holy Spirit is just a prayer away. "Help me, Holy Spirit" has been my prayer many a day. The Holy Spirit is ever-present, but we must learn how to "hear His voice." We must learn to recognize how He speaks to us. For me, when I'm off course or need to consider something, I get a "feeling in my gizzard, my gut." When I'm in despair, I get a warmth that surrounds and fills me. Or He speaks to me by giving me a thought or an idea (usually between 2 am – 4 am). I have asked God if 5 am – 7 am might be a better time, but so far, His timing stands. Or He impresses upon my heart to say or do something. The Holy Spirit speaks, and I am learning to be tuned to His voice so that I might dwell in that "lovin' feeling" always.

The Holy Spirit can give us peace during our problems and patience during the pause. The Holy Spirit is on our side, rooting for us, cheering us on. Hold on, and let the Spirit work and live in you!

## Reflections

- How does John 14:16-17 speak to you?
- How does the Holy Spirit speak to you?
- What's been your "Patmos" experience? Did the Holy Spirit intervene, and if so, how?
- Describe what prevents you from hearing from God? What supports you hearing from God?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
  - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

### **Playlist**

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from my playlist that remind me of Who God Is. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- Holy Spirit Come Fill This Place – CeCe Winans – [Holy Spirit Come and Fill this Place](#)

### **Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, I am a temple of Your Holy Spirit. He dwells in me; therefore, I am never alone. Help me to be in tune with His leading, His guidance, and His wisdom. Help me to honor You always in how I think, speak, go, and do. You, Father, loved me so much that You gave me Your Holy Spirit to remind me of Your majesty and presence. I receive what You have given, and I will keep that lovin' feeling forevermore! In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

## -----The Word of God: God's Love Letter to You

Some of you may be old enough to remember getting letters in the mail. Not a text or email. Not a tweet or a FB shoutout. I'm talking about a letter, beautifully crafted on stationary, penned with ink, sealed in an envelope and delivered to her place of residence. Oh, how I loved getting letters, especially while in college. My good ol' faithful dad sent me such letters at least monthly. His letters would update me on the happenings at home, share some encouragement and advice, and always express his love for and pride in me, his daughter.

And while these letters from my earthly Father were awesome, God's love letter, the Bible, is awesomeness on steroids. And it's from this position, the position that the Bible is indeed a love story penned by God, written just for me, that I have grown to know and love God more deeply and intimately.

### Scripture

**John 1:1** – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**II Timothy 3:16-17** – All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

### Lessons Learned

Now, I'd be naïve to diminish the Bible to "just a simple love letter from a loving Father to His daughter." Because the Bible is so much more complex and intricate than that, it's a breathing, living, powerful (II Timothy 3:16-17), timeless, compelling and relevant (Hebrews 13:8, II Peter 1:3), inspired Word of God (II Peter 1:21) with the ability to penetrate the heart (Hebrews 4:12) and transform lives (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Bible is the ultimate judge of our beliefs, thinking, and actions, guiding us as to how we are to live until the return of Christ (Isaiah 59:21). The Bible intertwines the sacred and secular history into one powerful and awesome story of salvation. It is a historical record of the relationship between a particular people and a "particular God" and how the specialness of that relationship has affected mankind (Felder, *The African American Guide to the Bible*).

The Bible wasn't written by one author, at one specified time, in a particular order. It was written over a period of decades. The Bible was written from a position of the author's "present-day truth and experiences." When not foretelling future prophesies or writing direct messages from God, the authors wrote about events that had already occurred. So they were writing not only through the Divine guidance of the Holy Spirit but through their cultural, social, political, and personal lenses.

The Bible is a beautiful love story inspired by a remarkable God who understood that this story needed to inform and move people. It needed to move people to the point of compassion, commitment and transformation. God had to engage our hearts as well as our heads.

