



IN A DARK CORNER

bible study companion



KNOW THE TRUTH. LIVE THE TRUTH.
IT CHANGES EVERYTHING.

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week One - Part 1

Bible Study Companion Leader: Katrina V. Wylie



Hi Bible study friend! I'm glad you've chosen to join me here in the Bible Study Companion. Like Wendy Blight indicated in Chapter 1 of *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner*, it was God's love and Word that set her heart free. So what better step for us to take than to dig into His Word, and learn more about His love and Truth, to begin to set our hearts free too! To help us do that, let's start by *opening* our hearts.

Opening Our Hearts:

When we have a loss, hurt or trial burdening us, it's not uncommon to close our hearts to some degree. But, if we want to find freedom again, we need to set about reopening our hearts, even just a little bit, especially to God. In the "Guide for Reflection and Study," in the back of *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner*, Wendy Blight wrote and shared a beautiful prayer to help us do this. Let's pray that now.

"Heavenly Father, we acknowledge You as our Creator and the One who loves us just as we are. Together, my new friend and I come before You and give the next weeks to You as we begin this journey together. Lord, I ask that You open her heart to receive all the wonderful Truths You have in store for her. You led her to choose this book because You have a powerful work You want to perform in her life. I pray that as she turns each page, she would experience the power of Your healing touch. Thank You for Your promise that when we seek You with all of our heart, we will find You. I claim that for her right now. I pray she will experience You in a powerful way. We thank You in advance for all You will do. It is in Your Son Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Your Dark Corner:

In the introduction of the book, Wendy asks these tough questions:

Have you ever...

- *Been the victim of someone's violent behavior?*
- *Felt like someone ripped away all you had in this world?*
- *Felt like your life was spiraling out of control and you didn't know how you could survive another day?*
- *Experienced a physical or emotional pain so deep that nothing could soothe the hurt?*

*Do you relate? Circle the bullets or parts that personally speak to your feelings and circumstance, and then answer the next questions. Though this step can be hard, taking time with God to do this can also be a helpful beginning to finding healing and freedom.

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*How does your loss, hurt or trial currently burden your heart and affect your everyday life?

In Chapter one, Wendy shares her “dark corner” story with us about being raped. She begins with these hard-hitting words: *“It was supposed to be the happiest time of my life...”* While I haven’t endured being the victim of someone’s violent behavior, I can very much relate to her words in regards to my own “dark corner” experience.

My dark corner began with a long, difficult labor during the birth of my daughter, which led to health complications I’m still dealing with today, ten years later. Complications that meant we wouldn’t have more children of our own through pregnancy.

The birth of a child is another time in our lives that’s “supposed to be the happiest.” Part of what made my experience so hard for me was that my expectations of what that time in my life was supposed to be like, didn’t align with my reality. What I felt “should’ve” been a beautiful high point in my life, suddenly and unexpectedly involved one of my toughest lows.

*Have your expectations and the timing of your loss, hurt or trial played a part in your reaction to it? If so, how?

Wendy’s story struck another chord with me when she ended Chapter 1 with these words: *“I felt so alone. No one, not a single soul, understood the depths of my pain and my despair. No one knew the terror I lived with each day. No one knew ... my loneliness, my helplessness, my hopelessness.”*

*Have you, too, felt alone in the burden you carry, like no one truly knows or understands? Explain.

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Merging Our Story with Jesus' Story:

*Look up and read the passages listed in the chart below, making note of what Jesus endured. As you do, reflect upon all you've endured through *your* dark corner experience, circling and/or jotting down the ways in which you relate, big or small.

Bible Study Tip!

Flipping back and forth between books is a great way to increase familiarity with the Bible. I highly encourage the practice! However, when in a time crunch, you can also utilize technology such as Bible Gateway to look up a list of verses quickly. Here's how:

1. Go to <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.
2. Click in the search box at the top.
3. Type out each of the listed verses, adding a comma between each one.
4. To the right, choose the desired Bible translation and hit the SEARCH button. All the verses will now show up, one after another, for you to scroll and read through.

Verses:	Jesus endured:	How I relate:
Luke 22:4-6 Matthew 26:20-25 Matthew 26:47-50	Betrayal	
Matthew 26:69-75 Mark 15:6-14		
Matthew 26:59 Mark 14:56 Mark 15:1-3 Luke 23:10		
John 19:1 Matthew 27:27-31 Matthew 27:37-44		
Mark 15:33-34		
Mark 15:37		

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I went into labor on Good Friday. Friday came and went. Saturday came and went. Easter Sunday came and went, and *still* no baby. With what felt like no end in sight to the pain, I vividly remember crying out in my mind the very same question Jesus cried out on the cross: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” But finally, on Monday morning, my beautiful girl came — Ava — a gift from God with my mom’s red hair!

After a week of Ava having to be in the NICU (due to health complications from the long, difficult birth), our hospital stay finally came to an end. But my questioning of God? That cry of my heart echoed into each passing week, month and year as my own personal health complications continued without answers.

*Has your loss, pain or trial affected your faith, causing you to question God’s love, His goodness and/or the Truth of His Word? If so, what have you questioned, and how has that impacted your walk with God (Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, etc.)?

In addition to relating to Jesus enduring physical pain and feeling forsaken, I also related to Him experiencing death. Not death in the physical sense, but the death of my dream to have more children. Death of my overall good health and the everyday tasks I used to take for granted but now can’t do. And death to the years I spent living in fear, anger and resentment. The years I pushed God and my loved ones away, turning to food for comfort instead. A choice that only caused further health struggles that still plague me today.

*What emotions are you experiencing in response to your loss, pain or trial (anger, jealousy, fear, resentment, doubt, etc.)? How strongly are those emotions controlling your everyday life (thoughts, actions, beliefs)? List and rank them from strongest to weakest.

*In what ways and how often do these emotions affect you and those around you?

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*Have you tried to deal with everything through means other than God? If yes, what have you tried, and did it successfully resolve anything?

Jesus endured betrayal, rejection, false accusations, excruciating pain and humiliation, feeling forsaken and eventual death. What an unfathomable experience to have to endure! But, we know God had a bigger plan. One that everyone but Jesus couldn't yet see or understand. One that, in order for it to take effect, first meant Jesus experiencing all those unthinkable things.

*Look up and read John 3:16. Why and for whom did Jesus endure all of those things?

Friend, while I don't know what you've had to endure, I do know this: God so loved YOU that He gave His one and only Son to die on that cross. God being God, could've chosen a less painful way to accomplish His salvation plan for us. But, God being God, knew what WE would have to endure in this sin-soaked world. He knew it would take Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross to reach us, in our times of pain, with His message:

You are not alone.

I am with you.

I understand.

*How does knowing and remembering everything Jesus endured and why, AND that God had a bigger plan, help your view of your loss, hurt or trial?

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Week 1 - Part 2

Let's continue on in Jesus' story, because we know it doesn't end here in all the pain and sorrow. Resurrection and new life are coming!

*Look up and read Luke 24:1-3, John 20:1-2 and Mark 16:1-4. Did the women have to roll the stone away from the tomb?

*Look up and read Matthew 28:1-3. Through this account, who do we learn was responsible for the stone being rolled away?

In our memory verse this week, God says, *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."* Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

While this verse isn't speaking of the stone at Jesus' tomb, when I read it, I picture the angel of the Lord rolling away the stone, opening the way for Jesus to enter into His new and glorious resurrected body and life. I picture God doing the same for us — rolling away the stone that's entombed us in the dark corners of *our* hearts, so we can walk out into new life!

Don't miss the significance of *who* rolled away the stone. God didn't expect the women to roll away the stone to make the way for Jesus to walk into new life. He did it for them. It's the same with us. We don't carry the burden of removing what holds us captive and burdens our hearts. That's God's role. He carries the load for us, making a way for us to walk into new life.

*How are you striving, in your own strength, to overcome and start anew after your loss, hurt, or trial? How has this worked for you? What's one step you'll commit to take to stop striving and start surrendering the burden over to God to carry?

