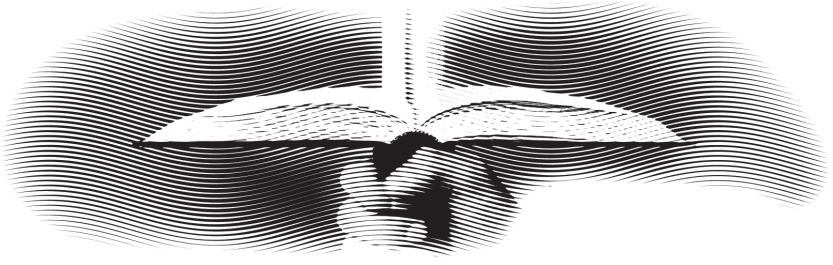
LESSON 4 *April 18–24

(page 30 of Standard Edition)

The Role *of the* Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Lam. 3:22, 23; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; John 17:17; Eph. 1:13; Ps. 119:11; 1 Cor. 2:14.*

Memory Text: **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"** *(Hebrews 4:12, NJKV)***.**

The Bible. No doubt you own one copy or perhaps many. Throughout history, this precious book has been copied in secret, smuggled, and banned. It's the most published book in the world, in any language, and also one of the oldest. Some have died so that the Bible could be preserved.

Where is the Bible in your life? Do you read it or does it sit beside your bed or on a bookcase gathering dust? Is life too busy for you to find time to really study the Word of God or do you feel too tired to open its pages?

God's Word is living and powerful, and God is calling for you to let it speak to your heart, to encourage you, to challenge and change you, and to give you guidance and hope.

The Bible is not just an academic book or a collection of old stories. Instead, it is a beautiful, profound account of how the Creator of the universe seeks to draw us close to Him. If you have a desire to grow in your relationship with God, the best thing you can do is commit to spending quality time with Him daily, praying, reading His inspired Word, and surrendering your will to what it teaches.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 25.*

(page 31 of Standard Edition)

The Most Powerful Weapon

Before we explore why the Bible is so valuable and how to dig deeper in our personal Bible study, we must understand something: one of the most significant attacks Satan can make on you is to stop you from spending time with God in His Word. Keeping people away from their Bibles through business, apathy, tiredness, or doubt is his number-one strategy. He knows that when we spend time with God in His Word, it revives our lives and nourishes our souls; so, of course, he would do everything to prevent this!

We are told that "Satan employs every possible device to prevent [people] from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 593. Satan knows that God's powerful Word makes him powerless. Satan knows that prayer and Bible study are the most powerful weapons humanity can use against him *(Eph. 6:17, 18; Heb. 4:12)*, so he does everything he can to stop us from reading and praying. He knows that God's words are powerful and that they not only spoke this world into existence *(Ps. 33:6)*, but they can raise the dead (*John 11:41–44*) and give us strength to overcome *(Matt. 4:1–11)*.

By keeping God's people away from their Bibles, Satan affects not only our relationship with God but our relationships with others. Our marriages become strained, we yell at our kids, and we don't have patience with our friends or coworkers. Life seems too busy; we feel stressed and burdened, with no escape route. And surprisingly, we don't often pause long enough to realize what's happening. We might think we're close to God, but in reality, when days and weeks pass by without our ever opening God's Word, we're weakened more every day.

Even when we have an up-and-down and very inconsistent relationship with God, He is wonderfully constant, as Lamentations 3:22, 23 tells us. What do you notice in these verses, and how do they compare with our human natures?

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As the covering cherub before he fell *(Ezek. 28:14–17)*, Lucifer heard God's words and knew their incredible power. He now hates this truth, so it's clear why our minds grow numb and our hearts grow dull when we don't choose to hear and bring God's words into our daily lives.

How wishy-washy or inconsistent are you in your devotional life? What should your answer tell you about making some changes, if needed?

Scripture, the Authority

The Bible's authority and function are clearly declared within its pages. Read and copy out 2 Timothy 3:15–17. Take note of what these verses tell you about the function of the Bible.