So like all great stories, this love story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has settings, characters, plot twists, and themes. And each story contributes to a grander story, the story of our salvation. As with all good stories, we find the Bible packed with mystery, beauty, war, suffering, victory, betrayal, love, hate, death, life, forgiveness, grace, and redemption. The Bible is filled with people and tells the

stories of families, friends, lovers, sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, nations, kings, queens, slaves, servants, the rich and the poor. And the Bible is filled with poetry, songs and nuggets of wisdom. From <https://www.faithgateway.com/bible-story/#.YB6sAOhKhPY>

### Lessons Lived

I could go into greater detail about the make-up of the Bible (The Old and New Testaments, the authors, the literary approaches, the major themes, etc.). But for me, what's been most important in my knowing and growing is the reality that God's Word is beautiful and is still just as relevant today as it was yesteryears ago. And when His Word becomes active and living. When it becomes the basis in which I live, move and have my very being (Acts 17:28), well, that's far more superior, more incredible and life-changing than any other exegetical analysis or theological knowledge that I could possess or give.

For me, the Bible is God's love letter to me. A love letter that I can read over and over again. A love letter that encourages, guides, corrects, instructs, comforts, informs, delights, assures and sustains me. A love letter that unveils God's plan for my salvation and eternal life. A love letter from my Heavenly Father, written especially for His beloved daughter.

Don't let the intricate descriptions, lofty explanations, or theological ponderings frighten you or lead you to believe you need a degree, a title, or some special appointment. God can and will speak to you. He can and will give you understanding. I promise this love letter will have you drawing hearts on the border of your homework assignment and will have you singing and smiling in the rain. Read it for yourself, and I promise your life will never be the same again!

### Reflections

- How does II Timothy 3:16-17 speak to you?
- What are some beliefs you've held about the Bible? How have these beliefs shaped your approaches to study, understand and live the Bible?
- How does the view of the Bible as a love letter from your Heavenly Father to you, His beloved daughter, resonate with you?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
  - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

### Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from my playlist that remind me of Who God Is. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- Word of God Speak – Mercy Me – [Word Of God Speak – MercyMe](#)

**Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, Your way is perfect, and Your Word is flawless (Psalm 18:30), and while it may seem too lofty or unapproachable, I know that it's Your love letter to me. So help me, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, to discern and understand Your Word (John 16:13). Make it alive in my heart (Psalm 119:11). Let Your Word be a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path so that I can walk securely in Thee (Psalm 119:105). Teach me, correct me and train me in righteousness so that I will be equipped to do the good work You have prepared for me (II Timothy 3:16-17). In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.



# Be Enlightened - On The Tablet of My Heart

Like many of you, I needed something to do during those many months of "lockdown" during the COVID19 pandemic. Hence, I binged watched a lot of series. How many of you watched the television series 24? Well, I did. I binged, and **24** captivated me. It was full of twists and turns and gut-wrenching, on the edge of your seat drama! You never knew from one episode to the next who would live or who might die, and the good guy wasn't always good, and the bad guy (or girl) was usually decked out in sheep's clothing but was actually a lion, ready to pounce. And I couldn't get enough. Episode after episode, I found myself repeatedly saying, just one more, I have to know how things turn out for Chloe or Kim or Tony or Jack. I lost many a night's sleep and some days of productive work!

## Scripture:

**Romans 15:13** – Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

## Lessons Learned:

I particularly remember one episode during Season 7. Although Jack, in previous seasons, had survived being held hostage, endured major beatings, dodged bullets, and survived explosions, I was sure that this particular episode was destined to be his demise. As the show began, "I am federal agent Jack Bauer, and this is the longest day of my life," I was struck by how frail and near-death Jack looked. See, Jack had been exposed to biochemical weapons of mass destruction and this time it appeared that all hope had been lost. There was no cure, and everyone else who had been exposed had died. By episodes 17 and 18, Jack's health was rapidly deteriorating. I was sure that this would be the one thing that would kill him. I was on pins and needles, and as I anxiously gripped my husband's arm, I proclaimed, "Derrick, this is it. There's no way Jack can come back from this one."