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Turn back to Luke 24 in your Bibles (or Bible app). We're going to journey through the rest of this account of Jesus' story together!

*Read verses 2-8. What emotion did the women feel in response to not finding what they expected in the tomb?

*What do the two men remind the women of that helps them to move past their fear into understanding and belief? Write out verse 8.

*Read verses 9-12.

In response to *remembering Jesus' words*, the women leave the tomb and go tell the apostles the good news. But the apostles don't believe them. Verse 11 (NIV) tells us why: "*because THEIR words seemed to them like nonsense*" (emphasis added). In other words, they were focusing on the women's words rather than the words of Jesus!

Oh, how I'm guilty of this — focusing on the words of others over God's. But this is why it's so important for us to remember what *God's Word* says when we find ourselves in unexpected trials. While the words of others often leads to lies, fear and doubt, God's Word fills us with truth. Truth that leads to trust and belief and gives us the courage we need to step out of the tomb, step outside our pain and share the good news with others!

In my Bible, the next section of Luke 24 is titled "On the Road to Emmaus." While the apostles stayed back in Jerusalem, other followers of Jesus left Jerusalem confused and filled with sadness. We meet two of these followers in verses 13-35. Let's read their story.

*Read verses 13-24, taking note of the first few words of verse 21.

Jesus' followers doubted and failed to recognize Him. In the NIV version, verse 21 starts out, "*...but we had hoped...*" These words hint at what Cleopas and his friend are focused on — their own expectations! So much so, they're not seeing what God has done and is doing.

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*Do you recognize when Jesus shows up in your loss, hurt or trial? Or do your expectations keep you from recognizing God at work in your circumstance? List any “but I had hoped” expectations you’re still holding on to.

*Read verses 25-27.

Jesus reminds Cleopas and his friend why He had to suffer, explaining what the Scriptures say about Him, trying to help them see that it truly is Him risen from the dead and standing before them alive. But, they still failed to recognize Him and the Truths He’s telling them. He’s about to finally get through to them, though.

*Read verses 28-35. Why do you think Cleopas and his friend had yet to recognize Jesus? What did it take for them to recognize Him?

The two go back to Jerusalem and share their story with the apostles. Though Scripture isn’t clear why the two initially failed to recognize Jesus, it could be because they didn’t truly know Jesus. Maybe they didn’t listen carefully enough to have truly heard and absorbed His teachings. But, when Jesus opens the Scriptures, *opens the Word* to them that prophesied of His coming, their eyes are opened to see who He truly is.

*Are you opening the Word of God enough to truly know Jesus, follow Him closely and recognize Him at work in your loss, hurt or trial? Which of these do you struggle with (knowing, following, recognizing)? What’s one step you’ll commit to take to be in the Word more?

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*Read verses 36-44.

In this passage, both the followers and apostles respond with doubt when Jesus appears. While initially this seems crazy to me, when I stop and think about it, I, too, flip-flop between recognition and doubt. So, it encourages me that even His followers and apostles, who physically saw Him, struggled with this. Jesus' response also encourages me — by offering His peace and continuing to invite them to "see," know and remember that everything written about Him *must* be fulfilled. He keeps inviting and reminding us too, friend.

*Read verses 45-49. What did Jesus do then and why (v. 45)?

*We began this Bible Study Companion praying for God to open our hearts, but have you ever asked God to open your mind to the Scriptures? If not, why not pray for that now?

Bible Study Tip!

Beginning each time you spend in God's Word with a small prayer for him to open your heart and mind to scripture can make a big difference! Especially when praying God's Word, such as Psalm 119:18, which says: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." (NIV)

*Read verses 50-53.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He blessed the apostles and THEN the apostles finally responded in worship, joy and praise.

*Reflect back over your life for a moment. Has it taken a blessing coming from God before you were able to respond in worship, joy and praise?

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This is yet another reason it's important to be in God's Word. So that no matter what's happened/happening, we can respond with worship, joy and praise. It's my hope and prayer that you'll be able to respond with these, even if it's only in small ways and things, and that you'll continue to do so through the remainder of our study.

I sure have enjoyed taking this journey with you of merging our stories with Jesus' story. But, don't go anywhere yet! I have one more page below, to help you recognize and record all God is doing in you, and for you, through this study.

Blessings,
Kat

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Seed Seeking:

Remember the 4 reasons Wendy gives for God leading you to choose her book (from the introduction of *Hidden Joy*)?

Because God has...

1. A **personal message** for you
2. **Powerful truths** to teach you
3. **Amazing love** to reveal to you
4. **Everlasting hope** to offer you

Let's close our study time reflecting and recording the seeds God has planted in your heart this week. I invite you to track the seeds God plants each week by printing six copies of this page and filling one out at the end of each week.

*What **personal message** did God give you this week?

*What **powerful truths** did God teach you this week?

*What did God reveal to you about His **amazing love** this week?

*What did God offer you that's brought **everlasting hope** this week?

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week 2

Bible Study Companion Leader: Katrina V. Wylie



Hello, friend! I'm proud of you for opening this lesson, so we can open God's Word together and learn more about Him and His Word. I'm believing, as we do, He's going to do what Wendy Blight said He'd do in *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner* — open your heart and mind to what His Word says. It's my prayer that as He does, your trust in Him will grow.

Progressing Toward Complete Freedom:

Last week, I shared a bit about my dark corner that began during the long, difficult labor of my daughter, and continued with health complications for myself. For a long time, one word came to mind when trying to describe how I felt — broken. But I couldn't quite explain why. Yes, actual physical brokenness occurred, but that didn't fully encompass the brokenness I felt. It wasn't until many years later that I realized it was the breaking of my trust in God that truly had me feeling so shattered and shaken.

Goodness, that's hard to admit! Because of that severed trust, like Wendy, I questioned God and came to the same three possible conclusions she shared with us in Chapter 2 of *Hidden Joy*. Either...

1. God did not have the power to stop what happened to me.
2. God is all-powerful, but He didn't care enough to intervene.
3. God is all-powerful and loves me greatly but allowed it to happen anyway. But why?

*Circle any of the three you've found yourself pondering through your dark corner. Star the one you land and get stuck on the most.

When we entertain these thoughts, what we're really doing is questioning and doubting *God's character*. When we question if He has the power to stop what happens to us, we're doubting *His sovereignty*. When we question if He cares enough about us to intervene, we're doubting *His love*. When we question why He allowed something to happen to us, we're doubting *His wisdom*. And, ultimately, when we're questioning these characteristics of God, we're doubting the *Truth of His Word*.

Do you want to be free from everything that keeps you bound in your dark corner? It's difficult to find freedom when we question and doubt the very things that bring us true freedom. Like Wendy learned and shares in Chapter 3 of *Hidden Joy*, "*God's Truth, His Word, is the key. It was the one thing I needed to progress toward complete freedom.*" So let's dig into God's Word, learn about Him and progress toward freedom!

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Trusting God's Character

*Based on the characteristic(s) of God you struggle with (His sovereignty, love or wisdom), choose one (or more, depending on your available time) to dig further into.

God's Sovereignty:

In Chapter 2 of *Hidden Joy*, Wendy teaches us that "sovereignty" means, "one who possesses supreme power." Believing God is sovereign requires us to know both God's power AND that His power is supreme (the paramount authority, superior to all other things). When we don't know and believe these two truths about God, it's easy to question Him having the power to stop what happens to us.

Many verses in Scripture speak to both God's power and supremacy. Isaiah 40:28 (NIV) tells us He's the "everlasting God" and "Creator of the ends of the earth." That He doesn't "grow tired or weary," and "his understanding no one can fathom." From Psalms 147:5 (NIV) we learn He's "great" and "mighty in power" and "his understanding has no limit." And Jeremiah 32:27 (NIV) makes clear He's "the God of all mankind." Nothing is "too hard" for Him.

*Do you struggle more with questioning/doubting God's supremacy, or His power? Why?

