

STUDY GUIDES



UNDERSTANDING

DEATH AND

THE AFTERLIFE

FAITH  BRIDGE

Week 1 - The Bible and the Afterlife

Monday—Read Genesis 2:7, Genesis 5:21-24, and Psalm 23:4-6 in the Old Testament. Do you have a concept of the afterlife? What do you think actually happens to a person right after they die? Is your answer to that question any different now than it was when you were an adolescent? The above passages give us some insight into how the afterlife was viewed during early biblical times. Scholars tell us that the Jewish understanding of the afterlife took many centuries to develop. Even to the time of Jesus, there were sharp disputes about what happens after death. What are your thoughts on this?

Tuesday—Read Luke 20:27-39 in the New Testament. In this scene, Jesus is confronted with a “trick question” from a group called the Sadducees. This group did not believe that resurrection was possible. Their question asks Jesus to compare a fairly common earthly situation with what consequences resurrection would cause. Jesus points out that our relationships in this life are limited by time, death and sin. We don’t know everything about resurrection life, but Jesus affirms that our relationships will be very different from what we are used to now. What difference does believing in the resurrection make in your daily life? Why does it matter if there is an afterlife?

Wednesday—Read John 11:25 along with **John 14:1-3** in the New Testament. The key phrase to notice is that Jesus said to trust God and to trust in him. What is your particular image of the afterlife? How are you trusting God for that image? How do you think about your own particular room prepared just for you?

Thursday—Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-58 in the New Testament. In this longer passage we read something of Paul’s view on the resurrection and our resurrection bodies. What insights do you gain from this about the afterlife? What questions does it raise for you? Does the passage offer you any particular hope or promise? If you re-read verse 58, you will see that it teaches the implications of hope for our daily lives. What leads you to be hopeful about the afterlife?

Friday—Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 in the New Testament. Paul suffered many hardships and troubles as he went about preaching. There were great troubles. As you face trouble, do you find it easy to focus on the pain rather than on your ultimate goal? We have assurance of eternal life so our sufferings should not diminish our faith. For this, Paul is a great example! If death is trouble, then even death has been swallowed up in victory!

Week 2 - What About Hell?

Monday—Read Ezekiel 26:19-21 and Ezekiel 33:10-11 in the Old Testament. What does this last passage tell us about God's heart regarding punishment of the wicked? What do these verses teach us about God's salvation and will for humanity? Do you see where it says that God desires to keep people from the pit?

Tuesday—Read Matthew 5:17-30 in the New Testament. What role does hell play in these verses from the Sermon on the Mount? How does Jesus describe hell? What is God's word to you from these passages? Take a look at **Luke 16:19-31** from the New Testament. What was Jesus' point in telling this parable about the afterlife?

Wednesday—Read Matthew 24:36-51 along with **Matthew 22:1-14** in the New Testament. These are two of the parables of Jesus about judgment. What is the point Jesus wants us to understand? What do you picture when you think of "weeping and gnashing of teeth?" Should Jesus return today, are you ready? In what respect is your house in order?

Thursday—Read Romans 2:1-11 in the New Testament. The apostles wrote about hell, for example, this passage from Paul. How does Paul describe hell and, according to Paul, who goes to hell? The apostle Peter wrote in **2 Peter 2:1- 22** in the New Testament. Taking a look at verses 4 and 17, what does Peter teach about hell? Who is hell reserved for? How are we saved from hell?

Friday—Read Revelation 1:17-18 in the New Testament. The Book of Revelation paints vivid pictures with words of the judgment of God and the final victory of the Lord over all that is evil. What does it mean to you to hear that Jesus holds the keys of hell and death? In sum, the aim of the Bible's teaching about hell is to warn people, and to encourage them to walk with God, living in the grace of God, and to accept God's invitation to the wedding banquet. Whether hell is eternal death, or eternal punishment, or simply living for eternity in the darkness outside the Kingdom of God, it is a place none need go, nor one that God wishes any to go. What is your reaction to this?

Week 3 - What About the Final Judgement?

Monday—Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 in the New Testament. Are you looking forward to being judged? Are you going to have a pocketful of “explanations” handy, just in case? While eternal life is a free gift given on the basis of God’s grace, according to this scripture, we are still going to be judged. That free gift doesn’t relieve us of the duty to be obedient. Do you take proper comfort in viewing God as merciful and also just? It doesn’t look like universalism is going to work.

Tuesday—Read Romans 3:23 in the New Testament. Just because you consider your sins to be not quite as bad as the sins of someone else, does that mean that you “deserve” eternal life? How much do you minimize or justify your sin? Comparing your actions to the sins of someone else is measuring with the wrong scale. The standard to measure against is not set by other people. The true standard to measure is set by God. In other words, the greatest human goodness based on human effort is going to fall far short of the mark. What will bridge the gap?