My oh-so-tolerant husband would patiently remind me, "Dee, it's not real." And while I knew that the show was fictional, I had such a hard time remembering this. There were times when I confused the fictional show 24 with reality, like quoting President Palmer as if he were, in fact, our current President. Derrick also pointed out something else. As the credits rolled, he reminded me that the writers, *Robert Cochran, Manny Coto* and *Evan Katz* cared about Jack as much as I did, well, maybe even more since Jack was their livelihood. So since the show was not going off the air anytime soon, I should be assured that Jack would indeed live. And what do you know, Derrick was right. Jack lived to see another season!

What a reality check that last statement Derrick made about the show's writers. See, the authors knew the end of the story. The authors had the power to write a story of life or death; the power to change the fate of the characters. And this caused me to reflect upon my own journey as an author. I, too, had all power over my characters. Did the name "Sue" match the personality of one of my characters? No problem. I could simply change her name to "Lindsey," which better suited her bubbly, nature-loving, millennial personality. Was Seth coming across as too perfect? No problem. I could write in such a way to cast doubt regarding his impeccable characterization. Would Alex leave her husband? Would Barb find passion after 60? Would Shula strangle her mother? As the author, I have complete control over the story being told.

### Lessons Lived:

Reminds me of another author. "Looking unto Jesus, the **author** and **finisher** of our faith...." Hebrews 12:2. Do you get it yet? Are you shouting yet? Well, I, for one, am. See, Jesus knows the end of the story, the end of your story and my story. He knows that Satan is defeated and that Christ has the victory. And as the author of our stories, He can erase our mistakes, give us a new name, and transform our character. I, you, we have the privilege of living happily ever after!

Usually, I detest when someone who's already seen whatever it is I'm watching gives the ending away. But not in the case of The Greatest Love Story Ever Told. See, God's issued a spoiler alert and has told us the end of the story. We win. We are victorious. We will no longer experience hurt, pain, or sadness. We will live eternally with our heavenly Father.

This should give you **HOPE**. Despite all the doom and gloom and the agony and tragedy, we can have HOPE! COV19 and all its variants don't matter. We have **HOPE**. Trump or Biden as President - Doesn't matter. There's **HOPE**. Violence, hatred and racial unrest - Doesn't matter. We have **HOPE**. Oppression and poverty - Thank God, there's still **HOPE**. So don't be discouraged. Don't be afraid for the Bible's filled with promises of **HOPE** (Romans 8:24 and 15:13, Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 39:7, Proverbs 10:28).

And this hope should be the catalyst for our complete surrender.

### Reflections:

- How does Romans 15:13 speak to you?
- What are your thoughts about the text, "Looking unto Jesus, the **author** and **finisher** of our faith" Hebrews 12:2?
- Does knowing that your future is secure give you hope? If so, how might you live your life differently, on the other side of despair?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** : What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
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### Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a few songs from my "Who God Is" Playlist. Listen and let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- God is Able by Smokie Norful - [Smokie Norful - God is able](#)
- My Redeemer Lives by Nicole C. Mullen - [Nicole C. Mullen - My Redeemer Lives](#)

### Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, I come before You with praise and thanksgiving in my heart. Despite how I feel and my circumstances, I acknowledge how awesome You are. Your Word tells me that the antidote to fear and doubt is praise. You said that I should give praise in everything, which means when things are going well and when things hit rock bottom. So here I am, kneeling before Your throne in full adoration and giving honor and glory to Your name. My heart is so heavy right now, but I praise You anyhow because You're my God, and You care about me. In 1 Peter 5:7, You tell me to cast all my cares upon You, and although the situation might not change, Psalm 73:3 tells me that You will be beside and before me, holding me in Your right hand. And even when I can't feel You or sense that You're near, I trust Your Word. My hope is in You oh God (Matthew 28:20). And because You are my hope and because Your promises are true, I surrender my all to You. There is none like You, and I love and adore You. In Your name, I pray, Amen.