*If you struggle with trusting God's supremacy, look up and read the additional verses below, jotting down next to each what you learn about His supremacy.

- Deuteronomy 10:17 _____
- 1 Chronicles 29:11 _____
- 1 Timothy 6:15 _____

*If you struggle with trusting God's power, look up and read the additional verses below, jotting down next to each what has been, or is still being done, through His power.

- Exodus 15:6 _____
- Jeremiah 10:12 _____
- 1 Corinthians 6:14 _____
- Ephesians 3:20 _____
- Colossians 1:16 _____
- 2 Peter 1:3 _____

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Homeschooling my daughter taught me so much about her, myself and the various school subjects. What surprised me the most is how, through it, I've gained a deeper, more personal understanding of God's sovereignty. Not only has it caused me to have to rely on God's power more to overcome the many everyday challenges, but I've also learned more about His sovereignty as we've studied His Word. Particularly the story of creation.

*If time allows, look up and read Genesis 1 in the NIV translation. You can use biblegateway.com if needed.

- What are the first three words in verses 3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24 and 26?

- What are the last four words in verses 7, 9, 11, 15 and 24?

*Looking at these words, what do they tell us about how God created everything and about His power?

Friend, not only is God powerful, but His *Word* is powerful. And not just His Word, but more specifically, His *spoken* Word. All He has to do is speak and *anything* can be made "so."

*How does knowing God is sovereign comfort you and/or make you more confused in your circumstances?

*Looking back, how have you personally experienced God's sovereignty?

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God's Love:

This week's memory verses, Romans 8:38-39 (NIV), speak about God's love:

*"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from **the love of God** that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

*What does this verse teach us about God's love?

For years, I felt abandoned by God. This question consumed my mind: *"Does God still love me, even though...?"*

*...even though I turned to pain relief medications for help, rather than His strength.
...even though I turned to food for comfort, rather than to Him.
...even though I turned away from Him through it all, rather than drew closer.
...even though I stopped regularly going to church and reading His Word.
...even though I grew angry, allowing my words and actions to slip into sin.*

*Have you ever felt abandoned by God? What was the situation?

*What specifically causes you to question God's love for you?

*Go back to our memory verse. Underline the words "anything" and "all." Then circle what the verse tells us CAN'T separate us from the love of God.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Because I'm a "word" person by nature, I Googled the words *convinced*, *anything* and *all* to gain a broader understanding of their meaning. Here's what I found:

Convinced - completely certain about something. Firm in one's belief with regard to a particular course or issue. (Synonyms: persuade, satisfy, prove, cause to feel certain, assure, reassure, put/set someone's mind at rest, dispel someone's doubts.)

Anything - used to refer to a thing, no matter what. Used for emphasis. Used to indicate a range.

All - used to refer to the whole quantity or extent of a particular group or thing. (Synonyms: each, every, whole, entire, complete, total, full, utter, maximum.)

These words help me read this passage with a new, broader perspective and personal depth:

*For I (Katrina), am **convinced** (completely certain, firm in my belief, assured and reassured, mind at rest and doubt dispelled), that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, (neither turning to pain relief meds for strength nor food for comfort, nor turning away from God, neither irregularly going to church and reading His Word, nor slipping into sin due to my anger) nor **ANYTHING ELSE** (no matter what) in **all** (each, every, the whole, entire, complete, total) creation, will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

*Now it's your turn. Personalize our verse by inserting the definitions that speak most to you, and the things that have caused you to question God's love for you.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

*How is this verse helping you feel more love and trust in and from God when it comes to your loss, hurt or trial?

God's Wisdom:

Though I questioned God's sovereignty and love, ultimately I got stuck on the "Why" question. *Why* God allowed me to walk through such a painful journey. I questioned God's wisdom and what possible reason He could've had to not intervene. His failure to intervene on my behalf seemed unwise. But, as Wendy teaches us in Chapter 2, the word "wisdom" derives from the Hebrew word *chokmah*, which refers to a person's technical skills or special abilities AND "the knowledge and the ability to make right choices at the opportune time."

There are many verses in the Bible that speak of God's wisdom. From Jeremiah 10:12 and 51:15 (NIV), we learn God "*founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.*" Psalms 104:24 (NIV) tells us He made all earth's creatures in wisdom. And we learned through the story of creation in Genesis 1 that all He created was declared "good." Surely if He can wisely construct the world, its creatures and the heavens, He can also wisely establish our lives, even our dark days. Let's dig further for more convincing.

*Look up and read the verses below. Jot down next to each how God's wisdom is described.

- Job 9:4 _____
- Job 12:13 _____
- Isaiah 28:29 _____
- Romans 11:33 _____

Profound, magnificent, deep, rich — that's the kind of wisdom I want establishing my life! That's the kind of wisdom God has and gives ... even when we can't perceive it as such. You see, there's one more thing about wisdom that's important for us to understand. God's wisdom is not the same as ours. There's a difference between heavenly and worldly wisdom.

*Look up and read Isaiah 55:8-9 and James 3:13-18. How does knowing God has heavenly wisdom comfort you in your circumstance?

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*Looking back, how has God's wisdom been evident in your life?

Checking Your Progress:

Friend, God is sovereign. God loves you. God is wise. He's all these things and SO much more. He wants to continue to reveal more and more of Himself to you. He wants you to come to know Him fully and personally, to trust Him and find freedom from your dark corner.

*How has studying God's character changed your perspective of Him and your trust in Him?

*How does your new perspective/trust of God help your current situation or circumstance?

As we close our time together, remember something important. Growing our trust in anything, including God, takes time. So, if you're not there yet, don't worry and don't give up! Allow your questions, your doubts, your hesitations to pull you *into* God and His Word, rather than push you away.

I'm praying this for you,
Kat

P.S. Don't forget the "Seed Seeking" page I gave at the end of [last week's Bible Study Companion](#) that you can use to record the *personal messages, powerful truths, amazing love and everlasting hope* God reveals to you each week.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week 2 Bonus Lesson - Trusting God's Word

Learning more about who God is helps us to trust Him more, which is good. But, if we don't also grow our trust in God's Word, we may continue to question if God really is who the Bible says He is. Let's use the tool Wendy used in Chapter 3 of *Hidden Joy*, to deepen her understanding of God's Word. In case you forgot or haven't read it yet, she wanted to learn more about the word "word," so she looked it up in the concordance in the back of her Bible. A concordance is one way of doing what's considered "a topical word study."

*Now it's your turn to do a topical word study on "word." Here are several ways to do it.

1. Turn to the concordance in your Bible and look up "word."
2. Use your Bible (or an online source such as BibleGateway) to look up and read the verses listed under "word" in your concordance.
3. As you read the verses, use the next page of this companion to fill in the verse references and what each teaches you about God's Word.
4. After you're done, answer the final two questions below.

Note: Depending on your available time and the depth you want to go, you can print multiple copies of the next page and look up all the verses listed, OR choose a few that seem most applicable. You may also look up similar words, such as: *words*, *scripture*, *scriptures*. You can even use the next page to do completely different word studies too!

*How has studying these verses changed and grown your perspective of God's Word?

*How does your new perspective of God's Word help your perspective of your circumstance?

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Topical Word Study

Main Topic Word:

Similar Words:

Verse Reference:

I learned:

Verse Reference:

I learned:

Verse Reference:

I learned:

Verse Reference:

I learned:

Verse Reference:

I learned:

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week Three

Bible Study Companion Leader: Stacy J. Lowe



Hey there, friend! I'm so glad to be joining you here on the Bible Study Companion this week!

When tragedy strikes, I want to know why. Not necessarily *why*, as in the purpose that could come of it, but *why* as in what caused it to even happen in the first place?

It's not that knowing the why makes a situation any less tragic, but it somehow brings me comfort to be able to point to a reason.

Are you a person who wants to know why? _____

How does knowing why help you process through a situation?

Dissecting the cause of something that's happened helps us make at least a little sense of some tragedies, but what about when there IS no why to be found? What then?

