

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Greetings, Pilgrims! The book we are setting out to read and discuss together is one of the most famous in the English language. It has been in print continuously since its first publication in 1678—345 years ago! Generation after generation have found in this story of Christian's journey to the Celestial City a mirror to their own experience of walking with God in this world. After all, everyone who has made Jesus their King is “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

The original full title of the book is *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*. While the storyline focuses a great deal on the trials and tribulations through which every Christian must travel in this life, there is no doubt that the emphasis is on what is to come. It is the hope that Christian has set before him that enables him to endure such trials. Though his journey is dangerous, his great desire—the thing that keeps him going—is to please the King and to arrive safely in His heavenly kingdom.

Part of what gives Bunyan's work such power are the circumstances in which he wrote it. He was a Baptist at a time when it was illegal to be one. It was illegal to worship God in good conscience according to one's own understanding of the Scriptures. Under the reign of King Charles II of England, he was imprisoned in Bedford County Jail for twelve years. It was during this time that he wrote the book. He alludes to this in the opening lines. The “den” or “cave” in which he says he laid down to rest, according to his own margin note, is the jail.

So, as we approach this study together, we should have a deep appreciation for those who have gone before us in the Christian life. The circumstances of our trials might be different, but the spiritual dynamics are very much the same. We have our own temptations to despair, to doubt, to be enamored with the things of this world, to lose sight of our great prize—the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

May this study help us to renew our commitment to Christ in this life, to awaken us to the real spiritual dangers within and without, and to cause us to persevere in faith until we reach the desired country.

Note on the Study Guide

Each study will have a glossary for unfamiliar terms, a synopsis of the chapter(s), Scripture passages to read together, questions for reflection and discussion, and memory verses. Many of the questions have been adapted from *The Pilgrim's Progress Discipleship Course* by Cheryl Ford and *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Guided Tour* by Derek Thomas. If you are joining a group for discussion, make sure to work through the questions in advance, so as to make the most of your time together. Also, make sure to familiarize yourselves with the Scripture references in each chapter. The value of a Christian book is found in the ways that it illumines and applies the Scriptures. We pray no one loses sight of that as we get into this story together.

WEEK ONE: PILGRIM'S GREAT DISTRESS

Chapter One

Glossary

Pliable: Easily influenced.

Obstinate: Stubborn refusal to change.

Despond: A state of unhappiness or low spirits.

Synopsis

A man named Christian is front and center as the book opens. He is greatly distressed because of the book he is reading and the burden he is carrying. The book has revealed to him that the city in which he and his family are living (the City of Destruction) is going to be destroyed, burned with fire from heaven. His distress is only amplified by the unbelief of his family who think he has lost his mind. In the heat of this crisis, he cries out repeatedly, "What shall I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Eventually, he meets a man named Evangelist who points him in the direction of the narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14) and sends him on his way.

Along the road, he is chased down by two other citizens of the City of Destruction named Pliable and Obstinate. They try to persuade Christian to come back with them. Obstinate, seeing that they are not getting anywhere, returns alone to the city, but Pliable agrees to go a little farther. As they travel together, Christian shares from his book about the infinite happiness that is to come in the Celestial City.

Soon, however, they fall into a swamp called Despond. Experiencing this unhappiness leads Pliable to return to the City of Destruction leaving Christian alone. Just then, a man named Help comes to help Christian out of the swamp. It is revealed to Christian that the swamp is the conscience of the sinner who has been awakened to his condition but is trapped in all kinds of doubts, fears, and anxieties and cannot find firm footing on the promises of God. Just as Christian prepares to resume his journey, he is assured by Help, "once you go through the narrow gate, the ground is good."

Bible Reading

Hebrews 9:27-28; 11:8-16

Memory Verse

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) Have you ever thought of the Christian life as a pilgrimage? Why might that be a helpful metaphor?

- 2) What does Christian discover about his condition in the opening scene (p. 19-20)? How does he make that discovery? Why is that significant for us today?

- 3) What big decision does Christian make in response to this discovery (p. 22)? Is that the same as being “saved”? How do you know?