Wednesday—Read John 14:6 in the New Testament. There is a judgment and standing on our own record we’re going to fail it, but Jesus has paid our ransom and broken the barriers down, that we may enter in. Jesus is the path to the Father, and he is the reality of God’s promises. His life can be ours, both now and eternally. But grace comes first. Grace always leads. Have you a habit of silently judging others? Do you lead with grace? When you are being judged, do you need some grace?

Thursday—Read Matthew 25:31-39 in the New Testament. Are you comfortable being ultimately separated from other people based on how you have been obedient to the examples set forth in this passage? Another way of asking this, but still not an easy question, is how well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers? Is there any real evidence of what you believe based on observing what you do?

Friday—Read Matthew 28:18-20 along with John 14:26 in the New Testament. The Matthew verses are the words of the Great Commission. Jesus calls forth his followers, like many of us, to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey his commandments. Jesus also promises to be here with us in this life while we do these things. How is Jesus with us? How do you sense his presence in these moments? Jesus continues to be with us today and everyday through his spirit. According to the John passage, the Holy Spirit is the presence of Jesus and will never leave us. Are you able to accept the comfort and assurance offered to you?

Week 4 - What About Heaven?

Monday—Read 1 Corinthians 13:12 in the New Testament. The point of this sermon series, *Now What?* is the fact that how we understand the afterlife affects how we will live this life. Where were you in life when you first seriously wondered about the afterlife? In the afterlife you envision, will you still have regrets and shame? This passage tells us we will be ourselves after passing, but that negative emotions will be seen in God's context, with his vision and comfort, and not ours. This is the theological concept of *continuity*. Do you take comfort in knowing that one day you will have all the answers that you don't have now?

Tuesday—Read Revelation 21:1-27 in the New Testament. Human beings are poorly equipped to give an accurate description of Heaven. This vivid description from Revelation certainly reads like Heaven is a fantastic place, but why would gold, for example, have a high value in Heaven? Gold is an earthly thing. Our earthly descriptions fall short. How would you describe the physical makeup of Heaven? Do you see Heaven more as a place for you to be—a space to occupy? Or is Heaven more where you will be doing things, or reconciling things. How do you imagine Heaven?

Wednesday—Read Genesis 1:28-3:19 in the Old Testament. One way we might infer a bit of what Heaven might be like is to look at a description of the Garden of Eden from this passage in Genesis. Is this a picture of how God originally intended life to be lived? What can you infer from this about what Heaven might be like? Take the challenge to read the passage twice, just to see what else shows up!

Thursday—Read Matthew 18:1-4 in the New Testament. In his miracles, Jesus gave us a foretaste of what our bodies might be like in Heaven. The lame will walk, the blind will see, the sick are made well. There will be no hunger or poverty. It's good to think that Heaven is like this. In this passage from Matthew, Jesus tells us that we must come to the kingdom like a child. We must be humble to be able to do that. What scars do you carry that might be healed in Heaven? What fears will you be relieved of in Heaven? Is there anything that prevents you from being humble?

Friday—Read Isaiah 2:1-5 in the Old Testament. This passage provides a good example of a Hebrew Prophet painting a picture depicting God's eventual restoration of all things. This is a vision associated with the predicted coming of a Messiah to Israel. This is a description of the Messianic Age to come. Now, Christians believe that this predicted age actually began with the coming of Jesus into the world. How should these pictures of Heaven shape how we live on this earth now? How are you altering your day-to-day activities to embody what you expect, or hope for, from Heaven? Discuss this with someone close to you.

Week 5 - What About Suicide?

Sunday's message was about suicide, and if you haven't seen it, please take time and do so this week online. In the message many ways of handling stress and dread were shared, as well as different ways you can reach out if you, or someone you know, is considering suicide. Those steps are:

- **Seek professional help**
- **Find Friends that Can lift you up**
- **Tell your family and friends about your feelings and struggles**
- **Help other people**

Also, if someone you know tells you that they are thinking about committing suicide, **do not leave them alone**. Stay with them, find someone to stay with them, get them to the emergency room, call 911 if you have to. Second, **Eliminate access to firearms** or any potential tools for suicide. Third, **call or have them call a suicide hotline number**. The national number is **800-273-8255**. It is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And, of course, as the crisis passes, **help them get professional help**. Encourage positive action.

The rest of this week's time will be different than our normal study. First, **Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20** in your New Testament. This verse is where our theology around suicide lands. You'll notice what Paul says about our bodies. What is your body? Who does it belong to? If God gave you your body is it possible God has something in store for how you use it? In Sunday's message Ben said, *"God gave you this life and he has certain things he wants you to accomplish in the world, he has potential that he's built in to your life and it's not yours to dispose of."* What does this statement bring to mind? What potentials has God placed within your life?

Beyond the act of suicide, how might this passage impact what you do with your body this week, month, year? This week pay attention to your body, and more specifically what you do with it. Be attentive to its needs. Be aware of things that neglect it. Write those things down this week, and on Friday spend time in prayer asking God for the assistance to make any needed changes.