The Darkness

A recent shooting rocked my town of Virginia Beach, Virginia to its core when a gunman opened fire in a city building, killing 12 and critically wounding four others. Immediately, speculation began as to the possible motives of the shooter.

The more information that was released, though, the more it seemed none of the rumors flying around town were true. In fact, as of the writing of these pages, there seems to be no discernible explanation for this man's actions.

What do you do with something like that, when things just don't add up?

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

In Wendy's case, she found herself angry with God. As she says on page 50 of *Hidden Joy*:

"I cried out to God: *Why are You doing this to me? What have I done to deserve this? I felt abandoned and alone.*"

Can you relate? How do these unknowable situations make you feel toward God?

Romans 8:28 (NIV) says this, though:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Note the percentage of things God says He will work for good: ALL things — 100%. Which means despite even the worst ugliness life can throw our way, God will bring something of value from it. Not just for us personally. There is often something beneficial for *others* as they watch us walk through difficult times, just as there can be something for us as we observe them doing the same.

Setting the Stage

Scripture is filled with stories of people just like you and me who faced a darkness of their own. One of the most notable is the story of a man named Job.

Read Job 1:1-3. How does the Bible describe him?

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Job was a good man who followed after God. According to this passage, Job seemed to have everything he could ever dream of, and life was going along splendidly. Until suddenly one day it wasn't.

Read Job 1: 13-18. What does Scripture tell us he lost?

Now, let's go back up a few verses to Job 1:6-12.

Who specifically presented himself to God? _____

What did he request of God? _____

What was God's response? _____

Can I be honest? I really struggle with this part of Job's story. He was doing *everything* right — God Himself described Job as "blameless and upright" — and yet God allowed Satan to come against him.

While I don't pretend to understand why, there's nevertheless an important distinction to note here: While God may have ALLOWED Job's suffering, *HE DID NOT CAUSE IT*.

Pause for a moment, and let that sink in.

God may have ALLOWED Job's suffering — He may have allowed YOUR suffering — but **HE. DID. NOT. CAUSE. IT!**

Go back up to that sentence and circle it, highlight it, put a star by it — *anything* to emphasize this important truth we need to hold on to when we're fumbling around in the dark.

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

Now skip ahead to Job 2:1-7. What happened to Job next?

Can you imagine what it must have been like for him? This man who loved God and followed wholeheartedly after Him had, in a very short span of time, lost his children, his servants, his animals, his livelihood, and now even his health.

I hope you haven't experienced loss to *that* extreme, but what loss *have* you experienced?

It's times like these that test our faith the most.

Have you ever escaped the city lights and gazed upon the clear night sky? It never ceases to amaze me the countless number of stars you can see. It's not that they're any less there in the light; they're just not visible to us.

There are some things we can only observe in total darkness.

I love that Job's story gives us a front row seat to his darkness — not just what he was going through, but also how he responded and God's take on it as well.

And, remember how Romans 8:28 says God works ALL things for good? In Job's darkness, I see a lot of good shining through for us.

Let's jump back into his story and see what we can learn.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

LESSON 1

Read Job 2:9. What does Job's wife suggest he should do?

What was Job's response in verse 10?

Read the following Scriptures:

Job 4:7-8

Job 8:20

Job 11: 10-15

What do Job's friends say about the cause of his suffering?

What two words are used to describe Job in Job 1:1 (NIV)?

 and

Bible Study Tip!

Want to look up Scripture in different translations?

Step 1: Go to BibleGateway.com (linked).

Step 2: Type the Scripture reference in the search box.

Step 3: Choose the translation from the dropdown menu.

Step 4: Click the magnifying glass or "Search."

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

In the NLT translation, it describes him as “a man of complete integrity.”

It would seem Job’s friends got it wrong. He wasn’t suffering because God was punishing him for something he had done.

In fact, read John 9:1-3. What reason does Jesus give for the man’s blindness?

While our sin may lead to suffering, that’s not always the case. It wasn’t the case with Job at all.

Now read Job 42:7. What did God have to say about Job’s friends?

Which brings us to **Lesson #1: Be careful whose voice you listen to.**

Sometimes those around us can offer some much-needed perspective. But if what they’re saying doesn’t line up with the character of God as revealed in Scripture, no matter how close the relationship, theirs is not a voice we should listen to.

Job refused to give in to the negative voices surrounding him. In fact, going back to Job 42:7, how did God describe *Job’s* words about Him?

Job never lost sight of the truth of who God is.

Questions for personal reflection:

Who is speaking into my situation?

Do their words line up with the character of God?

What words am I speaking and believing about God through this?

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

LESSON 2

Has anyone ever told you (or have you tried telling yourself) it's somehow wrong to hurt and grieve over a situation?

While Job may have walked honorably through these dark times, he wasn't numb to the experience. Read Job 1: 20-21. What did Job do in response to his loss?

In ancient Jewish culture, tearing one's robe and shaving one's head were outward signs of immeasurable grief. Job's actions expressed to everyone around him that in that moment, *he was not ok*.

Note the author's comment following this passage in Job 1:22. What does the first part of this verse say?

This brings us to **Lesson #2: It's ok to grieve and feel hurt.**

Grief and hurt are part of the healing process we (or others) sometimes think we need to speed through. That it's somehow wrong for us to take the time to grieve and to express our grief. But, the Bible is very clear that Job's reaction to his pain was NOT sin.

Read Job 1:20 again. What did Job do in conjunction with tearing his robe and shaving his head?

Y'all. He fell to the ground and WORSHIPPED.

While I wish I could say that's my first reaction to pain, it's often not. I can't help but wonder, though, if Job's act of worship enabled him to walk through this experience and come out the other side with his faith still intact, and, in fact, stronger than it was before. He allowed himself to grieve, but his was a worship-filled grief.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Questions for personal reflection:

Have you allowed yourself to properly grieve what's lost?

Are you grieving alone, or have you invited God into that process via worship?

(Please note- Processing your grief for a time, and staying permanently in a place of grief are two different things. If you've grieved for a while and are struggling to move forward, or if you just feel like you need someone to talk to, Focus on the Family has resources available to you. Visit <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/contact-us> for help.)

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

LESSON 3

On page 58 of *Hidden Joy*, Wendy reminds us, “God wants you to take your questions to Him.” That’s exactly what Job did, beginning in Job 7 and continuing off and on throughout most of the remainder of the book.

Then, in Chapter 38, God responds. If time permits, read all of Chapters 38-41. Otherwise, focus on Job 38:4-41.

What do these verses tell you about God?

God’s response to Job brings me to our final lesson, **Lesson #3: No matter how we may feel, God still sees us, and He is still in control.**

While God didn’t answer Job immediately, He was keenly aware of Job’s suffering. When the time was right, God spoke into Job’s questions with questions of His own. Questions intended to remind Job of His omnipotence.

Now read Psalm 139:16 and Luke 12:6-7.

These verses confirm what Job discovered in his conversations with God. The Almighty God of the universe never takes His eyes off His children. Just because something catches us off guard doesn’t mean it’s done the same for Him. God knew and planned every detail of our lives before we lived a single day.

Personal reflection:

Do you feel forgotten by God?

What can you do to remind yourself of His sovereignty?

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Summing It All Up

The story of Job is a tough one, so thank you for sticking with it! Before we end, I want to bring out one final point from the very last verse of the book.

Job 42:17 (NLT) says this:

“Then he died, an old man who had lived a long, full life.”

Notice, it doesn't say he died an old man who had lived a *difficult* life. It says he died “an old man who had lived a **long, full life**.”

You see, Job may have suffered and walked through a level of darkness we can't even begin to comprehend, but ultimately, *his darkness did not define him*.

And neither does your darkness define you.

THIS IS NOT THE END!

Write out a statement of faith below that your life will ultimately be defined by WHOSE you are, not by what you're going through.

Remember, God is there, and He loves you infinitely more than you could ever imagine!

