

“YOUR SERVICE AND GIVING – IT’S ALL ABOUT GOD AND YOU”

A BIBLE STUDY

FOR THE THANKFUL SAINTS OF

EMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

**Living For Him
Trusting In Him
Following Him
Focusing On Him**

By

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It's All About God And You

LIVING FOR HIM

Romans 12:1 – 2

How do you view God in your relationship with Him? This will determine how you see your purpose in life. Your Christian faith is based upon a relationship that was initiated and sought by a perfect partner, Jesus. Our entire lives ought to have purpose and meaning that centers on knowing God and what He has done for you and me. Yes, living for Jesus gives meaning and purpose for our daily lives and our faith.

PART I - SACRIFICES

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12: 1

1. Paul in these verses indicates the primary motivation for our Christian faith and life. Identify the key motivational phrase from verse 1. Explain why it is so important for every believer to understand this motivation.
2. Stewardship has been defined as everything we believers do to thank God for what He has done for us. Explain the connection between our acts of stewardship and the motivation given in verse 1.
3. There is a striking difference between sacrifices of the Old Testament and the type of New Testament sacrifice Paul is describing. Complete the table below comparing these two types of sacrifices.

	O. T. Sacrifice	N.T. Sacrifice
How the "sacrifices" arrive at the altar		
Describe the "sacrifices" life status		
Who owns the sacrifice		
Other comparisons:		

4. Some of the more common “sacrifices” for the 21st Century Christian are listed below. How can these acts become routine and repetitive?

Sunday worship

giving an offering

service to others

5. Since the Old Testament people were told what, how and when to perform a sacrifice, it may have been very common to turn it into a ritualistic activity. Repeating the same actions over and over can become routine and repetitive. Paul paints an entirely different picture when he describes the New Testament sacrificial actions as a “spiritual act.” Evaluate this description using the following words:

heart

think

want

With your group share how the Holy Spirit has helped you to make the above sacrifices a living, spiritual act of worship as you live for Jesus.

6. Our acts of service are living acts, not like the Old Testament dead ones that were consumed. Discuss the significance of being sacrifices that are becoming healthier and stronger through our obedient service to God.

PART II - TRANSFORMATION

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:2

7. There are many people in the church who do not get the message and therefore do not change the way they think. They follow the world’s pattern and go their own way. Even in their better moments they try to conform by earning favor with God by buying into his graces. But Paul introduces the gospel imperative, *be transformed*, which indicates a continuing action. Describe what that suggests to you about the Christian’s faith and life.

8. Your transformation takes place by the *renewing of your mind*. How does this renewing happen (think of where we find the will of God)?

9. A transformation entails making changes. Analyze why our flesh often fights against or resists spiritual change. What are some examples of this in our lives?

10. One of the most difficult changes for the disciple of Jesus to make is the change of the pocketbook. Our sinful flesh tells us not to give a generous amount back to the Lord. Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians, advised just the opposite.

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

2 Corinthians 9:6

Explain how a farmer understands the meaning of sowing and reaping sparingly versus sowing and reaping generously. How is this related to the subject of giving for the thankful giver?

11. Why do some people find it easier to simply restructure and settle for a cosmetic approach (surface) rather than changing inside spiritually?

PART III - REFLECTION

12. PERSONAL REFLECTION

- a. Pinpoint two obstacles that are hindering your relationship with Jesus.
- b. Make a plan to eliminate those obstacles. Partner up with a close friend who will hold you accountable, share the plan with him/her asking them to support you and your plan, and pray for God’s direction and support.

13. COMMUNITY OF FAITH REFLECTION

- a. Identify an attitude within our congregation that, if “transformed,” would greatly enrich the spiritual growth of every one of our members.
- b. Identify a tradition or practice within our congregation that, if “transformed”, would dramatically impact the Christian faith and life of every congregational member.
- c. Create a list of three blessings that our congregation might experience as each individual sees his/her spiritual life grow and flourish.

It's All About God And You

TRUSTING IN HIM

Deuteronomy 30: 11 – 20

God gives the Christian choices. We can trust Him or worry and doubt. We can obey Christ or disobey. Today's study reminds us that we have a choice between life and death, blessings and curses. We can be guided by spiritual values or attach ourselves to the physical and materials things of this world. Yes, trusting in Jesus gives meaning and purpose for our daily lives and our faith.

PART I - OBEYING

¹¹Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹²It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. Deuteronomy 30: 11 – 14

1. Moses declares to the Children of Israel that understanding, believing and accepting the covenant was not beyond them. Analyze why he uses the heaven and the sea analogy to explain this.
2. The word was "very near" the Children of Israel. How is it near us as well? How is it possible to make it far away from us?
3. How can these verses support and encourage us to commit ourselves to be lifelong Bible students?
4. When God's Word is read and studied, His will is shared. This gives the Christian assurance and confidence to face and overcome fears. How can this help us as we are challenged in our stewardship lives?