# Be Enlightened - Soul Food

## Introduction

One of the things I love, love, love to do is EAT. I love good food. And I particularly love soul food. It's the food I grew up eating. It's the food that fills my belly and warms my heart. Give me some collard greens, mac and cheese, fried fish (and yes, that would be the croaker with the head still attached), turkey wings and gravy, black-eyed peas, fried chicken, grits, some yeast rolls, hushpuppies and anything drenched in butter and you will have one happy girl!

These are the foods that comfort me. That remind me of home. The foods I go to when I'm sad and that I turn to in celebration. The foods that pick me up when I'm down and seemingly right my topsy-turvy world. These foods also contribute to my expanding waist, clogged arteries, lethargy, and the overall feeling of "blah-ness." And when I developed food allergies (too many to name, and quite depressing actually) and varying health challenges, I had to change the way I ate. And physically, I feel so much better. But I felt like I got booted out of my "happy place." I'm sorry. I like Brussel sprouts and all, but they do not compare to a juicy cheeseburger and fries. I missed commiserating with friends over apple cobbler and ice cream. My body was being made whole, yet my soul continued to feel empty.

**Scripture – Matthew 4:4** – But He answered and said, "It is written,' Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

## Lessons Learned

And then it hit me. I was longing for the wrong kind of soul food. See, the smothered chicken wasn't making me feel good. It was simply providing me a temporary high while masking my underlying need. It wasn't the sweet potatoes topped with marshmallows that I needed; it was a deeper, more meaningful connection with the sustainer of my soul.

Real fulfillment comes from God and God alone. His word is a complete meal – milk (I Peter 2:2), bread (Deuteronomy 8:3) and meat (I Corinthians 3:2) – and is sweeter than honey (Psalm 119:103), a joy and a delight that satisfies the soul (Jeremiah 15:16). So let God's Word nourish your soul and give you life (John 6:63). Allow God's Word to be Your portion (Psalm 73:26). Ingest His Word and chew on it until it quenches your thirst, fills you up, and becomes the satisfaction of your every craving and longing (Isaiah 55:2).

## Lessons Lived

Anytime you're tempted or have a craving, FEAST on God's Word (Ezekiel 2:8). One Thing Alone Ministries (onethingalone.com) describes the **FEAST** method this way:

**Focus** – Ask God to focus your heart and mind on Him (Psalm 139:23-24).

**Engage** – Engage with God's Word. Allow it to speak to you (Romans 10:17).

**Assess** – Assess the main idea. Analyze the meaning, the context (Hebrews 4:12).

**Spark** – Ask the Holy Spirit to spark transformation in your life (Galatians 2:20).

**Turn** – Turn your heart and mind towards God in worship. Respond to God. Live His Word (Philippians 2:16, Acts 5:20).

Have an arsenal of scripture that "talks you off the ledge" and gives you comfort, peace and satisfaction (Psalm 119:11). My go-to texts are as follows:

My Comforter – 2 Corinthians 1:3	My Sustainer – Isaiah 46:4
My Hope – Psalm 39:7	My Portion Control – Lamentation 3:24
My Joy – Proverbs 10:28	My Strength – Isaiah 40:29
Filled Abundantly – John 10:10	My Satisfaction – Isaiah 58:11

Finally, a book I recommend is **Made to Crave** by Lysa Terkeurst. This book examines our God-infused need to be filled. Lysa shares how, as a result of sin, we attempt to satiate our cravings with misguided comforts, and what we're really longing for is the only one Who can fill us, and that's God.

Let God's Word be your portion so that you will be spiritually fit to do the will of God and finish His good work (John 4:34)!