- 4) What role does Evangelist play in this story? What might that teach us about our role in evangelism today?

- 5) Read Matthew 10:32-39. How does this passage inform our response to Christian leaving his family the way that he does?

- 6) How does Christian’s encounter with Pliable and Obstinate help us understand some of the kinds of people we will meet in our journey through the Christian life?

- 7) How would you describe the Swamp of Despond? In what ways has that reflected your experience?

- 8) What difference did the Swamp of Despond make in the journeys of Christian and Pliable? Why was Christian able to continue his journey after falling into the swamp?

WEEK 2: THE NARROW GATE AND THE HOUSE OF THE INTERPRETER

Chapter Two

Glossary

Carnal: Pertaining to the flesh; a natural/unregenerate state.

Beelzebub: A demon who was one of the gods of the Philistines (2 Kings 1:2-3). Beelzebul, also a name for a demon, is used for Satan himself, the prince of demons (Matt. 12:24, 27).

Legalism: The belief that our good works can earn God's grace. This belief exists in both fundamentalism as well as prosperity gospel teaching.

Synopsis

As Christian continues on his journey, weary from the burden he is carrying on his back, he encounters Mr. Worldly-Wiseman. This man represents those who preach a message of morality—that we just need to be good in order to receive God's blessing. He persuades Christian that if he wants to get rid of his burden, he should leave the difficult path that Evangelist has directed him on and go instead to a place called Morality. Once he arrives, Christian is terrified by the prospect of trying to keep the Law in order to please God (Heb. 12:18-21) and realizes he should have stayed on the path Evangelist had set him on.

Evangelist finally catches up to Christian and explains his error. He has forsaken the good path in order to follow a supposedly easier path that really only leads to death. Christian, with a contrite heart, expresses sorrow over his sin and asks for forgiveness. Evangelist assures him that he is forgiven and tells him to resume his journey to the Narrow Gate. At the Narrow Gate, Christian is greeted by Good-Will who assures him of the love of Christ for sinners (John 6:37). After giving him this assurance, he sends him on to the House of the Interpreter.

At the House of the Interpreter, Christian is given several visions to help him understand the way that is set before him—the insufficiency of the Law to cleanse the heart, the virtue of waiting for eternal rewards rather than temporal, the sustaining grace of Christ in the midst of Satan's attacks, the tribulations through which he must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22), the dangers of falling away from grace and hardening his heart toward Christ, and a vision of the Day of Judgment with the accompanying warning against being unprepared for that Day.

Bible Reading

Galatians 3:1-12; 4:8-11; 5:2-12; 6:1, 11-18

Memory Verse

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”
(Matthew 7:13-14)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) Read Psalm 38:1-4. What is Christian's burden? Why is he so desperate to get rid of it?

- 2) Why would it be easy for someone who is initially drawn to Christianity to fall into legalism?

- 3) What is the consequence of heeding Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's counsel (p. 35-36)?

- 4) What are the similarities and differences between Evangelist and Good-Will in how they show love to Christian in this chapter? What do their interactions teach us about how we should love one another?

- 5) Why is it important for Christians to be able to receive rebuke and correction? How easy or difficult is it for you?

- 6) Which room in the House of the Interpreter was most encouraging to you (p. 46-57)? Why?

- 7) Which room was most disturbing to you? Why?

- 8) Christians cannot lose their salvation (John 10:27-30). Bunyan firmly believed this. What is his point in showing the vision of the man in the cage (p. 53-55)?

WEEK 3: THE CROSS, THE HILL OF DIFFICULTY, AND THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

Chapter Three

Glossary

Sloth: Not inclined to be active or work; sluggish.

Timorous: Fearful; timid; lacking courage.

Prudence: Wisdom applied to practice.

Piety: Reverence for God that works itself out in obedience.

Synopsis

Having been equipped at the House of the Interpreter, Christian now comes to a climactic moment at the cross, where he finally loses his burden once and for all. Despite this glorious experience of relief, the moment quickly passes and Christian returns to his journey. The transition is accentuated as he comes almost immediately to the Hill of Difficulty. There is a lot for us to learn as redeemed people living in a fallen world from the timing and sequence of Christian's experience here.

