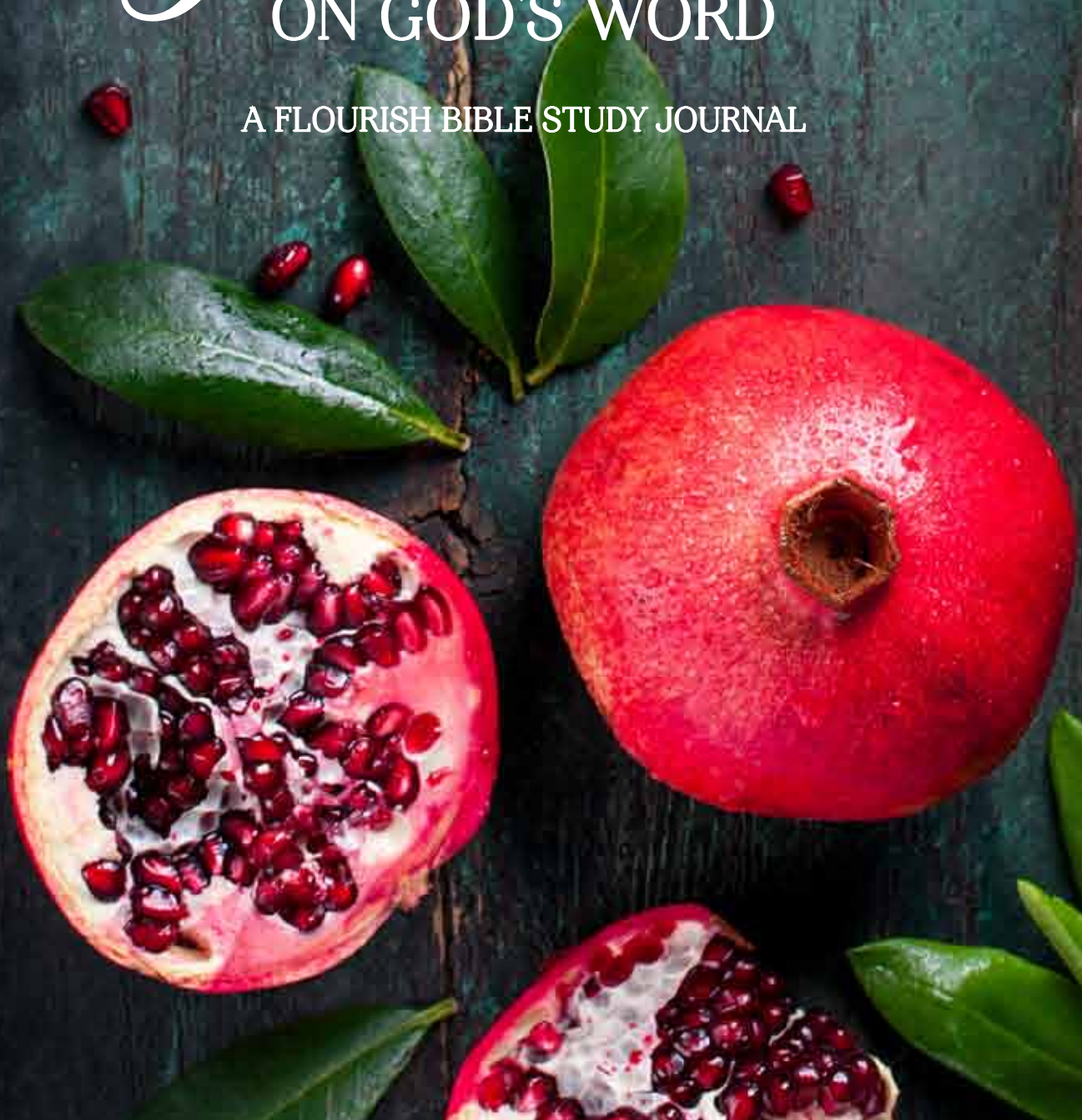


Feasting

ON GOD'S WORD

A FLOURISH BIBLE STUDY JOURNAL



Feasting
on God's Word

A Flourish Bible Study Journal

By

Mindy Kiker and Jenny Kochert

© Copyright 2018
by Melinda Kiker & Jennifer Kochert

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Flourish Ministries LLC
FlourishGathering.com

Unless otherwise marked, scripture quotations are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version) copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV Text Edition: 2007.

Cover Design by Five Dot Design (fivedotdesign.com)



Welcome,

We're delighted that you're here. Your presence with us signals a season of refreshing, a time to dig into the Bible and hear God speak.

You hold in your hands a **Flourish Bible Study Journal** which guides you to spend time in the Word, filling your mind and heart with His truth. When you discover that He is good and that you are called, you can walk fearlessly into the future.

We have prayed that you would become *“like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God . . . trusting in God's unfailing love for ever and ever.” Psalm 52:8 (NIV)*

Whatever the circumstances of your life right now, God's Word is waiting to meet you exactly where you are with the help that you need to take the next step.

We all have seasons where we drift away from Jesus and His Word. It is easy to get busy with the daily cares of life or to become embroiled in a fiery trial. This Bible Study Journal invites you to create a quiet space to cultivate confidence in your life right now. We pray that as you posture yourself to hear, you will receive the Word that you need to step forward into the fulfillment of the promises that God has spoken.

You are going to be amazed at what you discover as you pursue the daily practices of the DECLARE Bible Study Approach. One friend likens it to *“Holy Spirit sunglasses”* that allow you to see through the surface into the deep waters: *“I've been able to see deeper into the Bible than I've ever done before. The Holy Spirit has used DECLARE to bring much more life into my Bible time.”* With regular use, it will become your own personal method to dig into any part of the Bible with an expectation of opening the Word and hearing Jesus speak.

This **Flourish Bible Study Journal** has been created from our God-breathed desire to walk with you, to take the truth you explore in Scripture and see it activated in your life. Regular time with Jesus nourishes the seeds of hope with the soil of truth, the sunshine of companionship, and the water of prayer to ignite growth in your heart.

May the seeds planted in your life grow and bloom as you open the Bible and enjoy time in God's presence. We stand with you in expectation at how Jesus is going to show up in your life as you feast on His Word.

Mindy & Jenny

How to get the most out of a Flourish Bible Study Journal

Like most things in life, you get out what you put into it. Go the gym and watch others do the heavy lifting, and not much is going to happen to your muscles -- but grab a set of dumbbells, start reaching for the sky, and you'll see results! Choosing a Flourish Bible Study Journal is a great first step to strengthening your spiritual muscles. And now for some hot tips on how to start reaching for the sky:

1. **Fight for your fifteen.** Set aside at least 15 minutes each day to dig in. *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans."* *Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)* Five days each week, you'll work through a stage of the DECLARE Bible Study Approach focusing on the declaration scripture for that week. If you have more time, there are additional ideas for digging into the Word further. There is also an optional daily reading plan. We have designed the study with our less-is-more approach to Bible study which goes deep into a small portion of scripture using all our senses to explore God's Word.

2. **Get curious about the Word.** What does the Word say about your situation? What does it say about God himself? What does it say about your family? What does it say about the future? As you learn more about the Bible, how to study it, and how to dig deeper, you will become hungry to get into the Bible and to know it well.
3. **Get to Know Jesus.** Jesus is the Word personified. He embodies everything God desires to reveal to us. John tells us that *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” John 1:14 (ESV)* That’s Jesus! His life of love and obedience crushed the power of death. By getting to know Him, we come to understand the whole Bible in terms of God’s plan to rescue all of humanity – this includes you and me, right here, right now, today!
4. **Seek for a personal word.** When trying to gain understanding, we look for answers in several places. You may seek counsel with trusted leaders in your life. It is good to seek wisdom in a multitude of counsel, but then you must draw away to a quiet place and seek God yourself. We usually say, “Father, I have sought much advice, and now I want to know what You have to say about this situation.” When we pursue God in this way, and the inevitable storms come, the Word God has spoken will hold us like an anchor to the Rock.

This is how you can flourish in faith, family and life. You dig into the Word. You fasten your gaze on the person of Jesus. You wait until you receive a personal word. The **DECLARE Bible Study Approach** is the key to bringing all these elements together. This less-is-more approach guides you to dig into the Bible and hear Jesus speak.

When we press into God’s Word and hear His voice, we gain confidence that He will never fail us. God may be later than expected. He may not answer like we imagined, but He knows what we need. One of the characteristics of God is that He loves multiplication. This is good news! **When pursuing God, you get out MORE than you put into it.** *Psalm 34:4 says, “God met me more than halfway.”* (MSG) We’re thrilled that you’re here, digging in with us.