PART II - CHOICES

¹⁵See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow

down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. Deuteronomy 30: 15 – 18

5. In the opening verse Moses focuses on two alternatives. In what ways are these shocking choices?

6. Under each heading use words from the above verses to describe how each can be achieved. Under “Results,” describe the promise God makes for each choice.

<i>Life and Prosperity</i>	<i>Death and Destruction</i>
RESULTS OF CHOICE	

7. There are a variety of ways “to bow down to other gods.” Discuss how the 21st Century Christian can bow down and worship the god of materialism.

PART III - DECISIONS

¹⁹This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and ²⁰that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Deuteronomy 30: 19 – 20

8. Moses gives encouragement to choose life and make the LORD our life. How does God become “our life”?

9. The Bible passage below is a description of some very generous Christian people, the Macedonians. Paul had not directed them to gather an offering for the church in Jerusalem, but they acted entirely on their own initiative. The eager desire

of the Macedonians to participate in an offering was there because of the attitude of their hearts.

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

II Corinthians 8: 2 – 5

From the verses identify characteristics of those thankful hearts. Assess how these characteristics came about and grew in their hearts.

- | | |
|----|----|
| a) | c) |
| b) | d) |

10. Discuss some problems that are created when Christians make salaries, homes, cars or other possessions their life or their purpose for existence. Include in the discussion how you know someone is worshipping this god of materialism.

PART IV - REFLECTION

11. PERSONAL REFLECTION

Identify some priorities in your life that have sneaked up and passed God. On a full piece of paper, draw four columns. Write the misplaced priorities in the far left column. In column two write two or three phrases describing how the misplaced priorities have received too much emphasis in your heart and mind. In column three describe why God gave you that life blessing. And finally, in the fourth column answer this question: How can I show my trust in God through it.

12. COMMUNITY OF FAITH REFLECTION

a. Why is it extremely important that every member of our congregation know and obey God's Word, "Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deut 30: 19b)?

b. Create a list of three blessings that our congregation might experience as each individual sees a change in priorities in their life by putting Jesus first.

FOLLOWING HIM

Joshua 1:6 – 11

When the Lord prepared the Children of Israel to enter the Promised Land, he took special pains to impress upon them that their wise and powerful God was still in control. This group of people witnessed many miraculous events that gave further testimony to his always true promises. God's commitment of grace remains our comfort and encouragement even as we struggle with decisions and challenges of living in this world. Today's study will inspire you to continue following your God until you reach your final destination, life eternal in heaven.

PART I – HEARING & TRUSTING

⁶“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your youth; meditate on it day an night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:6 – 9

1. These words followed the death of Moses and were spoken in some form to Joshua, son of Nun. God chose Joshua as the new leader for his people. Summarize the events that occurred between the time the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and these words which were spoken to Joshua.
2. If we were Joshua, list some concerns we might have about leading Israel.
3. Three times God boosted Joshua's faith by urging him to “be strong and courageous.” Underline this phrase each time it occurs in the above verses. This repetition is both striking and significant. Analyze why God used this phrase three times within four verses.

4. Another way that God gives encouragement in these verses is to make use of “Do not” statements. Observe the following pattern on the left when God says:

	Promise
“Do not turn from it (law) to the right or to the left” (v. 7)	†
let the Book of the Law depart from your youth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (v. 8)	†
be terrified; do not be discouraged” (v. 9)	†

After each of the above crosses, write out the promise that correlates with each encouraging “do not.”

PART II - FOLLOWING

¹⁰So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹“Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”
Joshua 1: 10 – 11

5. How did Joshua demonstrate he trusted God and was willing to follow him?

6. Joshua helped the nation prepare to enter the Promised Land. Israel took with them supplies that they would need in the new land. We too plan to enter a promised land, heaven, but will not take anything with us. Jesus gave some insightful instructions as we “prepare” to enter His heaven.

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Matthew 6: 19 – 21

With a partner respond to the following:

a. List some “treasures on earth”.

b. Explain how we “store up treasures in heaven”.

c. Describe the connection between “treasure” and “heart” in v. 21.

PART III - REFLECTION

7. PERSONAL REFLECTION

- a. To be firm in our faith, we need to hear God's uplifting words of encouragement again and again. From our discussion and the words of Joshua 1, share with a friend how these words, "be strong and courageous" build you up.

- b. Many times followers of Jesus will lose their perspective and will forget God's encouraging words. Think of a time when an earthly challenge or major decision took precedence over storing up "treasures in heaven." If given that situation and opportunity again, how would you respond today? Why?

- c. Choose a Scripture phrase or verse from today's lesson that gives you direction in meeting a challenge of today. Memorize it, so it is written on your heart. Write it down and place it in a prominent location (checkbook, cupboard door, bill location, computer screen, dresser top, etc.). Use it to give you a spiritual perspective during challenging or decision making times.

8. COMMUNITY OF FAITH REFLECTION

Jesus gave up everything and made us a very high priority in coming to this earth by living and dying a perfect life. Out of thanks for his atoning work, he made it very clear that following Him means that we give Him priority. Jesus encouraged his followers to continually ask, "Who and what comes first in our lives?" See Matt. 6:24 and Luke 14:33. This priority principle of Christ first in everything has a clear application to the way we plan our church activities, and how each one of us is involved in them.