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When it comes to personal Bible study, we must be careful not to expect the Bible to serve our purposes or perspectives, which are not always the same as God's. For example, we shouldn't use the "close my eyes and point to a text" method, because this isn't how God wants to communicate with us through His Word. God is not a puppet on a string, waiting to serve our needs and will. His ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours *(Isa. 55:9)*, and so we should never try to control His words to us. Neither should we pick and choose only the parts of the Bible that feel comfortable to us. Instead, we should see the Bible as a whole package rather than reading the easy, familiar passages and leaving out the confronting or challenging ones. If we truly want God to speak into our lives, we must take the Bible as a whole and use sound methods when we engage in careful Bible study, trusting that God will reveal what we need to hear when we need to hear it.

Also, Jesus Himself tells us: " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' " *(Matt. 22:37, NKJV)*. That is, God doesn't want us to ignore our minds; rather, He wants to inform our minds with His vast reaches of knowledge and understanding, which are revealed, in part, through His Word. We can read many biblical narratives in which God had discussions with such people as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and Job, in addition to many conversations that Jesus had with people. God doesn't bypass human reason but invites us to submit it to His Word and wisdom when "working out" our salvation.

Human reason, however, is still *human*—capable of error and deception. It's never infallible. It's possible for human reason to push God aside to try to work things out on our own, which places self as equal to, or above, God when it comes to thinking. People can approach Scripture with an arrogant and critical spirit, thinking they've heard it all before and that there is nothing new. It's when we feel important, confident, self-sufficient, and in need of nothing that we neglect our relationship with God and rely on our own limited knowledge and faulty reasoning.

Bible Truth

A trend among some liberal theologians in the 1960s was to write God out of the field of theology. In 2017, a cover story of *Time* magazine featured the headline "Is Truth Dead?" It's interesting because this trend illustrates the position of our society today. The very idea of "truth" itself is decaying to such an extent that no one knows what truth is anymore. According to popular culture, there is no measuring stick, no foundation that remains constant that can be depended upon to endure the test of time. Contrary to this, Jesus said, " 'I am the . . . truth' " *(John 14:6)*. His Word testifies about Him as truth in complete purity.

Read the following verses slowly, and then read them again a second time. What do you notice about these messages?

John 17:17 _____

Prov. 30:5, 6 _____

Ps. 12:6 _____

The Bible declares that basic truth, Jesus Himself, doesn't change *(Heb. 13:8)*. At the same time, as we read God's Word, our understanding of God and His truth can grow. "There are mines of truth yet to be discovered by the earnest seeker."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 704. In speaking of "truth," Ellen G. White always referred to truth as given by God through His Word. We can search for additional light in the Bible because God's Word never contradicts past truths but instead builds on them.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Psalm 33:4, 5; and Ephesians 1:13. What is the message found in these texts?

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In the end, the Bible, and the Bible alone, must be the foundational source of what we understand as truth. All other sources must be tried and tested by the Word of God. Even what we deem "reason" needs to be tested by God's Word!

Some people want to argue that there is no truth. Why is that statement self-contradictory? That is, why is making the claim that there is no truth an attempt to proclaim truth, and thus self-refuting?

Bible Claims

What might change in your home if you turned to the Bible when faced with a big decision, relationship problem, or challenge? What might change in your workplace or church if the words of the Bible truly became the lens through which people viewed the world and chose to live by?

The Bible authors knew how valuable the words of the Bible were. No other book can speak to your life as these words can. The words can sit on the page in your Bible, but how can you keep them in your heart?

What is David's advice in Psalm 119:11, and how might you follow it? *(See also Heb. 4:12.)*

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One of the claims the Bible makes about itself can be found in Hebrews 4:12. A two-edged sword is powerful and sharp, but the Bible can do what human tools cannot for the human soul. The Bible describes itself as being alive. Perhaps you've wondered how this could be, given that it was written thousands of years ago, but Jesus said, " 'The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life' " *(John 6:63, NKJV)*. If your heart is broken or your life is falling apart, God can speak His words into your world and change things around. The Old Testament also describes God's words as being very active and not at all stagnant or passive *(see Isa. 55:11)*. When David reflected on the impact of God's words on his life, he wrote, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life" *(Ps. 119:50, NKJV)*.