Father, thank You for the life of Job and for including his story in the Bible. While we may not understand why he had to go through what he did, we thank You for the faith he displayed as he walked through it and the lessons we can take from it. Thank You for the promise that You are working ALL things for our good. Remind us of this truth when we struggle to see it on our own, and let us come out the other side of our suffering closer to You than we've ever been. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thanks for journeying with me today, friend!

Love and prayers,
Stacy

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week Four

Bible Study Companion Leader: Stacy J. Lowe



Hey there! I'm excited to be back with you on the Bible Study Companion this week!

I have a question to kick us off today:

On a scale of 1-10, how important is obedience to God? _____

I know, I know ... seems like a no-brainer, right? But, if your answer were based solely on how you actually live, would that number go down? Perhaps significantly?

You're not alone!

Obedience may come easy in the small stuff, but it can be hard when what we're *supposed* to do goes against what we *want* to do, or feel is necessary or fair.

God has taught me, though, there is only ONE standard of truth we should live by, and it's His. Regardless of my opinion of what's right or wrong, my opinion will *never* trump His truth. Neither will yours.

Foundations

Read Matthew 7:24-27.

What two foundations does Jesus teach about?

_____ and _____

What happened to the house built on sand? _____

What happened to the house built on rock? _____

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Jesus taught that if we want to build our lives on something that will last, a proper foundation is essential! That foundation is the Word of God Himself — our Bible — and is the first place to start when we need guidance.

Forgiveness

Chapter 6 of *Hidden Joy* begins with this verse:

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” ~ Colossians 3:13

There is no qualifier here. God doesn’t say to forgive if the other person apologizes. He doesn’t say to forgive if the other person acts better. God says we are to forgive PERIOD.

As Wendy says, though,

“Forgiveness does not come naturally.”

No, it doesn’t!

With that in mind, let’s spend some time today looking deeper into forgiveness through the lens of Scripture — what it is, what it is NOT, and what to do when we struggle to forgive.

Roots of Unforgiveness

I overheard a conversation recently where a woman refused to forgive a wrong from years ago, but claimed the unforgiveness didn’t affect her in any way. A few minutes later, she expressed continued bitterness and anger toward this person who had wronged her. Clearly, it was affecting her more than she let on or realized.

Anger is often both the root and byproduct of unforgiveness. We feel a debt is owed to us, and holding on to our anger gives us a sense of superiority over the other person.

Do you feel that way about someone? If you’re comfortable, write that person’s name, or their initials, on the line below. Remember, this is just between you and God.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Now read Psalm 4:4, then copy it in the space provided.

Take particular note of the first part of this verse. The NLT translation says it like this:

“Don’t sin by letting anger control you.”

This tells me anger in and of itself does not always equal sin. It’s what we *do* with that anger that’s the problem.

Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 4:26, then carries it a step further.

Read Ephesians 4:26-27 in the NIV translation. What reason does Paul give for controlling our anger?

Merriam-Webster defines “foothold” as *“a position usable as a base for further advance.”*

In other words, when we allow anger to fester in our hearts, we are giving Satan that foothold. A prime opportunity not just to come against us, but to lodge himself firmly in our lives. This is what Paul warns against.

Look up the following Scriptures, then fill in the chart below with what each passage teaches us about anger.

Psalm 37:8	
Ecclesiastes 7:9	
Matthew 5:22	

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Did you notice what these verses have in common? The consequences of festering anger fall on US. Nowhere does it say the object of our anger will suffer. Nowhere does it say something will change in the other person's heart because we refuse to let it go.

Anger produces a lot of things, none of which are good, but there's also something it *won't* lead to. Read James 1:19-20. What does God desire that anger *won't* produce?

These Scriptures teach us that when we remain angry and refuse to forgive, we're hurting OURSELVES. ***It's not about the other person.*** Forgiveness is about US. God commands it for OUR benefit.

In fact, what does Proverbs 19:11 say happens when we LET GO of our anger and choose to overlook an offense?

What about the person we've been holding a grudge against? Read Romans 12:19, then copy it down below.

What good news Paul gives us here! When we release our anger, God takes control of the offense. He takes the burden off our shoulders and places it on His. The One who is the ultimate Judge will deal with the offense, and the person, as *He* sees fit.

It's Not a One-Time Thing.

Head knowledge of the importance of forgiveness is one thing. HEART knowledge and real-life application are something different.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

When's the last time you reminded yourself to take your next breath? My guess is never. There are some things we do that come naturally without thinking.

Forgiveness (unfortunately) is not one of those things. Forgiveness requires intentionality. It's an ACTIVE and REPEATED choice on our part.

In Matthew 18:22 (NLT), Jesus taught we are to forgive "*seventy times seven*" times.

A few times forgiving someone, you could possibly keep track of. But 490? No way. You would quickly lose count, and that's just the point Jesus was making. There's *no limit* to forgiveness.

****I want to pause for a quick clarification. Choosing to forgive someone does NOT mean putting yourself back in the same position you were in. There are some situations where, for your own safety or well-being, keeping your distance is necessary. You can fully forgive without allowing that person a place back in your life.****

Struggling to Let Go

Several years ago, I knew I needed to forgive someone for a pretty serious offense. Even though I knew there would be no apology, I chose to forgive. From that day forward, I didn't think about the offense or the person who had committed it. I genuinely thought I had forgiven and moved on until I encountered this person in a check out line.

I felt the world closing in around me. My heart began pounding, and my palms began to sweat. I started gasping for breath, praying she wouldn't notice me. I realized while I may have chosen to forgive, I'd done nothing about it since. I had some work to do.

Going back to Scripture, God's Word not only commands us to forgive our enemies. Jesus also instructs us how to interact with those we might label an enemy.

Read Matthew 5:43-48. What two things does Jesus tell us to do for our enemies and those who persecute us?

_____ and _____

Y'all. That's not an easy task! But, God hasn't left us to do this on our own. He's laid a solid foundation for forgiveness. He speaks of forgiveness often, and we need to take it seriously.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

For me, the one I had forgiven was no longer part of my life, so showing love to her in person wasn't an option, but I could still love her by praying.

Can I be honest? I didn't want to pray. My first time praying for this person went something like this...

"God, You said we are to pray for our enemies, so that's what I'm doing: I'm praying for (name). Amen."

That's all I had in me. It may not have been much, but it was something.

Do you find it easy to pray for your enemies? Why or why not?

Read Romans 8:26-27. How do Paul's words make you feel? What comfort do they bring you?

Knowing the Holy Spirit would take my obedience and my pitiful words and shape them into something beautiful and meaningful meant everything to me!

I then decided to go one step further. I wrote this person's name on my bathroom mirror. Every time I walked into the room and saw that name, I was reminded of my choice to forgive, and I would pray yet again.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

The feeling of forgiveness took time. But, eventually, the feeling caught up with my decision. It's not easy to hold a grudge against someone you daily bring to the feet of Jesus.

[illegible]

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Seventy times Seven

Before we end, let's return to Matthew's words in Matthew 18:22, "*seventy times seven.*" What does this kind of forgiveness require? To me, there is only one word for it: Grace.

We've spent our time today learning how to forgive others. But there's another forgiveness we should address. The forgiveness from which all other forgiveness flows. It's the ultimate gift of forgiveness offered to us *all* through Jesus Christ.

God's standard is holiness — perfection — and there isn't, never has been, and never will be one who fully lives up to that standard, EXCEPT for Jesus.

Romans 6:23 (NIV) says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Because Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, sin entered our world. That sin separated them from God. Because Adam was the first man, his sin has been downloaded into every generation of people since Adam and Eve, including you and me. In God's economy, that sin deserves death and eternal separation from Him.

Thankfully, God didn't want to be separated from His children. So He sent His perfect, sinless Son to live the life we never could and die the death we rightfully deserve. Jesus then did something none of us could *ever* do. He conquered death. God resurrected His Son, Jesus, into new life.

You're probably familiar with John 3:16, but let's read it in The Message, to see it with fresh eyes:

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him." ~ John 3:16-18

John writes ANYONE can have "a whole and lasting life." I'M an anyone. YOU'RE an anyone. That name you wrote above? ALSO an anyone. (Yep, God loves them too!)