### Reflections

- How does Matthew 4:4 speak to you?
- What helps you internalize God's Word?
- How has God's Word satisfied you or manifested itself as being everything that you need?
- How has God's Word served as "soul food" for you?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
  - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

### Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a few songs from my "Who God Is" Playlist. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- Fill My Cup by Jessy Dixon – [Jessy Dixon – Fill My Cup, Lord \[Live\]](#)
- Bread of Heaven – Fred Hammond – [Fred Hammond -Bread of Heaven \[lyrics\]](#)

### Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Deplete me of me, oh God. Then fill me up. Be my portion. Be all that I need. Satisfy me. Quench my thirst. More of You and less of me. In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

# Be Enlightened - Fifty Shades of Love

So I guess by now you know how much I love reading and watching movies. With my hectic, crazy, frantic life, having a two-and-a-half-hour escape into someone else's fantasy world is just enough to help me unwind. But as much as I'd love to switch my brain off during those brief moments of escape and just be – thinking and feeling nothing – it doesn't work. I'm just not wired that way. Much to my chagrin, my mind didn't come with an off switch, which means I analyze everything all the time, even fictional movies and stories.

Another confession. I read *Fifty Shades of Grey* or at least part of it. I wanted to see what all the hoopla was about. I wanted to better understand what was influencing the young ladies I taught. I wanted to better appreciate what was so appealing to young, single women, married women with children, and Christian women, no less. And, as much as I love to read and can generally get through most books pretty quickly, this one I could not. I just couldn't finish it. Not because I'm a prude, but because I felt so sorry for the main character and her warped views about love. In addition, my analytical brain couldn't stop wondering what message this book and movie (like so many others out there) was sending to the world about true love.

## Scripture

**I John 4:8** – Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

**I John 4:16** – So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

## Lessons Learned

The world has taken something defined, ordained, and sanctified by God and has made it twisted and convoluted and these skewed ideas, images, and practices have begun to rewire our thought patterns. These warped perceptions are becoming so entrenched in our values and belief systems that we no longer know true love. We no longer know how to love or be loved, and more tragically, we then project these false attributes and beliefs onto God. We're becoming so comfortable dwelling in the shades of grey – love is conditional, love hurts, love is temporary – that we no longer recognize the simple black and white of the matter. God is love; He loves us more than we can ever imagine, and because of His love for us and in us, we can love others as He designed.

## Lessons Lived

Before we can genuinely comprehend what it means to love ourselves and to love others unconditionally, we must first recognize what, or more accurately, Who love is. I John 4:8 states that God is love. I must've read this verse a thousand times. But it wasn't until I began "analyzing" the concept of love that it struck me in a whole new way. The verse didn't say that God is loving or lovable. It said that God **IS** love. So rereading I Corinthians 13 for the thousandth time, I also gained new insights and meaning. If God and Love are synonymous, then could that passage be read this way:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have **God**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have **God**, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast but do not have **God**, I gain nothing.

**God** is patient, **God** is kind. **He** does not envy, **He** does not boast, **He** is not proud. **He** does not dishonor others, **He** is not self-seeking, **He** is not easily angered, **He** keeps no record of wrongs. **God** does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **He** always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **God** never fails.

Are you excited yet, because I am! When I begin to appreciate just how magnanimous, wondrous, marvelous, perfect, and great our God is, I can't help but rejoice! See, when we dwell in the "shades of grey" where our understanding of love is mystified, misled, and muddled, it's easy for us to fall prey to the world's definitions of love. But when we comprehend Who God Is, we will realize that true love exists after all. True Love that endures in the good and the bad. True love that is gentle and kind and warm. True love that is all-consuming and big enough to support my mistakes, hurt, fears, and many flaws. True love that reassures that I, that you, that we, can love and be loved.