Perhaps you've experienced severe hunger at some point in your life, or maybe you've fasted or gone on a diet. Doesn't food taste good after you've been hungry? In a spiritual sense, the Bible is food for our souls.

If your soul is empty and hungry, open the Living Word. Read Jeremiah 15:16, 1 Peter 2:2, and Matthew 4:4.

God's words taste good to the mind and heart, and when we read them, they will fill us and sustain us as promised.

The messages in God's Word, the Bible, come from God Himself. God sent them specifically for us and for every other person who has sought Him. When we read them with a prayerful, open heart, those words won't be wasted.

How much time do you spend daily in the Bible, and how do you spend that time? What can you do to make that time the most spiritually profitable?

State of the Heart

Our ability to receive instruction from God's Word *(Job 22:22)* depends largely on what the state of our heart is like when we come to the Bible. How does 1 Corinthians 2:14 explain this?

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To have spiritual discernment means to have spiritual insight and understanding. It makes sense, then, that a spiritually open-minded person will have very different takeaways when reading the Bible than a spiritually closed-minded person. Someone who thinks the Bible is foolish won't look for truth in its pages.

So, both our attitude toward the Bible and the way we approach reading it are very important when it comes to growing in a relationship with God. How does Paul explain this in 1 Thessalonians 2:13?

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God's Word works in us when we believe. When you open your Bible and believe that God has something to say to you through the words on the pages, He will indeed speak to you and work in your life. But so much depends on your faith and your expectations. The good news is that if your faith is small, God can help it to grow *(Mark 9:24)*, even if it's tiny like a mustard seed *(Luke 17:6)*.

One of the great purposes of the Bible is to speak truth into our lives about the condition of our relationship with God and how to strengthen it. If your heart is open to the Holy Spirit and if you approach the Word with humility, you will always come away changed, even though you might not immediately recognize it day by day. Such change and growth are often incremental. But if we cling to our apathy and sin and are not willing to change, Bible reading can avail us little good. The Holy Spirit prompts us to move closer to Jesus Christ. Do we want to step closer? If so, we become "wise unto salvation" *(2 Tim. 3:15)*, and we'll see things we never even imagined.

What is the state of my heart and mind as I approach the Bible? Am I just bringing my opinions to the Bible with the goal of trying to justify them, or am I coming with an open mind and heart, ready with childlike faith to see what God wants to tell me today? Why is that answer so important?

Further Thought: If you consider the words that you've spoken during the past 24 hours, how would you evaluate them? Were they loving, kind, joyful, uplifting, frustrated, tired, anxious, angry, gossipy, or malicious? The Bible says, " 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' " *(Matt. 12:34, NKJV).* When we have junk in our hearts, it comes out in our words.

We've all experienced feeling frustrated, tired, or stressed, and that state of mind changes what comes out of our mouths (often words we later regret). In contrast, when our heart is bursting with love for someone, it flows through our words.

In the same way, God's Word speaks of His heart and His intentions toward us. It's amazing to think that these very words, straight from the heart of God, are in our possession in the Bible. It's truly incredible to see the power God's words have held throughout history.

"It is one thing to treat the Bible as a book of good moral instruction, to be heeded so far as is consistent with the spirit of the times and our position in the world; it is another thing to regard it as it really is—the word of the living God, the word that is our life, the word that is to mold our actions, our words, and our thoughts. To hold God's word as anything less than this is to reject it. And this rejection by those who profess to believe it, is foremost among the causes of skepticism and infidelity in the youth."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 260.

Discussion Questions:

1 What are all the logical and rational reasons you have for your faith? Probably a whole lot more than you realize.

2 How can you make sure that Bible study and prayer are the foundation of your relationship with God? How can you have a relationship with God without both prayer and Bible study?