- a. Think of how our church would function if every member lived their lives following the priority of Jesus first. What would change and be different?

- b. What can we do to help others place Jesus at a higher priority in their lives?

FOCUSING ON HIM

Mark 8: 22 – 25

There are many things in our lives that compete with the love we have for Jesus. Family members, material possessions, money, jobs and a desire to get ahead in this world are just some of those things. The growing Christian is cognizant of this competition and desires to more closely follow Jesus in all things. Today's study is about a man who was able to see his Lord and maker, Jesus more clearly. Through his eyes we will see that Jesus is truly the Son of God. He is our true focus for this life and the next.

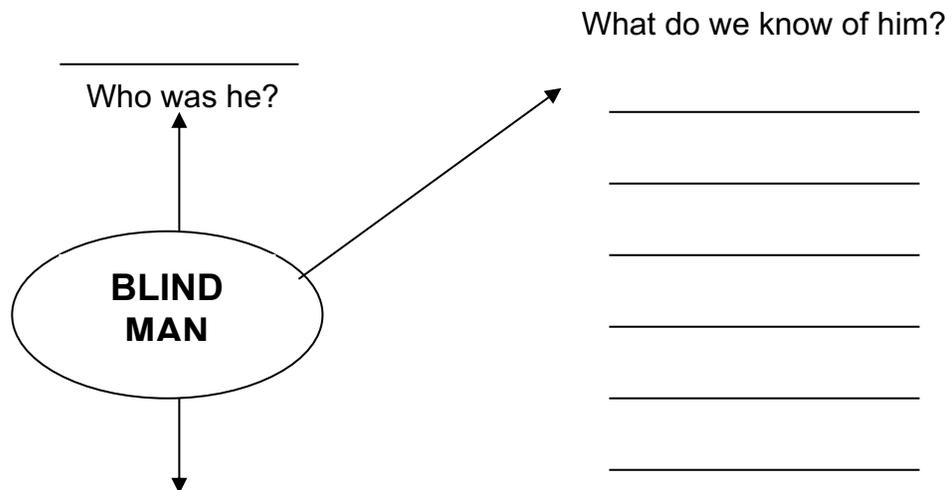
PART I - BELIEVING

²²They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

²⁵Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."
Mark 8: 22 – 25

1. Jesus led the blind man outside the village in order to heal him. Analyze why Jesus did this.
2. Complete the graphic below to deepen your understanding of the blind man.



List other Bible characters who saw Jesus more clearly after a period of time.

3. Jesus obviously could have healed the blind man on the first attempt. However, he had a purpose in meeting the man's need by doing a two-stage miracle.
- a. Discuss what the blind man's needs may have been.
 - b. Relating vv. 23 – 24 to spiritual vision, our sinful nature blurs the will and plan of God. We tend to distort some things by using human goals instead of God's goals. Name some of them.
 - c. Are there Biblical truths about stewardship that many church members see only vaguely and therefore do not practice? How can they receive the miracle of "seeing them more clearly" and trusting on God to practice them?
 - d. Sometimes we need a "two stage miracle" of having our eyes spiritually opened. Recall such an experience in your life.
4. Reread v. 25. How do Jesus' actions assure clear sight of God's plan for us?

PART II - FOCUSING

5. ²²**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** **Matthew 6:33**

What is the distorted view of this principle of giving which Christ taught? What is the correct view and how does it help the Christian to change from a leftover giver to a generous, firstfruit, proportionate giver?

6. ¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the **grace** that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. II Corinthians 8:1, 2

⁷But just as you excel in everything See that you also excel in this **grace** of giving. II Corinthians 8: 7

⁸And God is able to make all **grace** abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. II Corinthians 9: 8

With a partner share your definition of the grace of giving.

PART III - REFLECTION

7. PERSONAL REFLECTION

- a. Consider the challenge to make a financial commitment to God through our church by taking one of the following steps: a) continue my level of giving of last year so that our present church programs may continue; b) increase or step up my giving next year by enlarging my offerings either through an increase of giving by 1% of my income or by giving a tithe (10%) of what God gives me.

- b. Talk about why this is realistic both Biblically and practically.

- c. The devil will put up some distortions and barriers to stop you from doing this, or even thinking seriously about it. List some of these.

- d. Choose a Scripture passage from today's lesson that gives you strength to overcome these distortions and barriers. Memorize it, so it is written on your heart. When Satan comes, use it to fight him.

8. COMMUNITY OF FAITH REFLECTION

¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Deuteronomy 11:18

- a. What do we learn to be God's plan for Christians related to Bible study?

- b. What could you share with a member who does not see clearly that God's grace can cause them to be generous, firstfruit, proportionate givers?

- c. How can more church members be gained for a lifelong commitment to Bible study?

- d. Describe how the "eyes" of our congregation would change if we had more people regularly practice Christian giving.