I'm so glad that with God, my *Fifty Shades of Grey* are covered by His *Fifty Shades of Grace*. Grace sufficient enough to accept me as I am. Grace ample enough to cover my sins and hide my imperfections while molding me and shaping me into the me I was designed and am destined to be. I am *Fifty Shades of Grateful*, knowing that God is love and that Love dwells in me, bubbles over and impacts others, wrapping us all in a warm, soft, gentle blanket of Love.

### Reflections

- How do the texts I John 4:8 and I John 4:16 speak to you?
- What books, movies, and/or experiences helped to shape your understanding of love? In what ways?
- How does the biblical meaning of love compare to society's definition of love?
- How does the revised reading of I Corinthians 13:1-8 speak to you?
- How do you define unconditional love?
- What are your thoughts about the idea that God and Love are one? How might this impact your perception of Who God is and what Love means?
  
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
  - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
  - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
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- Lover of My Soul by Jonathan McReynolds - [Jonathan McReynolds - Lover Of My Soul \(AUDIO ONLY\)](#)

## **Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, I come before You today an empty vessel, longing to be filled with Your Holy Spirit. Teach me to love as You have loved me. Help me keep Your Word so that I may experience the love of the Father forevermore (John 14:23). Thank you for the gift of forgiveness, for even a sinner like me (Romans 5:8), and I pray that nothing – not death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation – separate me from your love (Romans 8:38). *In Your Most Holy Name, I pray, Amen.*



# Be Enlightened – All I Want for Christmas

The Jones family Christmas celebrations bring back some of my fondest childhood memories. The Christmas concerts, the turkey, stuffing, greens and sweet potato pies, and spending time with family at my Grandma's in Elizabeth City, NC. But one of my favorite Christmas pastimes was the development of our Christmas Wishlist. My sister, brother and I would be so excited, beginning the day after Thanksgiving. We'd spend hours combing through the toy catalogs, making our lists and checking them twice.

## Scripture

James 1:17 – Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

## Lessons Learned

One Christmas, I recall my sister having that year's hot ticket item on her list; she wanted a Cabbage Patch doll like every other little girl in America. My sister talked about that doll non-stop. "I wonder what her name will be (Cabbage Patch dolls came with a birth certificate)?" "I can't wait to push her in the stroller and dress her in pretty dresses," and on and on and on she went. Now our usual protocol was to have six or seven things on our list, hoping that we'd get at least two or three of the desired items. But this Christmas, my sister only had one thing on her list – a Cabbage Patch doll.

By this time, I was old enough to take part in "Operation Find a Cabbage Patch Doll." This process was more intricate than a military operation. It entailed at least a hundred inquiries to every Toys R' Us within a 200-mile radius, followed by standing in long lines where shipments were due to come in; calls to family members across the United States; and lots and lots of prayers.

And their persistence paid off. My sister welcomed Carol Lottie into the Jones family on Christmas morning. I don't know if I'd ever seen a smile so wide. And she wasn't the only one bubbling over with smiles, tears and unbridled happiness. My parents were just as excited, for my sisters' joy gave them joy. Knowing that their sacrifice, efforts, and love were appreciated was all the thanks they needed. And the benefits of my sisters' joy weren't just limited to Christmas day. No, that gift bought my parents at least a month or so of good behavior on my sister's behalf.

## Lessons Lived

I think the relationship between us and God, our provider, should be similar to that of my sister and my parents. See, my parents gave with no expectation of anything in return. They gave out of genuine, unconditional love and the very act of giving gave them joy. My sister freely received the gift given with unadulterated joy. Her "good behavior" and thanksgiving stemmed from her delight and elation over the gift, not from a sense of obligation.