Table of Contents

Welcome	1
Reading Plan.....	6
DECLARE Bible Study Approach.....	7
Let the Feasting Begin.....	11
Week One: Treasure the Word	13
Devotional: Nothing Else Will Satisfy	14
Day 1-5	17
Week Two: The Bread of Life	36
Devotional: A Heart of Abundance.....	37
Day 1-5	41
Week Three: My Heart's Delight	60
Devotional: A Place of Refreshing	61
Day 1-5	64
Week Four: Sweeter Than Honey	83
Devotional: The Mystery & the Majesty.....	84
Day 1-5	88
Next Steps.....	106
Small Group Discussion Topics	108
About Flourish.....	113
About the Authors.....	114



Reading Plan & Weekly Scripture Declaration

Week 1: Reading Plan – Job Chapters 1-10

Week 1 Declaration -- Job 23:12

“I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.” (ESV)

Week 2: Reading Plan – Job Chapters 11-21

Week 2 Declaration -- Matthew 4:4

"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " (NIV)

Week 3: Reading Plan – Job Chapters 22-31

Week 3 Declaration -- Jeremiah 15:16

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.” (NIV)

Week 4: Reading Plan – Job Chapters 32-42

Week 4 Declaration -- Psalm 119:103

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (NIV)

Declare Bible Study Approach

“We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. . . .”

1 John 5:20

The Declare Bible Study Approach equips us to dig deeper into a passage of scripture in order to know God’s Word intimately and apply it to our lives. (*1 Corinthians 2:10-15*) When His Word is activated in our midst, new life is released, and we will begin to flourish where we are planted.

Learn more about the DECLARE Bible Study Approach and how to use online Bible study aids. Log onto www.flourishgathering.com/declare to view our video series.

Preparation: Engage

Whenever you have time to dig into the Word, it is important to engage by tuning your ears and heart to God’s voice. Take just a few minutes to pray through the following items:

Toss: Throw your cares on God. Let Him bear your burdens. *Psalms 55:22*

Catch: Receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. *Philippians 4:7*

Invite: Take every thought captive. Invite clarity and focus. Refuse confusion, distraction, or double-mindedness. *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Open: Ask God if you have turned away or closed your heart to anyone. Release the offense, open your heart, and give the situation into God’s care. *Psalms 139:23*

Expect: Tell God that you are looking forward to hearing from Him. Let the excitement of time in His presence build expectation in your heart. *Habakkuk 2:1*

Stage 1: Read & Write

Start with a verse or short passage that you want to explore further:

- Read the scripture slowly once or twice, even out loud if you are able.
- Write the scripture in your journal, including verses before and after.
- Read the entire chapter for context.
- Read the passage in another translation.

Stage 2: Investigate

Once you have read the scripture and corresponding chapter, there are several options that you can use to look deeper into the meditation Scripture. Investigate as little or as much as time allows. Online resources like BibleGateway.com or BlueLetterBible.org will help:

- Highlight the words in the meditation verse you want to research more. We teach you how to do a word study to gain greater insight into the passage.
- Read other verses with a similar message, called cross references. Reading cross references will help you better understand a verse, word, or principle.
- Read a commentary.

Stage 3: Imagine

Read the meditation verse, and insert yourself in the story. Use your imagination to be present in the scene. Ask yourself the following questions:

- When and where is this taking place?
- Who is speaking? About what? Why?
- What are the characteristics of God as shown through this scripture or chapter?
- What are the promises of God as shown through this scripture or chapter?

Stage 4: Listen

Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart. You can ask these questions:

- How do these verses apply to me?
- Is there anything that I need to receive or surrender in my life?
- Lord, how I can apply Your Word to the frustrations, disappointments, fears, or hurts in my life?

Listening can be pursued for several days, and in fact, God will probably speak unexpectedly at random times of day or night as His revelation is released to you.

Stage 5: Declare

Write out a declaration of what you have received as you meditated on the Word. This can be a statement of God's promise to you, an affirmation of the healing that He has given you, or a proclamation of a truth that has become real to you. A declaration can include Scripture, your own words, or some of each.



Let the Feasting Begin...

Have you ever been achingly hungry? Your belly stabbing with sharp pains, yearning for nourishment. How delicious food tastes when you are truly desperate. *“Hunger is the best sauce,”* my friend from Trinidad likes to say as he serves up his savory island curry.

Hunger may enhance desire, but starvation is another condition altogether. If a person is chronically hungry, her body will shut down, give up, and cease to cry out in pain. She will slip into lethargy and listlessness. If she is unable to acquire sustenance, she will eventually fall into unconsciousness.

Our physical bodies give us insight into the functioning of our spiritual condition. Have you ever been desperate for the Word of God -- your spirit tortured by hunger pains, crying out for heavenly nourishment?

Some have never felt that desperate hunger: *“If I miss the voice of God today, I’m going to perish!”* Without even noticing, a person may be chronically hungry, wearied by spiritual lethargy, silently starving.

So what do you do if you find yourself wasting away? Simply respond to the invitation from your Jehovah Jireh, your Provider: *“He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” Psalm 107:9 (ESV)*

God longs to provide nourishment to your weary spirit. In fact, He invites you to a banquet hall (*Song of Solomon 2:4*). But what if you stand there, transfixed, wooed by sweet and savory aromas, yet confused: *“I wonder who all this glorious food is prepared for? Must be someone very special. Look how splendid it all is.”*

If you’re not listening, you may not hear God’s voice speaking sweetly in your ear, *“My Dear, this is for you. All that I have is yours. Come feast with me.”*

When at last you do perceive the invitation, you muster a burst of strength, and cry out for resurrection life: *“Jesus, help! Create in me a hunger and thirst for Your Word. I wish to join the banquet. I long to be satisfied by You alone.”*

Jesus draws near to all who call out to Him: *“Come, let me revive you and nourish you. I will satisfy your hungry spirit and quench your thirsty soul with delicious morsels. I will never leave you to languish. When you drink of Me and eat of Me, you will be forever satiated.”* (Psalm 107:9, Isaiah 55:2; John 6:35; Revelation 22:17)

And so your life becomes one of fellowship with Christ. Your spiritual famine is broken by taking the hand of your Savior – you follow Him to the table, pull up a chair, and begin to eat. Drink. Laugh. Listen. Savor. Relish the strength that courses through your once-anguished soul.

As you feast on God’s Word, nourished by His truth and love, you will experience the ceaseless blessing of eating bread every day, the simple daily practice of joining Him at the table. When you enjoy and expect health and vitality, you will no longer be content to stay away from banquet. Now, at last, you are home.

“The LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” Isaiah 58:11 (ESV)

Mmmmm, that sounds like flourishing.

Week One

Treasure the Word

DECLARATION VERSE:

“I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.” Job 23:12 (ESV)

As you enter your time of Bible Study this week, take a moment to “engage” by tuning your ears and heart to God’s voice.

Toss: Throw your cares on God. Let Him bear your burdens. *Psalm 55:22*

Catch: Receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. *Philippians 4:7*

Invite: Take every thought captive. Invite clarity and focus. Refuse confusion, distraction, or double-mindedness. *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Open: Ask God if you have turned away or closed your heart to anyone. Release the offense, open your heart, and give the situation into God’s care. *Psalm 139:23*

Expect: Tell God that you are looking forward to hearing from Him. Let the excitement of time in His presence build expectation in your heart. *Habakkuk 2:1*

Nothing Else Will Satisfy

*“I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.”
Job 22:6 (NIV)*

Inspiring and comforting words from the Bible . . . or what is going on here? The life of Job elicits a variety of reactions in the hearts and minds of curious seekers, from reassurance to shock or even to horror. How can one story create such disparate responses? Some people see Job’s suffering paired with God’s apparent tolerance of evil as highly discomfoting. The message of the story is at best a mystery, and at worst it sows a seed of doubt -- is my life held together by a good and wise God, or am I simply a pawn moved about in a cosmic chess game?

Still others take a much more hopeful view of the man from Uz. They admire that Job and his friends wrestle with God and with one another. They find reassurance in the intense wrangling: there are no quick, trite answers to life’s tough questions. Why do good people suffer? Why do young people die?

The fervent debates between Job and his friends give voice to our own questions. In the midst of suffering, platitudes can be offensive. When life is crumbling around you, shallow everything-will-be-okay comments are enough to draw out a wrathful retort of frustration. It is heartening to see the Bible present these complexities, permitting us to tangle with God and with one another in the hope that we discover the true character of the Lord and of ourselves.

A Wise and Faithful God

Reading through Job is a journey into the heart of despair, grief, confusion, and even the agony of physical pain and death, but it also offers hope in the unchanging nature of a wise and faithful God. The account does not attempt to be an insignificant Band-Aid straddling a gaping wound. It does not offer neat, tidy answers to the perplexing questions of human anguish and loss.