3 If someone wanted to deepen their relationship with God, where would you advise them to start reading?

4 How can you live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord? *(Deut. 8:3)***. What might that really look like in your life?**

5 What do the following passages tell us about God's words? *Heb. 11:3; Ps. 33:6; Matt. 11:4, 5; 1 Thess. 4:16; Eph. 6:17; James 1:21.*

Summary: The Bible is living and powerful, and reading it is foundational to growing our relationship with God. Not only does it teach us about God's wonderful character and His interactions with humanity throughout earth's history—it also speaks to each of us today when we come to it in humility.

Jail Time

By Carol de Oliveira

Can you imagine being thrust into a prison cell for sharing Jesus? This is a common occurrence for Global Mission pioneers serving in a veiled country in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. A country is called "veiled" to protect the lives and ministry of frontline workers. Global Mission pioneers are lay-people sent to start new groups of believers among unreached people groups.

Recently, Chong,* a pioneer, and Peter, the director of the local conference office, went to the northern part of this country to meet with members of a church plant.

While Chong and Peter had dinner with the members, they heard about three families who wanted to give their lives to Jesus. When Chong learned they were ready to burn their spirit-worship items, he decided to visit them that night.

As Chong, Peter, and some church members traveled to the three families' homes, a church member said he wanted his family to hear about Jesus. So, before the group reached the families, they visited the member's home to share the good news with his relatives.

Finally, the group arrived at the homes of the three families. It was late, but the people's beaming faces warmed Chong's heart, and their zeal energized his spirit. As they huddled around a fire, Peter introduced Chong and told the people he was there to help them make a full surrender to Jesus.

But the families didn't seem to need Chong's help. "We are ready to give our hearts to Jesus," the family elder said. "We will walk in the light with Jesus taking the lead; not the worldly spirits."

While Chong was talking with the families, a man burst into the room, demanding that Chong accompany him to the clan leader's home.

Later that evening, Peter and the church members returned to their place of worship to await news about Chong. As the hours dragged on, they became concerned about how long the meeting with the clan leader was taking. Finally, they learned that Chong was locked up in the clan leader's home.

During the night, the members prayed for Chong while the leaders tried to negotiate his release. But nothing they tried was successful. He was taken to a detention center where he was kept during the initial investigation of the case.

Providentially, Chong was released four days later. Now, the village where he spent time in jail has more than 100 people who have become Seventh-day Adventist Christians! Rather than deterring Chong from sharing Jesus, jail time strengthened his resolve.

Despite fierce opposition, God's work continues to flourish in this veiled country. Please pray for our Global Mission pioneers who risk their safety to establish new churches for Jesus. Your faithfulness sustains their ministry.

*Names have been changed.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 4:12*

Study Focus: *2 Tim. 3:15–17, John 17:17, Eph. 1:13, Ps. 119:11, 1 Cor. 2:14.*

The main role of the Word of God is to feed us spiritually to keep us alive. The Israelites learned this important spiritual lesson when they experienced physical hunger in the wilderness. Moses' interpretation of God's miracle of the manna reflects this notion: " 'That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD' " *(Deut. 8:3, NKJV)*. Jesus was famished in the wilderness when He uttered this principle to the devil *(Matt. 4:4)*. We hear this same idea in Peter's epistle in which he compares the Word of God to the milk that feeds and nourishes hungry newborn babes: "That you may grow thereby" *(1 Pet. 2:2, NKJV; compare with Heb. 5:13)*. These biblical examples make us aware of an important condition that we must have in order to partake of spiritual nourishment from the Word of God. We must come to the Word with an awareness of our need. We must come hungering and thirsting; otherwise, we will not appreciate the vital necessity of spiritual sustenance. Nor will we likely enjoy it or profit from it.