God wants the same from us. He gives wonderful gifts to us, not because we deserve them or have earned them but because He delights in our joy. He gives to us because of His love for us. And in return, we should praise Him through our worship and thanksgiving. Additionally, the good we do should not be out of a sense of obligation or belief that we can earn our way into His good graces. Our good works should stem from our exultation and delight for Gods' generous gifts of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

Do we deserve the blessings of God? No. Can we ever do enough, give enough, work hard enough to earn His love? No. Will we ever be able to repay Him? No. Yet we can bring God joy by simply enjoying His many blessings. We can bring Him joy by praising Him and worshipping Him as an extension of our gratitude. The Bible tells us that to enter Heaven, we must become like little children (Matthew 18:3). Why not give it a try? The joy my sister had for her gift of Carol Lottie is the same joy we can experience for the abundant gifts God's given to us.

### Reflections:

- How does James 1:17 speak to you?
- Think of a meaningful or memorable gift that you have received. Describe how the gift made you feel? Describe your feelings towards the one you gave you the gift? What was your reaction to receiving the gift?
- Spend time in praise and worship, thanking God for His blessings in your life. Write a love letter to God, expressing your gratitude. Or journal about the blessings received.
- How might your praise and worship differ if you were more like a little child?
  - Playful/Joyful (Philippians 4:4)
  - Imaginative (Proverbs 29:18)
  - Curious/Inquisitive (Proverbs 18:15)
  - Trusting (Proverbs 3:5)
  - Loving (1 John 4:8)
  - Teachable (Proverbs 13:18)
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
  - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts or practices?
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- Every Good Gift by One - [Every Good Gift](#)
- Grateful by Hezekiah Walker - [Grateful](#)

### Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I come before You today filled with gratitude and thanksgiving! I enter Your gates with thanksgiving and into Your courts with praise (Psalm 100:4)! I thank You, my great God, for being in my midst. Thank You for being a mighty One who can and will save me. Although I'm not worthy, thank you for rejoicing over me with gladness and when I am out of sorts, thank You for quieting me with Your love (Zephaniah 3:17). Thank you for wiping my debt clean and for offering me eternal life (Romans 3:24). *In Your most Holy Name, I pray, Amen.*

# Be Empowered – Who God Is

## So What's Your Story?

The Who God Is LIFE Lessons have given you the opportunity to examine God's Word through my experience of "knowing" God more intimately. Now, it's your turn.

Your focus will be on developing a devotional based on "Your Story" and your experience in getting to know God.

## Your Story Sharing Prompt:

Prepare a 5-minute devotional centered around the passage of scripture found in **Exodus 34:6-7**.

- Read Exodus 34:6-7. Note the lessons learned from this passage regarding who God is. Jot down the points you want to share and highlight about who God is.
- Develop an objective using this statement template: "All of us can know God more intimately by doing/understanding these 1-3 things \_\_\_\_\_."
- Identify the 1-3 things that can be done or understood to know God more deeply. These points should be grounded in the passage. Remember this is a 5-minute devotional, so your points must be straightforward, without extensive arguments, proofs and sub-points. If you have one point, you can go deeper into that point, but if you have three, be sure the three can stand on their own without a lot of clarification and explanation.
- Identify "Your Story" or your LIFE example to illustrate the points of the passage. Remember, the point always is to reflect Christ. So keep your story, your props, illustrations, etc., from overshadowing "Jesus."
- Write a word-for-word transcript of your devotional message inclusive of your introduction, your message, and a powerful conclusion. Write, write, write, then edit, edit, edit. Five minutes of speaking is about 600-800 words. Your final draft should be written the way you plan to share it. Shorter sentences are better than long, complicated ones. Avoid religious jargon. Make it personal, conversational.
- Practice, practice, practice. Imagine you're having a conversation with a friend. Record yourself, and then listen and critique. It'd be best if you know it so well, you can deliver it without notes. But if you need notes, develop cue cards or have an outline. You want your presentation to be as natural and as engaging as possible.
- Share your message. Sharing with a small group is a great place to start. And you can always share with your friends here at Mazuri Ministries! We'd love to hear from you! Please visit [www.mazuriministries.org](http://www.mazuriministries.org) and share your insights.