The story of Job is a testament to the sustaining power of God's Word in the face of unspeakable loss. Through crushing trials, Job remains steadfast and faithful to Jehovah. He holds fast the promises of God's Word to sustain him physically and spiritually through the darkest days of his life, and he is able to proclaim *"I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food."* Job 23:12 (ESV)

Compulsive Comparison

The story is uniquely complicated because Job is a righteous and upright man. He is not the typical person that we think deserves to lose everything. Here God challenges one of our core human weaknesses: we almost compulsively compare ourselves one with another. (2 Corinthians 10) This is an exercise in pride because we are hoping that in the comparison, we will come out on top.

Here's how justification-by-comparison sounds in my thoughts: *"Well, I may not be perfect, but, for goodness sake, at least I'm not as bad as her!"*

How do you justify yourself?

Job reveals this justification-by-comparison trap when he calls himself blameless, but God reminds him that no one is righteous but Jehovah alone, reiterated by Paul in Romans 3. It is impossible that any of us can be justified by our own goodness. To claim so is blatant pride which sets us in opposition to God. (James 4:6)

The Hidden Idol

Pride tempts us to look at another and suspect that he or she did something wrong to deserve heartache, just like Job's first three friends did to him: *"You must have sinned; otherwise this would not have happened to you."* But who are we to judge? Where were we when God laid the foundations of the earth? (Job 38) Who knows the heart of a person but God Himself? (1 Corinthians 2:11)

Each one of us is in need of a Savior, no matter our position in life. Jesus died, not just for some of us, but for all of us. We are not able to save ourselves by being good enough, but that does not stop us from trying. It is rare to find our hope in God alone. False gods tantalize us with alluring offers of gain without pain, power without submission, victory without the cross.

These idols promise freedom, but later we realize that they offer only the illusion of freedom; their goal is to take us prisoner and multiply our sorrows. (Psalm 16:4) We see in Job that pride is a hidden idol which exerts a powerful influence over all humanity. Even upright people are susceptible. In fact, upright people are most susceptible (Matthew 23).

In His great kindness, the Lord will allow circumstances in our lives to help us lay down any false gods that have captured our trust, even if that god is a seemingly good thing . . . *especially if that god seems like a good thing!* No one and nothing is truly good but God alone. (Mark 10:18) Nothing and no one in all creation can save us except our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12)

Do Not Turn Away

In God's great love for Job, the Lord invites Job to recognize his own pride and self-sufficiency. Job eventually repents for believing that his goodness could save him. He is good . . . but he is also proud, and pride taints goodness, making it unacceptable to God. (Proverbs 16:5, 18) There is no way that pride can bear good fruit.

When life falls apart for us, like Job, we are tempted to turn away from God: we may wish to "*curse God and die!*" Job 2:9 (NIV) Do not fall for this ploy of the enemy. When it seems like there is no hope – reach out anyway – you need to grab hold of your lifeline to Jesus and not let go. Come to the table. Feast on His Word. Nothing else will satisfy.

Treasure the Word: Day One

Declaration Verse:

“I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.” Job 23:12 (ESV)

Today’s Declare Practice: Read & Write

[] Read Job 23:12 slowly once or twice, even out loud if you are able.

[] Write Job 23:11-13 in the space below. *Feel free to get creative!*

Have a little more time?

Read Job Chapter 23 for context. Write out a few observations.

Read Job 23:13 in another Bible translation. Do you notice any differences?

Write your observations.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 1 & 2

Read and Write

Write any verses that stand out to you as you read the chapters.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Treasure the Word: Day Two

Declaration Verse: Job 23:12

Today's Declare Practice: Investigate

Today we begin looking deeper into the Declaration Verse. Investigate as little or as much as time allows. Online resources like BibleGateway.com or BlueLetterBible.org will help you during your investigation.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part One

Read the Declaration Verse or the entire chapter if you have more time. Spend a few minutes highlighting any words you want to research more.

Write these words below.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part Two

Want to learn more about the DECLARE Bible Study Approach and how to do a word study? Log onto www.flourishgathering.com/declare to view our video series.

Using BlueLetterBible.org or another online resource, choose a word you selected above to conduct your word study. This is as simple as looking up the original Greek or Hebrew word, reading the definitions of that word, and looking at how it is used in other verses in the Bible.

Record the results of your word study here.

Have a little more time?

[] Read any of the following cross references for Job 23:12:

Job 22:22

Psalm 33:11

Proverbs 30:8

Reading cross references will help you better understand a verse, word, or principle.

What did you discover? Write your insights.

[] Read a commentary. A commentary is a collection of explanatory notes that a Bible scholar has written about scripture. You can find these online. A good place to begin is Matthew Henry, C.H. Spurgeon, or David Guzik. Write any observations, quotes, or notes.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 3 & 4

Investigate

Highlight a couple of key words that stand out to you in the chapters you read. Using BlueLetterBible.org look up the Greek or Hebrew word and definition of one of those words.

Write your findings below.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Treasure the Word: Day Three

Declaration Verse: Job 23:12

Today's Declare Practice: Imagine

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart.

Read Job 23:12

You may want to scout around in your Bible for any notes or perhaps an introduction to this book of the Bible. When using your imagination, it helps to keep in mind the context of the chapter and book that you're in. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions. Use your imagination and all your senses to be present in the scene.

When and where is this taking place? What do you imagine you might see, hear, touch, taste, or smell?

[] Who is speaking or writing? Who are they addressing? Others? God?
Themselves?

[] What are they speaking or writing about? What is their purpose?

Have a little more time?

[] What are the characteristics of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Is He steadfast, faithful, just, trustworthy, nurturing, kind, gentle, or strong?
What do you see revealed about His nature in this passage of Scripture?

[] What are the promises of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Write any observations, key words, or questions you have as you ponder the Declaration Verse. If you have time, you may want to do another word study.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 5 & 6

Imagine

You may want flip back to the beginning of Job in your Bible to read the introduction or use an online resource. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions.

What is happening? Imagine that you are there. What do you notice?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Treasure the Word: Day Four

Declaration Verse: Job 23:12

Today's Declare Practice: Listen

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart. Remember that God’s voice will never accuse you. He may bring gentle conviction, and that can cause some grief, but God always brings hope.

Listening can be pursued for several days, and in fact, God will probably speak unexpectedly at random times of day or night as His revelation is released to you. Ask these questions as you listen to God’s voice.

[] How do these verses apply to me?

Have a little more time?

[] Ponder and pray: how I can apply these truths to the frustrations, disappointments, fears, or hurts in my life? Is there anything I need to surrender or receive in my life?

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 7 & 8

Listen

Ask yourself: how does what I have read so far in Job Chapters 1-8 apply to me? Does God want to speak to my heart today through this story?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Treasure the Word: Day Five

Declaration Verse: Job 23:12

Today's Declare Practice: Declare

Write out a declaration of what you have received as you meditated on the Word. This can be a statement of God's promise to you, an affirmation of the healing that He has given you, or a proclamation of a truth that has become real to you. A declaration can include Scripture, your own words, or some of each.

Reflect upon your week

Write out Job 23:12 by hand if you memorized it, or summarize the Declaration Verse in your own words below.

Spend a few minutes documenting your insights, “a-ha” moments, and revelations from this week of digging into the Bible.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 9 & 10

Write any notes or observations you made from the chapters you read today.
Is there one verse that stands out to you?

Record one new insight that came as you pondered Job this week.

Notes



Week Two

The Bread of Life

DECLARATION VERSE:

"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

As you enter your time of Bible Study this week, take a moment to “engage” by tuning your ears and heart to God’s voice.

Toss: Throw your cares on God. Let Him bear your burdens. *Psalm 55:22*

Catch: Receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. *Philippians 4:7*

Invite: Take every thought captive. Invite clarity and focus. Refuse confusion, distraction, or double-mindedness. *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Open: Ask God if you have turned away or closed your heart to anyone. Release the offense, open your heart, and give the situation into God’s care. *Psalm 139:23*

Expect: Tell God that you are looking forward to hearing from Him. Let the excitement of time in His presence build expectation in your heart. *Habakkuk 2:1*

A Heart of Abundance

*“... Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”
Luke 6:45 (ESV)*

What spills out of your mouth when you are squeezed? When my then-unchurched boyfriend (now-believing husband) accompanied us for the first time on a family road trip, we experienced an amusing incident that exposed a clash of cultures. Nearing home in the dark of night, we ran over a sizeable obstacle in the road which tore through our oil pan and brought our vehicle to a screeching halt. The shock of the incident elicited exclamations from everyone in the vehicle.