The Hill of Difficulty presents such a challenge to pilgrims that it leaves those who are not whole-heartedly devoted to the King (like Formalist and Hypocrisy) seeking alternate routes that do not lead to eternal life. But though it is difficult, Christian gives his full effort to making the climb. He finally reaches an arbor where he stops to rest, but his rest turns into indulgent sleep. After being awoken with a fright, he moves quickly to resume his journey but forgets his scroll at the arbor. Thankfully, he is able to retrace his steps and recover the scroll.

Finally, he arrives at the House Beautiful, which represents the fellowship of the church. Bunyan is highlighting how the church is a gift to us for "the relief and security of pilgrims" (p. 72). After being interviewed by one of the virgins of the house (Rev. 14:4), Christian is granted entry into the house and finds himself enjoying the company of the other residents—Prudence, Piety, and Charity. He reflects on the journey thus far and is able to rest for a few days. Before his departure, they equip Christian with armor from the Lord's armory, everything necessary for the journey that yet lies ahead of him.

Bible Reading

Ephesians 2:13-22; 3:20-21; 4:11-16; 6:11-18

Memory Verse

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." (Hebrews 3:12-14)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) What happened to Christian at the cross (p. 59-60)?

- 2) Why is assurance of salvation essential for the Christian life?

- 3) What is the significance of the Hill of Difficulty? To what degree does that describe your experience in the Christian life?

- 4) In what ways are other characters deterred by the Hill (think of Foolish, Sloth, Presumption, Formalist, and Hypocrisy)?

- 5) Remember, this is an allegory. What do you think Christian losing the scroll represents (p. 66-69)? How might that happen to Christians today?

- 6) The House Beautiful represents the fellowship of believers in the church. What does Christian's visit there teach us about the role of the church in our journey through the Christian life?

- 7) What are the marks of true conversion that Christian shares from his own experience at the House Beautiful (p. 74-80)?

- 8) How would you describe Christian's conversation with the residents at the House Beautiful? How closely does their fellowship resemble ours? Why do you think that is?

WEEK 4: A FIERCE BATTLE AND A DARK VALLEY

Chapter Four

Glossary

Apollyon: Used in Revelation 9:11, the name literally means “Destroyer.” In context, he is the “angel of the bottomless pit” and “the king” over the locusts of the fifth trumpet (Rev. 9:1-11).

Fiend: An enemy in the worst sense; the devil; an infernal being (Webster’s Dictionary, 1828).

Synopsis

The Valley of Humiliation presents Christian’s biggest challenge yet—a face to face confrontation with the devil himself. While the devil is depicted as a hideous monster (scales like fish, wings like a dragon, etc.), his tactics don’t begin with physical assault, but with spiritual attacks, with lies to deceive Christian (Eph. 6:12). Only when Christian has resisted the repeated spiritual attacks does Bunyan illustrate those spiritual attacks with the allegory of flaming darts (Eph. 6:16).

From one valley to another, Christian then passes through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, which, for Bunyan, represents the precipice of hell itself. It is a disturbing combination of sights and sounds, including the whispering of lies that tempt Christian to shrink back in his journey. But then he hears the words of Psalm 23 from which the valley takes its name, and they are a great comfort to him (Ps. 23:4). In these words, he “believed that someone who feared God was in the valley with him” and “he perceived that God was with this person...even though it was dark and dismal” (p. 97).

There is something telling about Christian’s journey of passing from one valley to another. Often, as evangelicals, we can seek “spiritual highs,” in which our passion for God is coupled with positive emotions (joy, relief, even ecstasy). However, as Bunyan makes clear, faithfulness to the King is often coupled with circumstances that produce negative emotions (adrenaline-induced anxiety, fear, confusion). We must remember in the midst of the valleys that the King of the Highway is always with us (Is. 35).

Bible Reading

Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 Peter 5:6-11

Memory Verse

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:11-12)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) Why does Apollyon confront Christian (p. 88)?