In this study, we will try to understand two crucial truths about spiritual nourishment: (1) why and (2) how the process of feeding on the Word of God sustains us. The basis of our study will be 2 Timothy 3:14–17, the foundational passage from Paul in his second letter to Timothy. The first question—"Why?"—will permit us to examine, from a biblical perspective, the special qualities and effects that make 2 Timothy so powerful and life-changing. The second question—"How?"—will propose methods for reading the Scriptures. Such methods will allow for the miracle of feeding on God's Word to happen in our own lives.

Part II: Commentary

The "Why" of the Scriptures. Why do the Scriptures possess the power to sustain life? Paul suggests two responses to this question. The first response has to do with Paul's high view of the Scriptures, as well as the nature, or sacred quality, of the Scriptures. The second response has to do with the effect of the Scriptures, namely, the transformative power of

the sacred writings in the life of Paul's reader, Timothy *(1 Tim. 3:15)*, whom Paul also calls the "man of God" *(1 Tim. 6:11)*.

1. The Quality of the Scriptures. The Scriptures that formed the Bible were first commonly identified as "holy." The phrase "holy Scriptures" (Greek: *hiera grammata*), which Paul uses, occurs only here in the New Testament. This phrase reflects the technical title *Torah sebbiktav*, "the written law," that designated in ancient Judaism the writings that were considered as inspired, in opposition to the *Torah sebbe'al pe*, "the oral Law," which was not considered inspired. By this term, Paul here refers to the Old Testament, a title that some Christians will use much later as a derogatory term to suggest a lower (or even invalid) inspiration.

For Paul, the so-called Old Testament was the only Holy Scripture. At that time, the New Testament did not exist and was not yet a part of the instruction that Timothy would have received. The reason these writings are called "holy" derives from the fact that they are considered to be *theopneustos*, "inspired"—literally, "God breathed" in the passive form, implying God as its subject. This same verb is used to describe the process of God's creation of man, in which God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" *(Gen. 2:7, NKJV)*. From this exalted view of Scripture, Paul infers not only lessons concerning the effect of the Scriptures upon us but also lessons concerning the way that we should approach God's Word.

2. The Effect of the Scriptures. The parallel between the inspiration of the Scriptures and the process of the creation of human beings is not accidental. This parallel is intended to suggest that the Word of God is *life*. As such, it brings life to its receiver, just as Adam received life from his Creator. Paul specifies that the Holy Scriptures "make you wise" *(2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV)*. Paul does not mean that this effect is mechanical, that those who receive the Scriptures would immediately and magically become endowed with wisdom. Paul reminds us that the wisdom of which he speaks comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, in the next verse, Paul explains that this wisdom functions in four distinct ways in the life of the believer:

- The first function of the Scriptures is "doctrinal." Scripture guides us in finding and understanding the truth.
- The second function of the Scriptures is "reproof"; that is, it makes us aware of errors we have committed, not only in doctrine but also in the way we behave in our personal lives.
- The third function of the Holy Scriptures is "correction." It is not enough to realize our mistakes; we also must understand how to correct our course and determine the right direction to take.

- The fourth and final function of Scripture is for "righteousness." The Scriptures ultimately lead us to repentance and obedience through the Holy Spirit. Paul then concludes that the goal of the Scriptures is the formation of the complete individual. Paul concludes his lesson on a practical level with the directive to take action. Thus, Scripture equips us "for every good work" *(2 Tim. 3:17, NKJV)*, as well.

The Approach to the Scriptures. How do the Scriptures produce these extraordinary effects, taking us from where we are to a life of righteousness with all the "good works" it implies? To help us answer this question, four lessons, or principles, concerning our approach to the Scriptures may be drawn from Paul's counsels to Timothy:

1. All Scripture. The first and most basic principle in our approach to biblical texts is the fact that their "holy" and inspired quality concerns the totality of Scripture. Paul insists that *all* Scripture is inspired *(2 Tim. 3:16)*. This principle means that the whole corpus of the Bible is to be considered in our studies and in our quest for God's revelation. Paul's statement encourages us to read Scripture, trusting that its holy writings will guide us in our search for divine truth and for practical advice in our life. Not one book or single passage of the Bible is to be privileged over other books or other passages. All Scripture merits the same high degree of interest and attention. Paul suggests here an approach that has been defined in more recent biblical scholarship as the "canonical approach." Thus, a particular text should be analyzed in light of other biblical passages that may refer to or allude to it (also called the intertextual principle).