“Help us, Jesus!” screamed Mom.

“Praise God!” yelled Dad.

“\$#*@!!!” bellowed my boyfriend.

And then there was silence. The expletive hung in the air, a strange sound in our ears. Four years later, I married that young man, and I have imagined myself superior to him because I do not swear in anger. Full disclosure – I do enjoy a bit of edgy language included for a humorous effect within a carefully-crafted story.

Nevertheless, I simply don’t swear when I am frustrated or angry, and I believed that this verbal self-control put me a step above my spouse on the “righteousness meter.” One day during an argument with my husband, I trotted out this fact as evidence of my superiority (you can imagine how that went over) to which he replied,

“I may curse in the more obvious fashion, but your cursing is just as cutting, perhaps even more so, cloaked in disdain, mocking, and shaming arrogance.”

Ouch! You know that feeling when a truth bomb has detonated, but you absolutely do not want to admit it?

Jesus' Perspective

Jesus delivers a similar rebuke in Matthew chapter 5 when he tells us that our human “righteousness meter” is not as accurately calibrated as we imagine. He tells us that anger is just as bad as murder; lust is as bad as adultery. He even adds, just to be clear, “*whoever says ‘You fool!’ [to another] will be liable to the hell of fire.*” *Matthew 5:22 (ESV)*

Really?! Did He have to use an example of something so common, so easy to let slip off the tongue? Can any of us hope to measure up to this standard? Are you good enough to make the grade? Jesus exposes a fundamental human weakness: we wish to calibrate our sense of righteousness by comparing ourselves with others rather than with Christ. Unfortunately, this human-to-human comparison leads to deception not to discernment. (2 Corinthians 10:12-18)

None of us are good enough. Spiteful attitudes, thoughts, and words spring up unbidden from the self-centered nature of every human being. Certainly, we desire to place our hope in God, but there is a war going on inside us. Paul gives us insight into this battle with a personal revelation, “*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*” *Romans 7:15 (ESV)*

This is The Awesome Apostle Paul. If anyone could live a righteous life in his own strength, surely it was this man. And yet, he describes the challenge that we all face: when we are squeezed, there is a good chance that the abundance of our heart will be shown to be more self and less God.

Confidence in Self

To be sure, Paul also reveals that as he matures, he puts less stock in his personal qualifications and more confidence in the righteousness that only Christ’s death purchases for him. Paul becomes aware that confidence in self is opposed to confidence in Jesus. In Philippians 3, the revered apostle presents his credentials, the ones he obtained by measure of his nationality, his studies, and his achievements. If anyone could boast in the

flesh, it was Paul when he was Saul. He was untouchable. And yet, his personal qualifications actually separated him from God in the early days. Before his humbling encounter with the “light from heaven” on the road to Damascus, his misplaced zeal made him an enemy of Jehovah. (Acts 9)

How do we temper this human tendency to be wise in our own eyes? It is tempting to think that our credentials make us good enough to earn God’s blessing. Saul had an inflated view of himself, perhaps as nearly equal to God as any human being could be. He may well have considered himself an understudy for the coming Messiah, just in case they needed a human substitute to step in and save the world.

Have you ever acted like a substitute savior? I have – repeatedly -- and it never turns out very well. How many failures will finally convince us that we cannot save ourselves, let alone anyone else? Jesus is the only One qualified to save, the only One who perfectly exemplifies a life completely yielded to God.

Jesus’ Heart of Abundance

In Matthew chapter 4, we witness Christ speaking from a heart of abundance. We enter the story just after Jesus is baptized by John when He is *“led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”* *Matthew 4:2 (NIV)*

Do you notice the similarity to the story of Job? Jehovah allows the devil to test Job (Job 1:12). He also permits the devil to test Jesus. Here we get a chance to see how Jesus responds to an attack of evil designed to take Him down:

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he [Jesus] was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Matthew 4:2-4 (NIV)

Friends, do you see what just happened?! When Jesus encounters evil, He does not fight the attack with the power of his own qualifications, even though he could. He is God, after all. Instead, Jesus confesses the Word. *Selah – pause and think of this.*

When Jesus is squeezed, the abundance of His heart is God's Word. Here in Matthew 4 He is referencing Deuteronomy 8 in which Moses encourages the Israelites to remember what Jehovah Jireh, God the Provider, has done for them so that they trust in Him no matter the trials they face as they prepare to enter the Promised Land.

Our Prayer for You

We pray that you allow God to examine the abundance of your heart and reveal the thoughts and intentions that reside there. Allow Him to disclose your treasures, both lovely and not-so-lovely. He already knows your deepest thoughts, and He appreciates when you are honest with Him.

God wants to celebrate with you and bring freedom where you are bound. Use the Scriptures, just like Jesus did, to protect you from the lies of the enemy. When you are full of God's truth, and life's troubles squeeze you, wisdom will come bursting out. Holy Spirit will inspire the Word hidden in your heart to guide you and to protect you.

Ask the Lord to remind you of the stories of His steadfast love, both in your life and in the lives of others. May your heart be satisfied by feasting on testimonies of God's faithfulness, drawing your strength and refreshing from His salvation alone.

The Bread of Life: Day One

Declaration Verse:

"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " Matthew 4:4

Today's Declare Practice: Read & Write

[] Read Matthew 4:4 slowly once or twice, even out loud if you are able.

[] Write Matthew 4:3-5 in the space below. *Feel free to get creative!*

Have a little more time?

[] Read Matthew Chapter 4 for context. Write out a few observations.

[] Read Matthew 4:4 in another Bible translation. Do you notice any differences?

Write your observations.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 11-13

Read and Write

Write any verses that stand out to you as you read the chapters.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

The Bread of Life: Day Two

Declaration Verse: Matthew 4:4

Today's Declare Practice: Investigate

Today we begin looking deeper into the Declaration Verse. Investigate as little or as much as time allows. Online resources like BibleGateway.com or BlueLetterBible.org will help you during your investigation.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part One

Read the Declaration Verse or the entire chapter if you have more time. Spend a few minutes highlighting any words you want to research more.

Write these words below.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part Two

Want to learn more about the DECLARE Bible Study Approach and how to do a word study? Log onto www.flourishgathering.com/declare to view our video series.

Using BlueLetterBible.org or another online resource, choose a word you selected above to conduct your word study. This is as simple as looking up the original Greek or Hebrew word, reading the definitions of that word, and looking at how it is used in other verses in the Bible.

Record the results of your word study here.

Have a little more time?

[] Read any of the following cross references for Matthew 4:4:

Deuteronomy 8:3

Matthew 5:11

John 15:26

Reading cross references will help you better understand a verse, word, or principle.

What did you discover? Write your insights:

[] Read a commentary. A commentary is a collection of explanatory notes that a Bible scholar has written about scripture. You can find these online. A good place to begin is Matthew Henry, C.H. Spurgeon, or David Guzik. Write any observations, quotes, or notes.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 14 & 15

Investigate

Highlight a couple of key words that stand out to you in the chapters you read. Using BlueLetterBible.org look up the Greek or Hebrew word and definition of one of those words.

Write your findings below.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

The Bread of Life: Day Three

Declaration Verse: Matthew 4:4

Today's Declare Practice: Imagine

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart.

[] Read Matthew 4:4

You may want to scout around in your Bible for any notes or perhaps an introduction to this book of the Bible. When using your imagination, it helps to keep in mind the context of the chapter and book that you're in. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions. Use your imagination and all your senses to be present in the scene.

[] When and where is this taking place? What do you imagine you might see, hear, touch, taste, or smell?

[] Who is speaking or writing? Who are they addressing? Others? God?
Themselves?

[] What are they speaking or writing about? What is their purpose?

Have a little more time?

[] What are the characteristics of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Is He steadfast, faithful, just, trustworthy, nurturing, kind, gentle, or strong?
What do you see revealed about His nature in this passage of Scripture?

[] What are the promises of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Write any observations, key words, or questions you have as you ponder the Declaration Verse. If you have time, you may want to do another word study.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 16 & 17

Imagine

You may want flip back to the beginning of Job in your Bible to read the introduction, or use an online resource. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions.

What is happening? Imagine you are there. What do you notice?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

The Bread of Life: Day Four

Declaration Verse: Matthew 4:4

Today's Declare Practice: Listen

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart. Remember that God’s voice will never accuse you. He may bring gentle conviction, and that can cause some grief, but God always brings hope.

Listening can be pursued for several days, and in fact, God will probably speak unexpectedly at random times of day or night as His revelation is released to you. Ask these questions as you listen to God’s voice:

[] How do these verses apply to me?

