

New Believer's Course – Lesson 3: Quiet times with God and Forgiveness

Welcome to Lesson 3 of the New Believer's Course. In this lesson we will cover one method, of which there are many, relating to how we can daily study God's word, the bible, as well as looking at what it means to forgive.

Romans 8:29 *For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

This verse highlights what could be arguably God's highest priority and purpose for our lives – to mould and shape us into the image of his son Jesus. God uses the daily obstacles in our life journey as opportunities through which to teach us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23).

Just as we eat physical food to keep our bodies physically strong, God's word is likened to spiritual food and it is what keeps our inner spirit and soul strong. Just as it is also necessary to feed ourselves physically every day, so too it is necessary to feed on God's word every day to learn wisdom. Remember 2 Tim 3:16 from lesson 1 that says: *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."* His word also gives us the spiritual strength we need to fight off the temptations and traps that the enemy seeks to put in our way to cause us to fall and ultimately to deny Jesus.

Psalm 1 describes this clearly:

*Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
²but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

Jesus himself points us to God's written word in Matthew 4:4 where he says: *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

John 6:35 and John 1:1 teach us that Jesus himself is both the word of God and the bread of life, so in studying the bible we can make an analogy that we are eating and internalising the life of Jesus.

(John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word (logos – written word), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.)

Psalm 1 tells us that it is good to come to meditate, think, ponder, on God's word daily – hence our daily "quiet times" with God. Jesus himself is often noted as going away by himself to spend time alone in prayer with his heavenly father.

Several years early on after SCF was pioneered we came across a method used for exploring the bible and relating with God from Wayne Cordeiro – a pastor of a church in Hawaii. The acrostic he uses is S.O.A.P. (which reminds us that by reading God’s word we are washing our inner selves) - S for Scripture, O for Observation, A for Application and P for Prayer. Around the same time, we also adopted a bible reading plan which takes us through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice over a two-year period. These are great tools for you to use to grow stronger in and closer to God as a new believer in Jesus.

S: Each day you read the **scripture** that is indicated on the bible reading plan.

O: From this reading it is good to have some sort of Quiet Time journal or file set up on your computer where you can make a note of any interesting points or **observations** that you have noticed. This is where you might also note any questions you have that you don’t know the answer to.

A: Application then is where you ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you something practical and measurable that you would like to do prompted by your reading. It might be a way of living that you want to try and change or an action of love that you want to do for someone else. It might be the action of memorising one of the verses you have just read.

Mark 4: 24 *And be sure to put into practise what you hear. The more you do this, the more you will understand what I tell you.*

P: And then, even though you may have been already talking with the Holy Spirit throughout the above process you end your quiet time with a concluding **prayer**. This may also include praying through a prayer list of people you know who need God’s particular help, or people that need to come to know God themselves. Prayer can also happen through the words of a worship song that you listen to or sing.

Let’s move on now to the second half of this lesson which is to do with the topic of forgiveness.

Personal forgiveness

- 1 John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Matt 6: 14 *“And if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

One very clear application that we can take from Matt 6:14 is that we are asked, even commanded by God, to forgive others so that He can forgive us. I would like to complete Lesson three with a short presentation of what forgiveness looks like as there can be some confusion around this topic.

7 Points in Forgiving Others – What does this Mean?

1. That being sinned against involves loss – take the time to acknowledge and grieve over what has been taken from you. It's ok for this process to involve feelings of both anger and sadness. Initially you may need some time to talk with a trusted friend or counsellor and journal about your hurt.
2. Forgiveness however is a choice, not a feeling. It is an act of obedience to God's word. We can't wait until we feel happy with a person before we decide to forgive them.
3. This choice to forgive may need to be repeated several times, especially as you are tempted to go back to a past wound in your mind and then have to choose again not to go over it – in other words forgiveness is a process not an event. Forgiveness doesn't mean that you will forget the offense but it **does mean** that you will ultimately **choose not to rehearse or continually bring up the offense, either in your mind or verbally with people around you.** (Ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware every time you start to go down this wrong track).
4. **Forgiveness doesn't equal trust.** This can cause much confusion among Christians who sometimes believe that they are expected by God to put themselves back under the influence of, or remain in connection to someone who has been abusive to them. Forgiveness does not mean that you must remain in or re-establish any form of contact. Trust is something that is earned – or not – over time. There must be a change of actions in any person who has hurt you in order for you to even consider re-engaging with them.
5. Remember that "hurt people hurt people". Sometimes this can help us to see others with compassion rather than anger.
6. Forgiveness isn't letting the other person "off the hook". It lets you "off the hook".
Rom 12: 17 *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge **but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord."***
7. Finally, the goal in healing for yourself is to work towards being able to pray for your offender's welfare:
Luke 6: 27 *"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."* The goal of forgiveness is to **be able to, in our own heart, wish the offender personal growth and a movement towards wholeness and maturity.** God instructs us to invoke blessings upon and pray for the happiness of those who curse us.