- 2) Do you think most Christians in churches like ours are conscious of the on-going spiritual battle we face? Why or why not?

- 3) What arguments does he try to use to persuade Christian to turn back (p. 88-90)? What are some common arguments the devil uses today to try to convince us to give up following Christ?

- 4) What is at stake in Christian's battle with Apollyon?

- 5) How does the armor of God enable Christian to stand firm against the attacks of Apollyon (p. 88-92)?

- 6) How might Christian's responses help us when we face severe temptation from the devil today? Have you found this to be true in your own life?

- 7) What do we learn from Christian having to pass through the two valleys (the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death) in close succession?

- 8) Read Psalm 23:4. This verse was such a great comfort to Christian. What comes to mind when you read it?

WEEK 5: A FAITHFUL BROTHER

Chapters Five and Six

Glossary

Wanton: Wandering from moral rectitude, indulging in sensuality without restraint.

Deceit: The act of causing someone to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid.

Prating: Talking foolishly or at tedious length about something (Talkative lives at Prating Row).

Synopsis

After passing through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Christian meets a fellow pilgrim from his town named Faithful, who informs him of the reaction to his departure in their town. The people initially considered their impending doom, but ultimately rejected that recognition in favor of mocking Christian's undertaking. Faithful then recounts his own journey, revealing that he encountered different obstacles. While he did not fall into the Swamp of Despond, he was tempted by Wanton with "carnal and fleshly pleasures." He had no difficulties passing through the Valleys of Humiliation and Shadow of Death that so troubled Christian, but he had been harassed by a man named Shame who persistently argued the foolishness of his journey. Through their sharing of stories, Bunyan demonstrates that while the basic outline of the Christian life is common to all, the particular obstacles we face as individuals will differ.

Christian and Faithful then encounter a third man from their city named Talkative. Faithful initially expresses excitement about their new companion, but Christian informs him that Talkative's appearance is deceptive. Christian knows from their town that Talkative is a rude man at home who cheats people in financial dealings and will talk just as enthusiastically about nonsense while drinking in the pub. We must understand as Christians that "saying and doing are two different things" (James 1:22-27). Faithful then approaches Talkative to question whether his actions reflect the truth of his words. Talkative becomes defensive and refuses to engage any longer. The two "sincere pilgrims" depart from him, and Christian commends Faithful for dealing with Talkative so directly, rather than passively accepting him.

Bible Reading

Mark 8:35-38, James 1:22-27, Ephesians 5:6-17

Memory Verse

"Let no one deceive you with empty words...Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true) and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Ephesians 5:6, 8-11)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) What news from the City of Destruction does Faithful share with Christian (p. 102)? What does that indicate about the condition the townspeople are in?

- 2) According to Faithful, why did the people in the City of Destruction mock Pliable (p. 103)? What does their response reveal about their hearts?

- 3) In what ways does Faithful's experience differ from Christian's? What is common to both journeys thus far?

- 4) The character Shame puts down Faithful's faith on the basis that "not many mighty, rich, or wise" share his opinion. What scriptural understanding does Faithful lean on to stand up to this attack (p. 108)?

- 5) Why is Faithful initially impressed by Talkative? What lesson can we take from his mistaken impression?

- 6) Christian's very direct assessment and rejection of Talkative may be jarring to our sensibilities today. How does Ephesians 5:6-17 shape our understanding of Christian's approach to Talkative?

- 7) What is the difference between "crying out" against sin and "abhorring" sin (p. 117)?

- 8) In your own words, how does the saving grace of God make itself known when it is in the heart of a person?

WEEK 6: VANITY FAIR

Chapter Seven

Glossary

Vanity: Lack of substance; emptiness, specifically with regard to pleasure.

Pharaoh: The ruler of Egypt who enslaved and murdered God's people (see Ex. 1-15).

Nebuchadnezzar: The ruler of Babylon who destroyed Jerusalem, carried God's people off into exile, and demanded they worship his image (see 2 Kings 24-25; Dan. 1-3).