Have a little more time?

[] Ponder and pray: how I can apply these truths to the frustrations, disappointments, fears, or hurts in my life? Is there anything I need to receive or surrender in my life?

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 18 & 19

Listen

Ask yourself: how does what I have read so far in Job Chapters 11-19 apply to me? Does God want to speak to my heart today through this story?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

The Bread of Life: Day Five

Declaration Verse: Matthew 4:4

Today's Declare Practice: Declare

Write out a declaration of what you have received as you meditated on the Word. This can be a statement of God's promise to you, an affirmation of the healing that He has given you, or a proclamation of a truth that has become real to you. A declaration can include Scripture, your own words, or some of each.

Reflect upon your week

Write out Matthew 4:4 by hand if you memorized it, or summarize the Declaration Verse in your own words below.

Spend a few minutes documenting your insights, “a-ha” moments, and revelations from this week of digging into the Bible.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 20 & 21

Write any notes or observations you made from the chapters you read today.
Is there one verse that stands out to you?

Did you have any new insights as you pondered Job this week?

Notes



Week Three

My Heart's Delight

DECLARATION VERSE:

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.” Jeremiah 15:16 (NIV)

As you enter your time of Bible Study this week, take a moment to “engage” by tuning your ears and heart to God’s voice.

Toss: Throw your cares on God. Let Him bear your burdens. *Psalm 55:22*

Catch: Receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. *Philippians 4:7*

Invite: Take every thought captive. Invite clarity and focus. Refuse confusion, distraction, or double-mindedness. *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Open: Ask God if you have turned away or closed your heart to anyone. Release the offense, open your heart, and give the situation into God’s care. *Psalm 139:23*

Expect: Tell God that you are looking forward to hearing from Him. Let the excitement of time in His presence build expectation in your heart. *Habakkuk 2:1*

A Place of Refreshing

Last week we compared the lives of Job, Paul, and Jesus and saw how they reacted to being squeezed. Life's circumstances have a way of revealing the abundance of our hearts, for better or for worse. We are delighted at what is revealed when we respond in love or kindness. Alternatively, we are disappointed when shaming or sarcastic words come out of our mouth.

When I disappoint myself, it is easy to reach for my personal "righteousness meter" which I use to balance my wrongdoing with good deeds: *"I was such a grump this morning. I'll cook a nice dinner for everyone tonight."*

Not that there is anything wrong with making up for wrongdoing, but if repentance and forgiveness are absent, you'll sit down to a rickety feasting table that may collapse. Chances are the food will be cold, and the meal will certainly not satisfy.

Maybe Pride Will Work

Another way to apply your righteousness meter is simply to fall back on the foundation of pride. It is always ready to help you see yourself in the best possible light and blame other people for any conflict that you face. Pride keeps a list of your qualifications based on what you have done and how you surpass others. False humility can help soften the edge, but no one is fooled for long. People eventually find out that it is still just plain old self-conceit under there.

The Saul-Paul transformation story is a useful example to see the difference between Saul-ish pride and Paul-ish humility. (Acts 9) The apostle lists his personal qualifications that justify his heart of superiority:

“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”
Philippians 3:4-5 (ESV)

When you read his prestigious pedigree, do you notice the word that he uses describes himself: “blameless”? Does that sound familiar? Yes, right there in Job 1:1. The same word is used to describe Job, the righteous man from Uz. Now this is getting interesting.

The Blameless Claim

Both Job and Paul claim to be blameless; however, their credentials are based on their self-effort. Their life challenges reveal what happens in the human heart when we trust in ourselves and place our hope in our own goodness rather than God’s. Can you picture these gentlemen pulling up their chairs to the feasting table of self-righteousness? As they nourish themselves with pride, their hearts become full of self but empty of God.

These two men demonstrate the limitations of our trying-to-be-good-enough salvation.

The feasting table of self-righteousness satisfies the flesh but starves the spirit.

People will never be good enough to save themselves, even the Paul’s or the Job’s among us. We simply cannot pay the price that is required to redeem sin, but that doesn’t stop us from trying. (Romans 3) Tragically, in the trying we position ourselves in opposition to the only One who can save us.

Delight in God

Let us see what God has to say about this human urge to set ourselves up as substitute saviors. Turn your attention with me to the prophet Jeremiah who had the unenviable job of informing God’s children that they would be punished if they did not repent and turn back to Jehovah. The people of Judah resisted the prophet’s message and instead persisted in their sin and continued rushing heedlessly toward destruction. Jeremiah’s heart was broken for his people as he prophesied and witnessed the fall of Jerusalem when Judah was conquered by Babylon in 586 BC.

Like most prophets of old, Jeremiah suffered under the burden of bringing an unpopular and unwelcomed message. He served faithfully for forty years as God's mouthpiece to Judah, during which time he languished in poverty and at times in prison. He was exported to Egypt and endured rejection by neighbors, friends, and even his family. Anyone observing his life at the time would call him a failure.

And yet, when Jeremiah was at his lowest moments, he knew where to turn for refreshment: *"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty."* Jeremiah 15: 16 (NIV)

His life exemplifies genuine overcoming that originates from God, not from his own prideful striving. Jeremiah was nourished by a thriving relationship with his Heavenly Father regardless of the circumstances. His vitality was sustained by feasting on God's Word as if life depended on it because for Jeremiah it absolutely did.

I find it strangely comforting to note that at times Jeremiah did suffer depression and despair. He was human! It is difficult to have a message from the Lord burning in your heart, but no one is listening. Jeremiah knows that God's people are heading for destruction, but he can do nothing more than remain faithful to God and leave the outcome in His capable hands. What a deep faith and trust he exemplifies by his yielded heart and obedient life held fast to the Word.

I pray that the steadfast spirit of Jeremiah, the repentant heart of Job, the humble transformation of Paul, and the obedient posture of Jesus are revealed in your life as you feast on God's Word. May you find your place of refreshing in the shelter of Jehovah:

*"As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him."
2 Samuel 22:31(NIV)*

My Heart's Delight: Day One

Declaration Verse:

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.” Jeremiah 15:16

Today’s Declare Practice: Read & Write

[] Read Jeremiah 15:16 slowly once or twice, even out loud if you are able.

[] Write Jeremiah 15:15-17 in the space below. *Feel free to get creative!*

Have a little more time?

Read Jeremiah Chapter 15 for context. Write out a few observations.

Read Jeremiah 15:16 in another Bible translation. Do you notice any differences?

Write your observations.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 22 & 23

Read and Write

Write any verses that stand out to you as you read the chapters.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

My Heart's Delight: Day Two

Declaration Verse: Jeremiah 15:16

Today's Declare Practice: Investigate

Today we begin looking deeper into the Declaration Verse. Investigate as little or as much as time allows. Online resources like BibleGateway.com or BlueLetterBible.org will help you during your investigation.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part One

Read the Declaration Verse or the entire chapter if you have more time. Spend a few minutes highlighting any words you want to research more.

Write these words below.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part Two

Want to learn more about the DECLARE Bible Study Approach and how to do a word study? Log onto www.flourishgathering.com/declare to view our video series.

Using BlueLetterBible.org or another online resource, choose a word you selected above to conduct your word study. This is as simple as looking up the original Greek or Hebrew word, reading the definitions of that word, and looking at how it is used in other verses in the Bible.

Record the results of your word study here:

Have a little more time?

[] Read any of the following cross references for Jeremiah 15:16:

Ezekiel 2:8

Revelation 10:9

Micah 2:7

Reading cross references will help you better understand a verse, word, or principle.

What did you discover? Write your insights.

[] Read a commentary. A commentary is a collection of explanatory notes that a Bible scholar has written about scripture. You can find these online. A good place to begin is Matthew Henry, C.H. Spurgeon, or David Guzik. Write any observations, quotes, or notes.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 24 & 25

Investigate

Highlight a couple of key words that stand out to you in the chapters you read. Using BlueLetterBible.org look up the Greek or Hebrew word and definition of one of those words.

Write your findings below.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

My Heart's Delight: Day Three

Declaration Verse: Jeremiah 15:16

Today's Declare Practice: Imagine

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart.

[] Read Jeremiah 15:16

You may want to scout around in your Bible for any notes or perhaps an introduction to this book of the Bible. When using your imagination, it helps to keep in mind the context of the chapter and book that you're in. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions. Use your imagination and all your senses to be present in the scene.

[] When and where is this taking place? What do you imagine you might see, hear, touch, taste, or smell?

[] Who is speaking or writing? Who are they addressing? Others? God?
Themselves?

[] What are they speaking or writing about? What is their purpose?

Have a little more time?