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

God's offer is for anyone. We need only accept the trade — His holiness for our sin. It's the best deal you'll ever make! If you've never made that trade, and you're ready to do so now, will you pray with me?

Lord, I confess to You that I am a sinner. As much as I need to forgive others, even more so I desperately need forgiveness from You. Thank You for loving me so much that You would send Your Son Jesus to this earth to live the life I never could, die the death I rightfully deserve, then conquer death itself. I'm ready now to accept Him as my Savior. Please come into my heart, forgive me of my sins, and help me to follow You from this day forward. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, we'd love to know about it! Send us an email at obsblogsupport@proverbs31.org so we can pray for you and provide you with resources to help get you started on this new journey in Christ.

Thank you for being here today and walking through this with me!

Rooting for you all,
Stacy

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week 5

Bible Study Companion Leader: Katrina V. Wylie



Hey, sweet friend! It's so good to be back with you. As we settle into this lesson together, it's my prayer God will grow in you a deeper yearning and commitment to spend daily quiet and prayer time with Him, because it's in spending time with Him that our hearts are truly filled.

In the deepest part of my dark corner, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, I tried to hide from God. My anger against Him continued, as did my questions and doubts. At the same time, shame filled me for the state I found myself in, in every area of my life. I couldn't bear to face Him, so I pulled away from everything that created connection with Him; especially quiet time and prayer. I distanced myself from family and friends, too, because I was tired of wearing the "everything's fine" mask.

Though pulling away seemed easier, it led me into a deep pit of isolation that felt impossible to climb out of. It led me into a false reality where I was convinced everyone could see the state I was in, and judged and ridiculed me for it. It led to the day I was so consumed with anger, and fear of being "found out," I couldn't turn the knob on my front door and walk out to check the mail.

On that difficult and humbling day, I again hit replay on my all-too-familiar reel of disappointments. But, this time, as those images flashed through my mind, a forgotten memory seeped in. A happy one. The time God placed the call to women's ministry in my heart.

With that tender reminder of my calling, a bud of hope sprang to life! I slid to my knees, lifted my hands and tear-drenched face to the heavens and, in full surrender prayed, *"Lord, I can't do this. I'm too broken. But YOU can. Forgive my wanderings. Wherever You lead, I'll go. Whatever You say to do, I'll do in You."*

I share my story with you because it was in re-surrendering to God, *through prayer*, where my journey back to Him and out of the dark began. It's through *prayer*, through *daily time with God*, your restoration can begin and/or continue as well.

Thank You, Lord, for never leaving or forsaking us; for how You keep seeking us, asking, "Where are you?" just like You did for Adam and Eve that day in the garden. May You grow in Your daughter a deeper yearning and commitment for quiet time and prayer, as she takes this time to meet with You today in these pages, and through our study this week. To You we give the glory for all the growth and restoration that is to come. In Jesus' name, amen.

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

Examining Your Time with God and Your Prayer Life:

*Describe your time with God and your prayer life. Would you describe yourself as “devoted”? Why or why not?

*How has your time with God and your prayer life been affected by your loss, hurt or trial?

*Describe how you desire this time and prayer life to be.

In Chapter 8 of *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner*, Wendy Blight reminds us, “*God will pursue us, but He will never force His way into our lives. We have to make time for Him.*” She also speaks the hard but honest truth about why we don’t make time for Him: “*... instead of centering our lives on God and letting all other things take their rightful place underneath Him, we center our lives on our agenda and fit God in where we can.*”

Sound familiar? In other words, spending time with God, or not, comes down to our priorities and where we place Him among ours. *Ouch*. Let’s study the biblical story of Mary and Martha to see what we can learn about our priorities and spending time with God.

*Look up and read Luke 10:38-42. What does this passage reveal about each of the sisters’ personalities and priorities?

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

I'm most naturally Martha. My personality tests all reveal I'm task-driven. I'm all about getting things done and making things perfect. So much so that, if I'm not careful and intentional, it distracts me from sitting at the feet of Jesus. I confess there are times I choose to start my day tackling tasks, rather than spending time with God. There are also days my "to-do's" bombard my quiet time like a cascade of arrows on a battlefield.

*Who do *you* personally relate to more, Mary or Martha? How does that impact your time with God?

*Re-read verse 38. Who opened her home to Jesus? _____

It's not that Martha wasn't willing and wanting to invite Jesus in. She opened her home to Him. Her problem was her focus. She was distracted and got off track.

*Which step is more often a stumbling block for you: Making time to spend with Jesus OR your focus during your time with Him? Why do you think that is?

*Re-read verse 39.

Mary's actions teach us two things I don't want us to miss:

1. **She sat at the Lord's feet.**

Sitting at someone's feet is more than receiving simple instruction and learning. Yes, that's important. But, this expression also means *"to be in a position of devotion or worship to someone; to pay homage to or be reverential to someone"* (Farlex Dictionary of Idioms). By sitting at Jesus' feet, Mary sought to learn from Him, but she also chose a humble posture. She recognized and revered *Him* as Lord.

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

*When it comes to your quiet and prayer time, what's the posture of your heart? How can having the right posture toward God help?

2. She listened to what He said.

Listening seems so easy. However, it takes intentionality and is a step "task-oriented Martha's" (such as myself) may easily miss!

*Do you intentionally listen for God during your quiet and prayer time, or do you do more of the talking? How can listening help?

*Re-read verse 40.

When I read this, I personalized the first part, replacing my name with Martha's and listing what distracts me. Take a moment to do the same.

*But _____ was distracted by _____

Recognizing what keeps us from sitting at the feet of Jesus is helpful. It enables us to take steps to eliminate those distractions. When I read Martha's words to Jesus in the second part of verse 40, *and listened*, God revealed a new distraction.

During Week One, I shared the story of my difficult labor with my daughter. After two days, it felt like the doctors and nurses had forgotten me and weren't doing anything to help me. Like Martha, frustration mounted, and I yelled (in my mind), "*Tell them to help me!*" What I failed to recognize in that moment was how I had fixated on man's help and lost all focus on THE Helper — Jesus. It wasn't just in this one instance. Upon further reflection, I've realized this is a pattern.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Friend, could your focus on how *people* are or aren't helping you be distracting YOU from seeking help from *Jesus*? Just a thought to ponder...

*Re-read verse 41. How does being worried and/or upset affect you sitting at Jesus' feet? Is it a distraction that keeps you from Him OR a source that drives you to Him?

*Re-read verse 42. Knowing Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus, what is the "*one thing*" Jesus tells Martha (and us) is needed?

Jesus. He is the One and Only thing needed, better than anything else we could choose. The only thing that can't be taken from us. This task-driven gal has slowly come to recognize that all work I could get done pales in comparison to the work our Lord does in our hearts and minds when we humble ourselves at His feet and listen to what He says.

I have a confession, though. The story of Mary and Martha used to bother me. Why would God create task-oriented girls like Martha and me when He seems to prefer "sitting-at-the-feet girls" like Mary? "Task-oriented Martha's," don't miss this! Nowhere does Jesus tell Martha to change *who* she is. Nowhere does it say doing tasks is wrong. Rather, Jesus gently rebukes and encourages Martha to change her priorities. To choose to sit at the feet of Jesus *before and above* doing tasks (and all else).

*Where do you prioritize spending time with God into your daily activities? What change(s) do you need to make to place time with Him above all else?

Though Mary and Martha's story is only a small part of Luke's Gospel, if we remember and apply the lessons we've learned, it can make a big impact! To further equip and motivate us to prioritize spending time with God, let's study a few more verses.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Blessings/Benefits of Spending Time with God:

- 1 Chronicles 16:11 (NIV) instructs us to, *“Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.”*
- Psalm 62:8 (NIV) encourages us to, *“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”*
- Our weekly memory verse, Colossians 4:2 (NIV), calls us to, *“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”*
- And Matthew 6:33 (NIV) even tells us to make time with God our *first* priority: *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...”*

Jesus Himself also set the example for us. In all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13, 23; Mark 1:35, 6:45-46, 14:32-34; Luke 4:42, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18 and John 6:15) we see Jesus, over and over again, being intentional to spend quiet time with God and in prayer. But why?