Darius: The ruler of Persia who held God's people captive and insisted they not worship their God (see Dan. 6).

Synopsis

Having come through the wilderness, Faithful and Christian come to the town of Vanity, where there is a year-round market called Vanity Fair. Before they enter, they are reunited with Evangelist who warns them that one of them will die there. After admonishing them to conduct themselves like men (1 Cor. 16:13), Evangelist leaves them to enter the town.

Vanity Fair is a place where all the empty pleasures of life are on display to lure pilgrims into a false sense of eternal happiness. These pleasures appear to really satisfy, and they take many varieties. They do not present themselves as evil, but if we "buy" them, if they capture our hearts, they can destroy our relationship with God. This was exactly how the devil tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11).

Seeing that Christian and Faithful are not interested in buying what they are selling, the people of the town arrest them and put them in prison. Faithful is then put on trial where several false witnesses are brought to testify against him. Despite their obvious folly and deceit, the witnesses are deemed credible, and the jurors decide against Faithful. After torturing him, he is finally executed, but Christian sees him immediately taken by chariot to the Celestial City. Christian is spared the same fate by God's mysterious providence and is freed from prison. He then connects with Hopeful, and they continue their journey together.

Bible Reading

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11; John 3:18-21; 7:7; 15:18-21; 16:33

Memory Verse

"The Lord stood by me and strengthened me...So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) How would you describe Vanity Fair in your own words? How does it resemble our world today?

- 2) Why did Christian and Faithful draw so much attention from the people they encountered at Vanity Fair (p. 130)? Why do you think they provoked such a strong reaction?

- 3) Read Acts 19:23-41. How does the outrage at Ephesus resemble the outrage at Vanity Fair?

- 4) In what ways should Christians provoke a strong reaction from the world today? What are some reasons we might not provoke such a strong reaction?

- 5) What makes true Christianity “diametrically opposed” to everything that Vanity Fair stands for (p. 135-136)?

- 6) What do you make of Faithful’s defense of himself (p. 136)? Was there anything you found particularly compelling?

- 7) What ultimately happens to Faithful in the wake of their verdict (p. 138)? How does that give us (who seek to remain faithful to Christ) hope for our lives?

- 8) What is the significance of Hopeful coming to join Christian immediately following the death of Faithful?

WEEK 7: TEMPTED BY THE WORLD

Chapters Eight and Nine

Glossary

By-ends: A term meaning “selfish motive,” which carries the connotation of a hidden or deceitful selfishness.

Demas: A professing Christian and one of Paul’s co-workers in ministry (Col. 4:14; Phlm. 24) who abandoned Paul because he was in love with the world (2 Tim. 4:10).

Synopsis

Christian and Hopeful escape from Vanity Fair and continue their journey until they encounter a man named By-ends. This man is a fair-weather Christian, or what we might often call a “Cultural Christian.” When it is socially or materially advantageous to be a Christian, he plays the part to gain that advantage. When it is not advantageous, he distances himself from Christ.

The company he keeps reveals the deceitful motives in his heart: Mr. Money-love, Mr. Hold-the-world, and Mr. Save-all. These men conspire with him to try to deceive Christian and Hopeful to fall in love with the world and follow their path. While their arguments may at first seem plausible (p. 146-147), Christian is so steeped in the Scriptures that he resists them and strengthens Hopeful as well, since Hopeful was more childish in his faith (Eph. 4:14).

This vulnerability of Hopeful’s is put to the test once again as they next encounter Demas, who was every bit as in love with the world as By-ends and his friends. Demas tries to persuade the pilgrims to enter a silver mine, but Christian resists this temptation as well and builds discernment and courage into Hopeful once again. Finally, they reach a river called “The River of God” or “The River of the Water of Life.” This is a wonderful place, and they find great refreshment after dealing with such a powerful series of temptations.

Bible Reading

Matthew 6:19-24; 13:22; 16:24-26; 19:16-30

Memory Verse

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt. 16:24-26)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) How would you describe By-ends attitude toward religion (p. 142-143)? How does that attitude show up today?