- [] What are the characteristics of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Is He steadfast, faithful, just, trustworthy, nurturing, kind, gentle, or strong?
What do you see revealed about His nature in this passage of Scripture?

- [] What are the promises of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Write any observations, key words, or questions you have as you ponder the Declaration Verse. If you have time, you may want to do another word study.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 26 & 27

Imagine

You may want flip back to the beginning of Job in your Bible to read the introduction or use an online resource. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions.

What is happening? Imagine you are there. What did you notice?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

My Heart's Delight: Day Four

Declaration Verse: Jeremiah 15:16

Today's Declare Practice: Listen

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart. Remember that God’s voice will never accuse you. He may bring gentle conviction, and that can cause some grief, but God always brings hope.

Listening can be pursued for several days, and in fact, God will probably speak unexpectedly at random times of day or night as His revelation is released to you. Ask these questions as you listen to God’s voice:

[] How do these verses apply to me?

Have a little more time?

[] Ponder and pray: how I can apply these truths to the frustrations, disappointments, fears, or hurts in my life? Is there anything I need to receive or surrender in my life?

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 28 & 29

Listen

Ask yourself: how does what I have read so far in Job Chapters 22-29 apply to me? Does God want to speak to my heart today through this story?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

My Heart's Delight: Day Five

Declaration Verse: Jeremiah 15:16

Today's Declare Practice: Declare

Write out a declaration of what you have received as you meditated on the Word. This can be a statement of God's promise to you, an affirmation of the healing that He has given you, or a proclamation of a truth that has become real to you. A declaration can include Scripture, your own words, or some of each.

Reflect upon your week

Write out Jeremiah 15:16 by hand if you memorized it, or summarize the Declaration Verse in your own words below.

Spend a few minutes documenting your insights, “a-ha” moments, and revelations from this week of digging into the Bible.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 30 & 31

Write any notes or observations you made from the chapters you read today.
Is there one verse that stands out to you?

Did you have any new insights as you pondered Job this week?

Notes



Week Four

Sweeter Than Honey

DECLARATION VERSE:

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

Psalm 119:103 (NIV)

As you enter your time of Bible Study this week, take a moment to “engage” by tuning your ears and heart to God’s voice.

Toss: Throw your cares on God. Let Him bear your burdens. *Psalm 55:22* **Catch:** Receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. *Philippians 4:7* **Invite:** Take every thought captive. Invite clarity and focus. Refuse confusion, distraction, or double-mindedness. *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Open: Ask God if you have turned away or closed your heart to anyone. Release the offense, open your heart, and give the situation into God’s care. *Psalm 139:23*

Expect: Tell God that you are looking forward to hearing from Him. Let the excitement of time in His presence build expectation in your heart. *Habakkuk 2:1*

The Mystery and Majesty

There is more depth and height and breadth to God's Word than I ever imagined. We pray that you have been filled up and refreshed by God's sustaining power becoming activated as the Word is made alive in you.

Where should we venture next for our final Scripture destination? If you were looking for a grand finale, a magnum opus, a comprehensive review of the value of the Word, where would you look? In your search, you would eventually discover a unique and lengthy psalm that is wholly dedicated to glorifying God and His Word. You know, the chapter that goes on and on for pages, one hundred seventy-six verses to be exact – yes, Psalm 119.

Why is Psalm 119 so important?

Nearly every verse in this remarkable psalm refers to the Word of God using terms such as law, judgments, precepts, testimonies, commandments, statutes, way, and righteousness.

Charles Spurgeon shares his adoration for this treasured passage of Scripture with a helpful visualization:

“This wonderful psalm, from its great length, helps us to wonder at the immensity of Scripture. . . . Its variety is that of a kaleidoscope: from a few objects a boundless variation is produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, and there is a strangely beautiful form. You shift the glass a very little, and another shape, equally delicate and beautiful, is before your eyes. So it is here.” (*Spurgeon's Commentary on the Bible, Psalm 119*)

This psalm is also uniquely structured in an acrostic pattern, divided into twenty-two sections of eight verses each representing the 22-character Hebrew alphabet. Has the Lord here provided a metaphor revealing that His Word is our spiritual alphabet, the building blocks of our language of the Spirit?

Psalm 119 and Job

Reading this psalm simultaneously with Job has provided some fascinating insights. The voice of David and the voice of Job began to overlap in my mind, and I almost wondered if Job was the long-lost author of Psalm 119. The verses of longing and declaration sounded so much like the petitions and proclamations of Job. I could not help but notice how many verses in Psalm 119 refer to the value of suffering in our lives: *“It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.” Psalm 119:71 (ESV)*

This discovery was not particularly comforting. I have to admit that much of my relationship with God is motivated by a desire to learn to walk in His ways so that I can acquire His blessing and protection. The verses that talk about finding life through death and growth through affliction are not my favorites. And yet, when pondering the life of Job together with the message of Psalm 119, it appears that God is more interested in my heart and my growth than in my ease.

For some reason, growth is rarely achieved without some measure of discomfort or even outright pain. Think of a baby’s birth, cutting teeth, learning to walk, limbs that ache during a growth spurt. God knows that this is the case, and He has provided relief in His Word: *“This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.” Psalm 119:50 (ESV)*

How does Job do it?

Alright, I admit that pain is part of life. So if affliction is coming, how do we endure these times of trial, valleys of despair, even attack on our bodies? When Job suffers unimaginable loss and painful disease, he refuses to curse God and die, although this might have been a tempting offer. How does Job remain steadfast?

As far as we know, he does not even have the written Word of God. He cannot turn to the Psalms for comfort or instruction. Jesus has not yet paid the final sacrifice to break the power of sin and death. Seemingly, Job is at a great disadvantage, and yet he does not give up on God. How does he persevere?

Treasure the Word

Job treasures God, and he is treasured by God. His life is sustained by his heart for the Lord: *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21 (NIV)* When everything else falls apart, and destruction is loosed in his life, Job discovers that there is an unshakable foundation beneath his feet, the Rock of his salvation.

Satan has no clue when he attempts to wreck this man’s life, that Job has an inner strength that will never be broken. The accuser falsely believes that Job’s dedication to the Lord is contingent on the blessings that he enjoys in his life. He is shocked to learn that Job’s inner strength is not based on his wealth, comfort, or health. In fact, Job’s determination is galvanized by affliction.

Despite mounting afflictions, Job is slowly apprehending that he has a fire in the pit of his belly that cannot be quenched by any suffering that the enemy launches against him. Job proves that the Word is his treasure, just like David professes: *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Psalm 119:11 (NIV)*

Sweet Refreshment

In the midst of his suffering, Job is tempted by the bitter comfort of self-pity and self-righteousness, but he chooses instead the sweet refreshment of God’s commandments and precepts.

Our Declaration Verse takes on a profound weight when we realize that the Word of God is rooted deeply in our hearts, spread out into every thought, impulse, word, and deed that nourishes us from the inside out. We think that we do God a favor by tasting and enjoying His Word, but we do not realize that it is He who does us a favor, for we would wither and starve without His sustaining power coursing through our veins, bringing life to our weary spirit.

*“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”
Psalm 119:103 (NIV)*

The sweet refreshing in Job's mouth which ignites the fire in his belly, establishes the rock beneath his feet, and creates the very breath in his lungs is none other than YHVH, the Hebrew word for Yahweh, the life force that sustains us.

My Eyes Have Seen You

When Job encounters God speaking out of the storm, he finally recognizes what foolishness it is to think that his integrity, reputation, or social standing could save him. At last, his God-accusing, self-justifying lament is resolved by his humble repentance:

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . . Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. . . . My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." Job 42: 2-5 (NIV)

The feasting table of self-righteousness is cleared by repentance, swept clean of the bitter morsels of a human rescue plan. God is no longer simply a theoretical entity speaking in Job's ears. Job has seen Him. They have connected eye to eye, and Job has been simultaneously humbled and restored.

The Source of Everything Good

When you turn to Jesus as your Savior and the Word as your nourishment, you experience the joy and liberation of abundance, even if your circumstances do not change. You experience that there is nothing more satisfying than a banquet table laden with God's promises in the company of the Lord Himself.

God's Word is indeed a multi-faceted kaleidoscope, full of color and brilliance. When I started this journey, I did not realize that I was going to be led into new vistas. I was living in a kingdom that appeared to be flat, but as I embarked on a pilgrimage to find the horizon, I realized that the world was round and endless and breathtaking. There is no end to the mystery and majesty of God's Word and God Himself. What a satisfying discovery!

Sweeter Than Honey: Day One

Declaration Verse:

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

Psalm 119:103

Today's Declare Practice: Read & Write

[] Read Psalm 119:103 slowly once or twice, even out loud if you are able.