2. Learn and Know. Paul values the effort of learning and knowing *(2 Tim. 3:14, 15)*. For this reason, ignorance of the Scriptures, or a superficial reading of the Bible, may have a serious impact, not only on our present existence but also on our eternal salvation. Within this framework, Paul's call to learn and know implies that we must give particular attention to the biblical text that is the object of our study. As Ellen G. White reminds us: "The importance of [seeking a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures] can hardly be overestimated. 'Given by inspiration of God,' 'able to make us wise unto salvation,' rendering 'the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,' the Book of books has the highest claim to our reverent attention. We must not be satisfied with superficial knowledge, but must seek to learn the full meaning of the words of truth, and to drink deep of the spirit of the holy oracles."—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 9, 1883.

3. Faithfulness. Paul's exhortation to Timothy to "continue" in the things he had learned *(2 Tim. 3:14)* echoes Jesus' appeal to "abide" in His Word *(John 8:31, NKJV)*. The same Greek verb *menō*, "continue," appears in both verses. It is not enough to learn the biblical truth once; we should review it. There is a Hebrew proverb that says, "Someone who learns a lesson and does not review it is like a farmer who sows and does not reap." For Timothy, and for many Christians, this training is not a one-time event; the work begins "from childhood" *(2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV)* and continues throughout life. Paul's exhortation to continue in the Word is not just engaging in an intellectual recollection of abstract truths and doctrines. Nor is it a temporary sentimental remembrance. Paul calls Timothy to abide in the Word and practice it at all times. James thinks along these lines when he discusses the connection between faith and works *(James 2:14–26)*.

4. Impact of Teachers. We cannot have access to the divine truth by ourselves. Because truth is given through revelation, as the Bible teaches, the testimony of human witnesses who have accepted that revelation as true is also needed. For this reason, we need teachers. From the very beginning of Israel's history, God has urged His people to teach their children *(Deut. 6:7)*. Paul alludes to that principle when he writes to Timothy about those "from whom" he had learned *(2 Tim. 3:14, NKJV)*. Paul particularly has in mind Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, but also himself among the "many witnesses" of the Christian community *(2 Tim. 2:2)*. Paul's appeal, then, concerns not only the students or the children who are indebted to their parents and their teachers but also the parents and teachers themselves who have the responsibility to share what they have learned.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: How do we successfully apply the Scriptures to our lives? The following activities are intended to help us do just that. Ask for a volunteer to read the section below titled "For Reflection." Then encourage class members to put into practice during the week one or more of the activities that follow and then report on their experience in class next Sabbath. Ask them to relate specifically how the activity strengthened their understanding of Scripture and how it deepened their relationship with the Lord.

For Reflection: There is the potential for misunderstanding how to apply the Scriptures in our own lives. The application of the Scriptures to our lives does

not mean we are at liberty to manipulate God's Word to accommodate our inclinations. Rather, to apply the Scriptures to our lives means that we should conform our lives to the teachings of Scripture.

Activity 1: Daily meditation: For a week or so, use a short text (one verse or one biblical passage) every morning for your devotional. Learn what this passage means in light of its context. Be creative. Look for new insights and lessons with each reading.

Activity 2: Learn a verse by heart: Every month, choose a Bible verse from your meditation texts and repeat it each morning until you have memorized it.

Activity 3: Teach: The best way to learn is to share with your spouse or a friend what you have learned and discovered in the Scriptures. Find someone with whom you may share and discuss your newfound knowledge and insights about the Bible.

Activity 4: Obey: It is not enough to know a verse by heart. The most important thing is to apply it to your life and obey its counsel. As Jesus said: " 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' " *(John 13:17, NKJV)*. As you read and study the Word, ask for the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom to know how to apply its truth in practical ways to your life.

Notes