- 2) Why is that attitude detrimental to those who wish to journey to the Celestial City?

- 3) How would you summarize By-Ends' question (p. 145) in your own words?

- 4) What is Money-love's answer (p. 146-147)? Why might someone find that answer compelling?

- 5) How does Christian answer that same question (p. 147-149)? What does his answer teach us about how we can resist temptation?

- 6) How does Demas tempt Christian and Hopeful? Why is Hopeful intrigued by that?

- 7) How does Lot's wife serve as a warning for pilgrims on the journey of the Christian life (Gen. 19:24-26; Luke 17:32-33)?

- 8) Why were Christian and Hopeful not content to stay at the river with all its comfort and refreshment (p. 156)?

WEEK 8: DESPAIR AND DIRECTION

Chapters Ten and Eleven

Glossary

Despair: The complete loss or absence of hope.

Delectable: Highly pleasing, delightful.

Ananias and Sapphira: Early Christians who fell dead after withholding money and lying about it (Acts 5).

Synopsis

After a difficult stretch of path, Christian persuades Hopeful to leave the path for an apparently easier way called By-Path Meadow. On the By-Path, they see a man named Vain-Confidence fall into a pit, indicating to them the folly of leaving the path. Though they regret their decision and resolve to head back to the path, they fall asleep. They are discovered by the Giant Despair who imprisons them in the dungeon of his castle. The Giant beats them mercilessly for a few days. Then, prompted by his wife, Distrust, he tells them to take their own lives rather than face a life of pain and suffering. As Christian considers this option (Job 7:15), Hopeful bolsters his resolve by reminding him that God is in ultimate control and their circumstances may change. He also reminds him of the difficult obstacles God has already brought him through on his journey. After prayer, Christian remembers he has a key called Promise (1 Cor. 1:8), that they can use to escape. They return to the path and put up a sign warning future pilgrims.

Christian and Hopeful continue until they reach the Delectable Mountains, a rich tapestry of vineyards, orchards, and gardens. There, the two pilgrims rest from their trials and seek guidance about the remainder of their journey from the shepherds there—Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere. The shepherds take the two up to mountain vantage points where they point out pitfalls that other pilgrims have faced (including the Giant's castle) and allow them to view the Celestial City ahead through their telescope (though the view is imperfect). Finally, they leave Christian and Hopeful with a map of the way and instruction to beware of the Flatterer and not to sleep on the Enchanted Ground.

Bible Reading

Job 7:12-8:6, Hebrews 13:2, 13:17

Memory Verse

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) What reasoning does Christian use to decide to follow an alternate pathway (p.157)? How might Christians use similar reasoning to go “off the path” in our time?

- 2) Why does Hopeful defer to Christian in going off the path (p. 158)? Was he right to defer for those reasons? How is Christian’s response to Hopeful a good model for us?

- 3) Remember, this is an allegory. Why do you think Bunyan depicted despair as a giant? What does his treatment of Christian and Hopeful teach us about despair in our lives?

- 4) What is the difference between the Giant’s proposition (p. 162-163) and Evangelist’s prophecy at Vanity Fair (p. 127)? Why is Christian able to accept Evangelist’s prophecy but reject the Giant’s proposition?

- 5) Hopeful counsels Christian to remember that God, and not the Giant, has ultimate control, and therefore a hope for their circumstances to change is justified. How can this recognition be applied to difficult circumstances in our lives, even up to the contemplation of suicide?

- 6) What is our “promise key” that can be wielded in situations similar to the one faced by Christian and Hopeful in the Giant’s dungeon?

- 7) What do you notice about the ways in which the shepherds care for Christian and Hopeful? How might that be a good model for churches today?

- 8) What hindered Christian and Hopeful from seeing the Celestial City clearly through the shepherds’ telescope (p. 172)? What does that imperfect view show about the state of their progress at this point?

WEEK 9: CORRECTING THE DECEIVED

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

Glossary

Apostasy: The abandonment or renunciation of faith.

Conceit: Excessive pride in oneself.