[] Write Psalm 119:102-104 in the space below. *Feel free to get creative!*

Have a little more time?

Read Psalm Chapter 119 for context. Write out a few observations:

Read Psalm 119:103 in another Bible translation. Do you notice any differences?

Write your observations.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 32 & 33

Read and Write

Write any verses that stand out to you as you read the chapters.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Sweeter Than Honey: Day Two

Declaration Verse: Psalm 119:103

Today's Declare Practice: Investigate

Today we begin looking deeper into the Declaration Verse. Investigate as little or as much as time allows. Online resources like BibleGateway.com or BlueLetterBible.org will help you during your investigation.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part One

Read the Declaration Verse or the entire chapter if you have more time. Spend a few minutes highlighting any words you want to research more.

Write these words below.

[] Conduct a Word Study: Part Two

Want to learn more about the DECLARE Bible Study Approach and how to do a word study? Log onto www.flourishgathering.com/declare to view our video series.

Using BlueLetterBible.org or another online resource, choose a word you selected above to conduct your word study. This is as simple as looking up the original Greek or Hebrew word, reading the definitions of that word, and looking at how it is used in other verses in the Bible.

Record the results of your word study here.

Have a little more time?

[] Read any of the following cross references for Psalm 119:103:

Psalm 34:8

Proverbs 24:14

Ezekiel 3:3

Reading cross references will help you better understand a verse, word, or principle.

What did you discover? Write your insights.

[] Read a commentary. A commentary is a collection of explanatory notes that a Bible scholar has written about scripture. You can find these online. A good place to begin is Matthew Henry, C.H. Spurgeon, or David Guzik. Write any observations, quotes, or notes.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 34 & 35

Investigate

Highlight a couple of key words that stand out to you in the chapters you read. Using BlueLetterBible.org look up the Greek or Hebrew word and definition of one of those words.

Write your findings below.

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Sweeter Than Honey: Day Three

Declaration Verse: Psalm 119:103

Today's Declare Practice: Imagine

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart.

[] Read Psalm 119:103

You may want to scout around in your Bible for any notes or perhaps an introduction to this book of the Bible. When using your imagination, it helps to keep in mind the context of the chapter and book that you're in. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions. Use your imagination and all your senses to be present in the scene.

[] When and where is this taking place? What do you imagine you might see, hear, touch, taste, or smell?

[] Who is speaking or writing? Whom are they addressing? Others? God?
Themselves?

[] What are they speaking or writing about? What is their purpose?

Have a little more time?

[] What are the characteristics of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Is He steadfast, faithful, just, trustworthy, nurturing, kind, gentle, or strong?
What do you see revealed about His nature in this passage of Scripture?

[] What are the promises of God as shown through the Declaration Verse or chapter?

Write any observations, key words, or questions you have as you ponder the Declaration Verse. If you have time, you may want to do another word study.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 36 & 37

Imagine

You may want flip back to the beginning of Job in your Bible to read the introduction or use an online resource. Insert yourself in the story as you ponder the following questions.

What is happening? Imagine you are there. What do you notice?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Sweeter Than Honey: Day Four

Declaration Verse: Psalm 119:103

Today's Declare Practice: Listen

Remember to take a moment to “engage” as you prepare to listen: toss, catch, invite, open, expect. Invite the Words of Scripture and the Words of God to speak personally into your mind and heart. Remember that God’s voice will never accuse you. He may bring gentle conviction, and that can cause some grief, but God always brings hope.

Listening can be pursued for several days, and in fact, God will probably speak unexpectedly at random times of day or night as His revelation is released to you. Ask these questions as you listen to God’s voice:

[] How do these verses apply to me?

Have a little more time?

[] Ponder and pray: how I can apply these truths to the frustrations, disappointments, fears, or hurts in my life? Is there anything I need to receive or surrender in my life?

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 38 & 39

Listen

Ask yourself: how does what I have read so far in Job Chapters 32-39 apply to me? Does God want to speak to my heart today through this story?

Write down any general thoughts or questions you have as you read the chapters today.

Sweeter Than Honey: Day Five

Declaration Verse: Psalm 119:103

Today's Declare Practice: Declare

Write out a declaration of what you have received as you meditated on the Word. This can be a statement of God's promise to you, an affirmation of the healing that He has given you, or a proclamation of a truth that has become real to you. A declaration can include Scripture, your own words, or some of each.

Reflect upon your week

Write out Psalm 119:103 by hand if you memorized it, or summarize the Declaration Verse in your own words below.

Spend a few minutes documenting your insights, “a-ha” moments, and revelations from this week of digging into the Bible.

Digging Deeper

Optional Study: Book of Job

Read Job Chapters 40 - 42

Write any notes or observations you made from the chapters you read today.
Is there one verse that stands out to you?

Did you have any new insights as you pondered Job this week?

Notes

Next Steps

We have been Feasting on God's Word for some time now, but we have only barely scratched the surface. We embark now on a life-long treasure hunt, seeking out the mysteries, yearning for revelation to draw us closer to our Savior:

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” Deuteronomy 29:29 (NIV)

We desire to feast on God's Word because we know that with Holy Spirit inspiration the Bible will enable us to become wise and discerning. This promise is reinforced throughout the Scriptures which describe the new life we will experience when we have our feet firmly planted on the Word.

No wonder it is so hard to develop a consistent devotional life that includes a real love for the Bible. The devil is afraid of the power we will possess. If we regularly nurture our relationship with our Lord by feasting on His Word, we will be dangerously strong against the forces of evil.

When the Word becomes the sweet morsels that nourish your mind and heart, you will experience the joy and liberation of abundance. You will be able to exclaim, like the Psalmist: *“For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.” Psalm 107:9 (NAS)*

The Accuser works overtime to thwart us from finding satisfaction in God, assaulting us with hopelessness and isolation designed to separate us from life-giving relationships. I recently received a letter from a friend who listed all the heartaches and failures in her life. The list was long. She concluded with, *“Quite frankly, God has been a big disappointment.”*

I empathize with her grief, but I also see the plans of the enemy to lure her to give up on God, to give up on life, to allow her hopes and dreams to be crushed under the steam-roller of the enemy. Praise God, she reached out for help. When we face utter despair, we need the strength of a sister to help escort us to the feasting table, to encourage us to grab hold of the sustaining nourishment we need to persevere.

As you continue to ponder the life of Job and the four Declaration Verses you have enjoyed in Feasting, you will be equipped to harness the power of a steadfast devotion founded solely on your relationship with God. We pray that you will become increasingly curious about the Scriptures and continue using the DECLARE Bible Study Approach for yourself.

No matter the circumstances you face, the message revealed by Holy Spirit will make known the Lord's path for you to find new life. You will not always find easy answers, but instead the Scriptures will point you to the only One who can answer.

Complex questions are opened in the Word that inspire a lifetime of exploration. We crack open a door to the Word of God that you will enjoy studying and investigating for the rest of your life. Don't stay away for long. Read and ponder and pray. Come back to the Word time and time again as the circumstances of your life shift, and ask God what He wishes to reveal at each crossroads that you face.

The Lord is dedicated to help you grow into a woman who reflects His glory. Some days it feels like thriving, other days it's more like surviving, but His mercies are new every morning. Through it all, the Word of God is the nourishment that will never fail you:

*“My [daughter], pay attention to what I say;
turn your ear to my words.
Do not let them out of your sight,
keep them within your heart;
for they are life to those who find them
and health to one's whole body.” (Proverbs 4:20-22)*

Small Group Discussion Topics

We provide discussion topics if you want to gather with friends to enjoy this study together. You are welcome to use these points to help guide your conversation, or you can ponder these questions as a personal reflection. Even if you are not able to meet up with a girlfriend, you're invited to join us in our private Facebook Group at facebook.com/groups/flourishgathering/

Week One : Treasure the Word Discussion Topics

- 1) Do you have any thoughts or reactions to this week's devotional? Here are two passages that may inspire an interesting conversation:

“Reading through Job is a journey into the heart of despair, grief, confusion, and even the agony of physical pain and death, but it also offers hope in the unchanging nature of a wise and faithful God.” (pg. 14)

“God challenges one of our core human weaknesses: we almost compulsively compare ourselves one with another (2 Corinthians 10). This is an exercise in pride because we are hoping that in the comparison, we will come out on top. . . . There is no way that pride can bear good fruit.” (pg. 15)

- 2) Was there a special insight you gained from the **Investigate** practice? Perhaps an interesting word study, cross reference, or commentary?