*Look up and read the verses listed in the charts below. Note next to each the blessings/benefits they reveal can be ours when we spend time with God.

Verses:	Blessings/Benefits of Spending Time in God’s Word:
Joshua 1:8	Learning to do what the Word says; prosperity and success
Psalm 119:9, 11, 105	
Romans 10:17	
Romans 12:2	
2 Timothy 3:16	

Verses:	Blessings/Benefits of Spending Time in Prayer:
Matthew 6:6	Being rewarded by God
Philippians 4:6-7	
Hebrews 4:16	

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Verses:	Blessings/Benefits of Spending Time with God's in General:
Psalms 32:8	Receiving instruction, teaching and counsel from God
Psalms 46:10a	
Psalms 62:1, 91:1	
Psalms 63:6-8	
John 15:5	
James 4:8a	

*Put a star next to the verses from the charts that personally speak to you most. Circle the benefits/blessings that excite and motivate you.

I find great comfort in knowing that when we draw near to God, He WILL draw near to us. That even through our dark corners, we CAN and WILL bear fruit, if and when we remain in Him. And, that when we remain in thanks and prayer, we CAN have the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds through it all.

Lord, thank You for drawing near to us and providing Your instructions, teaching and counsel. Thank You that we can rest in and be upheld by You, with Your peace that surpasses all understanding. We praise You for the transformational work You do in us, and for how you renew our minds when we meet with You. We praise You and give You all the glory for the faith and fruit grown, mercy and grace received, and all the rewards, success and prosperity to come. In Jesus' name, amen.

Before we wrap up our time together, here are three things I don't want you to miss:

- First, Wendy's many helpful tips in Chapter 8 for spending time with God. Highlight or underline your favorites, and then choose a few to implement!
- Second, the "My Quiet Time Declaration" (provided on the next page). Pray this to commit (or recommit) to spending time with God.
- Third, if/when you have additional time, don't miss the bonus lesson below to practice and personalize the different types of prayer Wendy teaches in Chapter 9.

It's been an honor and blessing to be a part of this journey with you!
Kat

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

My Quiet Time Declaration

Lord,

I, _____, commit to spend _____ mins/hrs with You daily.
(name)

I commit to spend my time with you at _____ a.m./p.m. in my _____.
(place)

During my time with You, I commit to doing the following:

(pray, listen, read/study the Bible, journal, read devotions, memorize Scripture, etc.)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

When something out of my control causes me to miss that scheduled time with You, I commit to spending at least _____ minutes with You sometime before I go to bed.

(Signature)

“Lord, please draw me to Your Word daily. Your Word says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Father, as I commit to spend time with You, help me to hear Your voice. I commit my thoughts to You and ask that You would fill me with Your Truth as I seek You each day. Help me to tune out anything that conflicts with the Truth You desire to speak to me. Give me ears to hear and let Your Word dwell in me richly. Give me discernment to understand all You have to say to me. I ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.”

(prayer by Wendy Blight in *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner*)

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Practicing Prayer - Week 5 Bonus Lesson

In Chapter 9 of *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner*, Wendy Blight shares **four forms of prayer**. Let's recap, reflect on and practice those! But first, let's start with this prayer by Wendy:

"Heavenly Father, I praise You as the source of all Truth, as the author and Perfecter of my faith. Thank You for creating me to be in relationship with You. Thank You that You desire for me to come before You in prayer. I commit to deepen my times of prayer with You. Please meet me every time I open my heart to receive all You have to offer me. Bring the fullness of Your Spirit into my prayer time with You. Let me sense the power of Your presence. Show me that You are active and listening. I claim Your promise that when I draw near to You, You will draw near to me. May I be different because of the time I spend with You. Change me as a woman, as a wife, as a mother, as a friend, and as Your servant. Make me a blessing to all those for whom I pray. May I draw others to You because of what You are going to do through me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

Prayers of Desperation:

Wendy describes prayers of desperation as ones we pray *"in our darkest moments ... as we walk through a difficult or painful situation."* Here are two examples for your reference:

- *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Jesus in Matthew 27:46 NIV)
- *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?"* (David in Psalm 22:1 NIV)

Though I didn't know it at the time I prayed it, my prayer I shared with you in the beginning of this companion is this type of prayer. Before that day, I only allowed my desperation to seep out in ugly bursts of anger. When I finally released my desperation to God, it became a powerful turning point!

*Have you ever prayed a prayer of desperation? If so, what impact did it have on you and/or your situation? If not, is there a prayer of desperation yearning to be released? What's holding you back? Write your thoughts and/or a prayer of desperation below.

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Prayers of Confession:

In prayers of confession, Wendy teaches “we ask for God’s mercy, grace and forgiveness.” She also reminds us “real confession”:

- “Springs from a repentant heart”
- “Requires that we confront our sin”
- “Cleanses us from the eternal effects of sin” (1 John 1:9)

David gives us a great example of this type of prayer in Psalm 51:1-2 (NLT): “Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.”

*Is there a place where you need God’s forgiveness and cleansing? If so, spend time in reflection and confession, recording your thoughts and/or prayer below.

Breath Prayers:

Breath prayers are great because we can speak them in one breath. As Wendy says, it is “a short prayer, usually one sentence that you can repeat throughout your day.” I love breath prayers because they’re simple to memorize and keep repeating! They help us to “pray continually” as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIV instructs.

After reading Chapter 9 of *Hidden Joy*, I started praying four breath prayers:

- When I’m tempted to turn to food or something else besides God, I pray: “You will not let me be tempted beyond what I can bear” (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV) And: “I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13 NIV).
- When my residual, wrong thought patterns return to plague me and keep me from living in joy, I pray: “This is the day the LORD has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24 NLT).
- When I need reminding to look to God in the everyday interactions in my marriage, I pray: “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12 NIV).

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*Write a breath prayer of your own, following these steps:

1. Identify an area in your life that's a temptation, need, struggle or praise.
2. Find verses on that topic by using the concordance of your Bible or Google.
3. Choose a verse that most speaks to you and use it to write your breath prayer.
4. Place your verse where you'll see it often and be reminded to pray.
5. Pray it for a week or more and see what God does!

*My temptation, need, struggle or praise: _____

*Verses on the topic: _____

*My breath prayer: _____

Intercessory Prayer:

Like Wendy writes in *Hidden Joy*, intercessory prayers are when “we invite God to work in and through us to affect the lives of those around us.” She also reminds us of the powerful weapon we have in God’s Word by saying, “The key to any prayer, especially intercessory prayer, is praying the Scriptures.”

Jesus gives us the perfect example of how to pray Scripture when He’s tempted by Satan in the wilderness and replies: “Get out of here, Satan ... For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him’” (Matthew 4:10 NLT).

*Who comes to mind that you can stand in the gap for through prayer?

*What topic(s) do you feel led to pray for them?

*Based on those topics, use your Bible concordance to find verses you can pray for them.

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*Use the Scriptures you found to write a prayer for that person, then continue to keep them in your prayers for the next week (or longer) and see what God does. If examples would be helpful, check out pages 140-143 of *Hidden Joy*.

As we wrap up, let's circle back to our weekly memory verse, Colossians 4:2: *"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."*

*What three instructions does Paul give us regarding prayer?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

As you head into the rest of your week and beyond, devoting yourself to the four types of prayer, will you also devote yourself to being watchful and thankful for how God responds? I encourage you to come back and record your praises for how God's worked. May many prayers and praises continue to be raised!

*How God has worked through these prayers:

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week Six

Bible Study Companion Leader: Stacy J. Lowe



Hi, friend!

Throughout these past weeks, we've talked about healing from dark times, both past and present. We've done the nitty-gritty hard work of digging in and pushing through. This week, I want us to focus on the *why* behind it.