Synopsis

Christian and Hopeful leave the Delectable Mountains and meet a man named Ignorance who had not entered the path through the narrow gate but rather a crooked lane coming from the town of Conceit. Ignorance tells Christian and Hopeful that his way is acceptable, but they conclude that he is too “wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:12). They determine to go on ahead without further discussion with him. After seeing Turn-Away from the town of Apostasy being carried away by demons, Christian recalls the story of Little-Faith, who, though he was robbed, refused to give up his certificate to the Celestial City. Though he offered little resistance in the fight, the Lord enabled him to keep his certificate to the end (2 Tim. 1:14). Hopeful contrasts this with Esau selling his birthright (Gen. 25:32). They conclude that though it may seem to them Little-Faith could have fought his attackers more courageously, they should be slow to presume how they would respond in facing another’s trial, and that it is ultimately the Lord’s grace that would carry them through rather than their own doing.

Coming upon a fork in the path, Christian and Hopeful are deceived into following one recommended by a man called a Flatterer, only to be led into a net in which they are entangled (Prov. 29:5). The Shining One releases them with an admonition for not using the map given to them by the shepherds. He rebukes them corporally, which they humbly accept. As they continue, they meet Atheist, who claims the Celestial City doesn’t exist at all. He tells them he searched for it for years in vain, using this to try to persuade Christian and Hopeful. Learning from their recent oversights, they swiftly reject him as a Flatterer not to be listened to (Eccl. 10:15). As they continue to face challenges, they remember the shepherds’ warnings and resolve to bolster each other with conversation. Hopeful shares with Christian his progress of gradually being awoken to the gravity of his sin and need for a Savior to justify him. Though it was not an instant or linear growth, he ultimately accepted Christ.

Bible Reading

John 10:27-30, 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 11:12-15

Memory Verse

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.” (Proverbs 3:5-8)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) Why does Ignorance assume he will get into the Celestial City? What is today's version of this assumption?

- 2) Read Luke 18:9-14. How is Ignorance like the Pharisee in Jesus's parable? What makes them confident in their own righteousness?

- 3) What do you think Bunyan intends for us to learn from the story of Little-Faith (p. 177-180)?

- 4) How do Christian and Hopeful correct their initial judgment of Little-Faith (p. 182-183)? How might we employ those same strategies in our relationships with other Christians today?

- 5) How does the Flatterer's appearance serve as a warning for us when considered along with his actions (2 Cor. 11:12-15)?

- 6) What argument does Atheist use to try to persuade Christian and Hopeful that the Celestial City does not exist? What are the flaws in his reasoning?

- 7) Hopeful recounts four reasons why he resisted God's work in his life (p. 190-191). How closely does his experience match your own?

- 8) Hopeful finds that even his best efforts to retreat from sin (prayer, Bible reading, weeping over sin) were "mixed up with sin." What must he learn to release him from that condition? How did Faithful's counsel help him (p. 192-195)?

WEEK 10: STUBBORN IGNORANCE

Chapter Fourteen

Glossary

Sluggard: A habitually lazy or idle person.

Backsliding: As Bunyan uses this term, it is a synonym for apostasy, referring to someone who temporarily showed signs of genuine faith but ultimately walks away from Christ. Today, the term can often be used of someone who has temporarily walked away from Christ but is believed to have genuine faith and ultimately be saved.

Synopsis

Christian and Hopeful observe that Ignorance continued to walk the path at a distance behind them, agreeing that he probably does not wish for their companionship. Christian allows him to catch up and questions him on how his journey is going and about his soul's standing with God. Ignorance, trusting in his own heart as the source of absolute truth, states that he is "full of good thoughts and intentions," but a skeptical Christian pursues what he means by "good thoughts." Christian states that good thoughts about ourselves are those that agree with the Word of God in affirming our sinful nature (Rom. 3:10-12), and that good thoughts about God are those that agree with what He says about Himself. Like many today, Ignorance reveals to Christian and Hopeful that he could never believe that his heart is "that bad" (Jer. 17:9). He cannot come to grips with his own sinfulness and need for a Savior.