- 3) What happened when you used your **Imagination**? What did you discover about the context of this chapter or book of the Bible? If you had time, did you gain insight into the character or promises of God?
- 4) Did God speak something special that you would like to share as you **Listened**?
- 5) What is your **Declaration**? How can we pray for you in this regard?
- 6) How about the optional reading plan? Anything interesting there?
- 7) How can we support one another this week? Prayer requests? Praise reports?

Week Two: The Bread of Life Discussion Topics

- 1) Do you have any thoughts or reactions to this week's devotional? Here are two passages that may inspire an interesting conversation:

“Have you ever acted like a substitute savior? I have – repeatedly – and it never turns out very well. How many failures will finally convince us that we cannot save ourselves, let alone anyone else? Jesus is the only One qualified to save, the only One who perfectly exemplifies a life completely yielded to God.” (pg. 39)

“When Jesus encounters evil, He does not fight the attack with the power of his own qualifications, even though he could (He is God, after all). Instead, Jesus confesses the Word. *Selah – pause and think of this.* (pg. 40)

- 2) Was there a special insight you gained from the **Investigate** practice? Perhaps an interesting word study, cross reference, or commentary?

- 3) What happened when you used your **Imagination**? What did you discover about the context of this chapter or book of the Bible? If you had time, did you gain insight into the character or promises of God?
- 4) Did God speak something special that you would like to share as you **Listened**?
- 5) What is your **Declaration**? How can we pray for you in this regard?
- 6) How about the optional reading plan? Anything interesting there?
- 7) How can we support one another this week? Prayer requests? Praise reports?

Week Three: My Heart's Delight Discussion Topics

- 1) Do you have any thoughts or reactions to this week's devotional? Here are two passages that may inspire an interesting conversation:

“Pride keeps a list of your qualifications based on what you have done and how you surpass others. False humility can help soften the edge, but no one is fooled for long. People eventually find out that it is still just plain old self-conceit under there.” (pg. 61)

“Jeremiah was nourished by a thriving relationship with his Heavenly Father regardless of the circumstances. His vitality was sustained by feasting on God's Word as if life depended on it because for Jeremiah it absolutely did.” (pg. 63)

- 2) Was there a special insight you gained from the **Investigate** practice? Perhaps an interesting word study, cross reference, or commentary?
- 3) What happened when you used your **Imagination**? What did you discover about the context of this chapter or book of the Bible? If you had time, did you gain insight into the character or promises of God?
- 4) Did God speak something special that you would like to share as you **Listened**?
- 5) What is your **Declaration**? How can we pray for you in this regard?
- 6) How about the optional reading plan? Anything interesting there?
- 7) How can we support one another this week? Prayer requests? Praise reports?

Week Four: Sweeter Than Honey Discussion Topics

- 1) Do you have any thoughts or reactions to this week's devotional? Here are two passages that may inspire an interesting conversation:

“Satan has no clue when he attempts to wreck this man’s life, that Job has an inner strength that will never be broken. The accuser falsely believes that Job’s dedication to the Lord is contingent on the blessings that he enjoys in his life. . . . In fact, Job’s determination is galvanized by affliction.” (pg. 86)

“Our Declaration Verse takes on a profound weight when we realize that the Word of God is rooted deeply in our hearts, spread out into every thought, impulse, word, and deed that nourishes us from the inside out. We think that we do God a favor by tasting and enjoying His Word, but we do not realize that it is He who does us a favor, for we would wither and starve without His sustaining power coursing through our veins, bringing life to our weary spirit.” (pg. 86)

- 2) Was there a special insight you gained from the **Investigate** practice? Perhaps an interesting word study, cross reference, or commentary?
- 3) What happened when you used your **Imagination**? What did you discover about the context of this chapter or book of the Bible? If you had time, did you gain insight into the character or promises of God?
- 4) Did God speak something special that you would like to share as you **Listened**?
- 5) What is your **Declaration**? How can we pray for you in this regard?
- 6) How about the optional reading plan? Anything interesting there?
- 7) How can we support one another this week? Prayer requests? Praise reports?

A little bit about Flourish

Flourish is a gathering of women who passionately pursue God and His Word. We encourage one another through genuine, transparent relationships which equip us to thrive where we are planted and impact our world for the glory of God.

We believe that the power of God's Word revealed by the Spirit changes lives. In relationship with God and with one another, we are strengthened to overcome hindrances in our journey. Flourish is dedicated to bringing God's Word to life in the 21st Century by encouraging women that the Word is alive, active, and powerful today.

Now here's our purpose spelled out in regular talk.

We want more of God, so we dig into His Word. We can't survive without Him. We can't survive without you either. You can leave your mask at the door because real life is messy, and no one here is pretending to have it all together

At Flourish we...

ENCOURAGE

We share real stories of real life with transparency and honesty, always pointing to the promises found in God's Word.

EQUIP

Flourish provides tools and resources that are grounded in the Word of God. Our community provides a safe place to learn and to grow.

ACTIVATE

We seek God in community because, when the rubber hits the road, we want to see evidence of God's life in our relationships.

About the Authors

Meet Mindy. . .

Mindy Kiker is a committed Floridian, enjoying a quiet woodland home that she and her husband built to shelter their four boisterous boys. Born in Tucson, Arizona, Mindy's magical childhood included a four-year hiatus on the big island of Hawaii where she danced the hula, and later helped with the family marina in Cedar Key where she learned to cast net and sail the Gulf of Mexico. The Kikers spent the 1990s in South Africa, returning with their brood for a sabbatical year in 2012 to reconnect with beloved friends and favorite places.

Now that Mindy's spring-chicken days are drawing to a close, she has accepted her role as an "older" woman (it's all relative) cheering others on in life's journey. A favorite verse that motivates her to keep pressing into God and encouraging her friends to do the same is *Galatians 5:1*, "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*"

And Jenny. . .

Jenny Kochert was born and raised in sunny South Florida. Although she took full advantage of big-city life growing up, she longed to move to a quieter town, and college provided the perfect excuse! After graduating from the University of Florida, Jenny followed in the family footsteps and became a private investigator (yes, you read that right!), opening her own agency in 2005.

However, once she became a mom to her daughter, Sophia, she turned in her badge, and settled at home, now home schooling her daughter. Jenny, her husband Ryan, and daughter Sophia now live in Northern Kentucky where they serve in ministry together as a family. God has put a story on her lips and a passion in her heart to encourage women, and she is thrilled that she gets to do that each and every day.

Join us for our next study

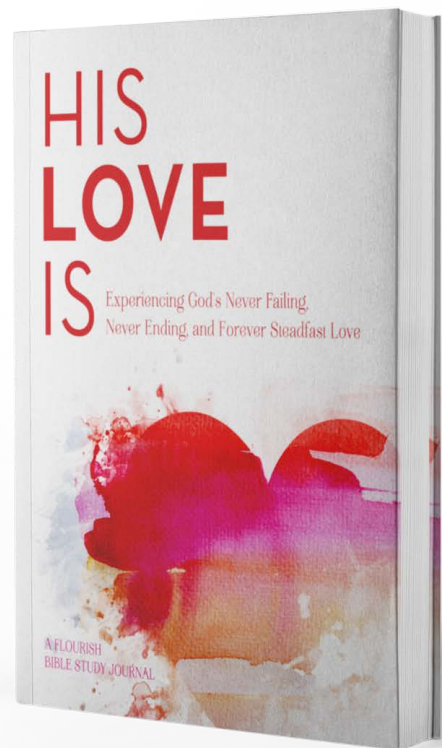
Available February 2018

Is love a fleeting emotion, maybe even painful or threatening? Or is it a trustworthy foundation in your life? Many of us are weary of striving to earn approval. Is there a better way? Jesus has written upon your heart a story of unfailing love that is unshakable to the core. But how can you be sure? His promises are found in the Bible, the greatest love story ever told.

Welcome to ***His Love Is***, a 20-day self-paced Bible study journal that guides you step-by-step as you study four key Scriptures using the DECLARE Bible Study Approach. This less-is-more approach invites you to dig into the Bible and hear God speak as you learn to apply five simple daily practices: read & write, investigate, imagine, listen and declare the Word.

In this guided study, you will explore the life of Ruth, a faithful woman who is loyal above all else. She is a living example of God's steadfast desire that his children flourish even in the face of difficulty, as promised in the Scriptures: "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*"
Lamentations 3:22-23 (NIV)

It is our prayer that as you study God's Word and seek His voice, you will receive His unconditional affection for you. You will become convinced that nothing can separate you from His Never Failing, Never Ending, and Forever Steadfast Love. Come away and discover a love story written especially for you.



Thank you

For Feasting on God's Word with Us!

Connect with us on Facebook:

@Flourishgathering

Contact us:

info@flourishgathering.com

Visit us:

Flourishgathering.com