No better place to begin than our memory verse for this week, Ephesians 2:10 NIV:

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Write your name in the blank below, then read the sentence out loud:

For I, _____, am God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for *me* to do!

Did you read it out loud? I hope so, because believe it or not, it's true!

Because this is the point at which a lot of people get stuck, before moving forward, read Proverbs 3:5. List two things Solomon instructs us to do.

Read the following Scriptures:

Proverbs 28:26

Jeremiah 17:9

What do these passages teach about our own wisdom?

THIS is why we can't lean on our own understanding!

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Now, see what *these* Scriptures have to say about wisdom:

Proverbs 2:6

1 Corinthians 1:25

James 3:17

What do these passages teach us about GOD'S wisdom?

Isaiah 40:28 ESV says this:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LoRD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

God created the heavens and the earth, and He created you and me. Not only did He *create* us, Paul's words in Ephesians 2:10 tell us we were created *on purpose* with a plan to do *good* in this world! While we may not see how He could possibly use us, God says it's so, and His ways and understanding are far beyond our own!

Using Our Gifts for Him

In Chapter 10 of *Hidden Joy*, Wendy says:

"Our calling is simply God's invitation to use our gifts and talents to His glory."

This is an idea I struggle with. When I look at others, I see the good; when I look at myself, I see the flaws. I decide I don't measure up, my weaknesses too big to overcome.

One of my favorite things about the Bible, though, is that God didn't fill it with stories of people who had it all together and did everything right. Instead, it's filled with people just like you and me! Let's take a look at a few.

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Look up the passages below. Determine and share what could have disqualified each person from being used by God. I'll get you started.

NAME	SCRIPTURE	SHORTCOMING
Abraham	Genesis 17:17	Too old
Moses	Exodus 2:11-12 Exodus 4:10 Exodus 6:12	Murdered an Egyptian, struggled to speak clearly
Rahab	Joshua 2:1	
David	2 Samuel 11:2-27	
Jonah	Jonah 1:1-3	
Peter	Matthew 26:69-75	
Paul (Saul)	Acts 7:54-8:3 Acts 9:1-2	
Timothy	1 Timothy 4:11-12	

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Can you relate to any? Looking at your own life, what do you think hinders *you* from being used by God?

I envy people who light up the room and make friends everywhere they go. Meanwhile, as an introvert, I cringe at the thought of making small talk and am perfectly content to stay home and read a book. I compare myself to others and think, *What good can there be here? How can God possibly use ME?*

How do those things you view as hindrances make *you* feel?

Let's go back to the chart we filled in above. Each person had flaws. Each had weaknesses. But that didn't stop God.

Using the Scriptures provided, share below how God used each of them, **DESPITE** their flaws and imperfections.

Abraham was too old, BUT GOD (Genesis 15:5, 21:1-5)

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Moses was a murderer who struggled with his words, BUT GOD (Exodus 14:15-31, 24:12-18)

Rahab was a prostitute, BUT GOD (Joshua 2:1-24)

David was a liar, an adulterer, and a murderer, BUT GOD (2 Samuel 12:13-25; 1 Kings 3:3-14; Matthew 1:1)

Jonah ran away from God's calling, BUT GOD (Jonah 3:3-10)

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Peter denied knowing Jesus, BUT GOD (Acts 2:14-41)

Paul (Saul) persecuted and killed Christians, BUT GOD (Acts 9:3-22)

(God also used him to write much of the New Testament, including this week's memory verse!)

Timothy was young, BUT GOD (1 Timothy 6:11-14)

I may look for a quiet corner in a crowd, BUT GOD has used those quiet corners to bring about conversations that never could have happened had I been flitting from person to person. Conversations that bring Him glory and serve to uplift others.

God has used you, too! Fill in below with your own example.

I may be/have _____, BUT GOD

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

When We're Afraid to Move Forward

I've been a writer all my life, but I rarely felt comfortable sharing my words and ideas with others. Five years ago, God led me to apply as a blog writer for Proverbs 31 Online Bible Studies. I was nervous, but I moved forward in obedience, completed the application project, and was shocked to be selected.

Submitting that first blog post intimidated me, but I survived the editing phase, and God has grown me through this process. I still get nervous, but I write with confidence now because I write the words God has given me.

Writing is one thing; speaking is another. I've always shied away from praying in front of others, from using my words to verbally teach and lead. Just the thought of it turned my stomach.

A few years ago at the P31 She Speaks Conference, as I was running out the door, my roommate (who I had just met) suddenly asked, "What is God calling you to do?"

I stopped dead in my tracks. I'm not sure which of us was more surprised when the tears began to flow. "Well," I said, "I've always enjoyed writing, but I can't help but feel God is asking me to use my words to speak."

I had never shared that with anyone. I had never even allowed myself to acknowledge it until that moment. Knowing I needed to figure this out, I went down to the Prayer Room, grabbed a notecard, and wrote a prayer to God.

I confessed I didn't like to speak, and I didn't WANT to speak. (In fact, I told Him that several times, in case He didn't already know and had somehow missed the first time I said it.) "But God," I wrote, "I can't get away from the feeling that this is what You're asking me to do. And if You are, my answer is ..."

I stopped right there. I didn't want to write it if I didn't really mean it. I thought about it, took a few deep breaths, then finished it off with a shaky *yes*.

Of all the words I've written in my life, those four are among the scariest: *My answer is yes*.

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What is that *thing* God is asking you to do that scares you?

Are you ready to tell Him those same four words? Use the space provided and write out your own prayer of surrender to the calling God has for you, even if you don't understand the how or why.

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In the days following my *yes* to God, He filled me with a *desire* to speak (which is *still* crazy to me). However, the nerves were still there. Soon after, God placed 2 Corinthians across my path. It's where Paul, even after giving his life to Christ, still struggled with what he called "a thorn in (his) flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7 NIV). While we don't know with certainty what that thorn was, we *do* know he asked God to take it away.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. What was God's answer to Paul's request?

What was Paul's response to God's words?

Suddenly those words of Scripture came alive like never before. I realized I didn't need God to *change* me in order to *use* me. Sure, He could take away the nerves and the fear that come along with speaking, but if He does, would I then rely on my own strength? By God NOT taking away my fear, my "thorn in my flesh," I can *only* operate in His grace.

Those who know me well know I don't have a natural bent to speak, so when I do, it can ONLY be because of God. HE gets all the glory, not ME, and that's exactly as it *should* be!

The Battle Isn't Ours

Before we end today, let's go back to David before he became king of Israel. In 1 Samuel, we learn about the Philistine, Goliath. Twice a day for 40 days, he taunted the Israelites to choose a man to face him in battle. His giant nine-foot frame terrified the Israelites. David, at the time a young shepherd boy, finally had enough of Goliath's taunts.

Read 1 Samuel 17:32-50 to discover what happened next.

Fill in the next phrase from verse 47 (NIV): "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; _____."

Just as that battle was the Lord's, so, too, is *this* for you, whatever *this* might be for you.

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BY WENDY BLIGHT

Saying Yes to Grace

During a recent visit to a wave pool at a local water park, I noticed two young girls playing. One was eagerly anticipating the coming waves; the other was trembling with fear. The first girl looked at her friend and said, "Release your fears, and just ride the waves!" Moments later, I saw the two of them dive straight in, allowing themselves to be swept forward in the oncoming swells.

THIS is what I envision God asking us to do: Release our fears and just *ride the waves of His grace* into the calling He has for us!

Let's do one last fill-in here. I'll go first:

I may be uncomfortable in a crowd, but I am *not* disqualified from His grace! I will still be used by God!

Your turn!

I may be _____, but I am *not* disqualified from His grace!
I will still be used by God!

Father God, thank You for the examples You've given in the Bible of real people with real flaws and shortcomings that You have chosen to use. Thank You that we can be listed among those as well. We say YES to Your grace! Everything about us that we think are hindrances, we give to You now. Turn them into something beautiful that could ONLY come from You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Cheering you on,
Stacy