Taking leave of Ignorance, Christian and Hopeful discuss the nature of those like him who fail to acknowledge the weight of their sin. Christian describes their lack, or stifling, of a productive fear of God. They then discuss the reasons those who had once shown an awareness of sin and desire to undertake the pilgrimage may backslide, using the example of a man they knew named Temporary. This discussion concludes Bunyan's development in this chapter of the various ways those that claim to have faith can show that they are missing a crucial element, be it the acknowledgement of the weight of sin, having a "true or right fear" of God, or true repentance.

Bible Reading

Jeremiah 17:9-10; 2 Peter 2:20-22, Romans 7:18-25

Memory Verse

"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matthew 11:27)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) How does Christian define good thoughts about ourselves and good thoughts about God?

- 2) According to Jeremiah 17:9-10, how reliable are our hearts in guiding us to the truth?

- 3) If that is the case, why do you think we are so eager to trust or follow our hearts?

- 4) Ignorance says, “I believe that Christ died for sinners, and I shall be justified before God from the curse through His gracious acceptance of my obedience to His law” (p. 203). What is the error in his understanding of the gospel?

- 5) What are the three things Christian says “true or right fear” of the Lord can be known by (p. 206)?

- 6) Why might someone try to resist the fear of God (p. 207)?

- 7) Why do people backslide (p. 208-209)?

- 8) According to Christian, what is the common element missing in all these cases (p. 209)?

WEEK 11: THE CELESTIAL CITY

Chapter Fifteen and Conclusion

Glossary

Beulah: A Hebrew word meaning “married” that is used to describe the beauty and glory of Zion/Jerusalem in Isaiah 62:1-5. Isaiah uses this term in contrast to the imagery of being forsaken or desolate (Is. 62:4; Lam. 1:1), which described Jerusalem during the time of the exile.

Shining Ones: These are angels who are often described in the Bible as having “shining” or “dazzling” clothing (Luke 24:4). They “shine” because they have been in God’s presence and radiate His glory (Ex. 34:29-35).

Synopsis

Christian and Hopeful reach the country of Beulah near the Celestial City. After staying there a while, they are told that they have two remaining difficulties to overcome: they must cross the river of death and they must ascend the final hill to reach the gate of the City.

As they set out toward the river, Christian is initially distressed by thoughts of his former sins and all the reasons why he would not be granted entrance into the City, but his friend, Hopeful, is able to touch the bottom of the river. Hopeful offers encouraging words to remind Christian of the kindness of the king and call to mind various Scriptures to fortify his faith.

When they reach the other side of the river, they are greeted by two Shining Ones, who begin to describe to them the inexpressible beauty and glory of life inside the City. Finally, they come to the gate of the City. There, they give their certificates to the gatekeeper who gave them to the King. Then the King commands that the gates be open and Christian and Hopeful be granted admittance into the Celestial City.

As the gates were opened, the narrator turns to see another man, Ignorance, approaching the edge of the river. He tries to avoid the hardships necessary to entering the kingdom (Acts 14:22), but it is to no avail. When he is confronted at the gate of the City and is found without a certificate, he is thrown into hell.

Bible Reading

Isaiah 62:1-12; 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-22:21

Memory Verse

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” (Rev. 21:3-4)

Reflect and Discuss

- 1) What comes to mind when you think of heaven? How often do you allow yourself to dwell on these thoughts?

- 2) What would make someone “sick with desire” for heaven (p. 212)? Have you ever felt that way? If so, what made you feel that way?

- 3) What is the significance of the Shining Ones’ admonition, “You must enter the City by your own faith” (p. 213)?

- 4) Why do you think Christian “began to despair” of having to cross the river of death, knowing what awaits him on the other side (p. 213)?

- 5) How does Hopeful strengthen Christian’s faith as they cross the river together (p. 214-216)?

- 6) How would you summarize the Shining Ones’ description of being in the Celestial City (p. 217-218)?

- 7) Why do you think Bunyan ended with the warning about Ignorance instead of the glorious vision of heaven (p. 220-222)?

- 8) What are one or two key takeaways having completed this study in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*?