

**Do you ever feel like there's got to be something more?
Does it sometimes seem like your life isn't quite what it
should be?**

Did you do the study last time?

Remember - nothing is going to change if nothing changes!

Christ calls us to an active, growing faith; to be weaned from spiritual milk and move on to solid foods (Hebrews 5:11-14). If you're not spending time each day going through His Word and praying, you're still taking milk from a bottle instead of feasting on bounty. Imagine all the wondrous food (and chocolate) you would have missed in your life if you were still drinking milk out of a bottle!

My friend, I'm praying you will pull a chair up to the table and dig in with me.

In the service of a glorious God,
Jennifer

Just Do It!

When 2008 ends, I want you to have a sense of peace so deep that nothing can shake it. I want you to be able to rejoice - even in the struggles of dirty diapers and dirty dishes. Even in the pain of broken promises and broken homes. Even in the suffering of painful diseases and painful deaths. I want you to rejoice because you know who God is and you know the promises He has made to you; promises that will never fail, no matter what your life situation is at any given time.

Please forgive me for nagging and pushing, but know I'll even beg if I have to. No, this isn't a pyramid scheme in disguise and I'm not making a commission off everyone who opens their Bible. I do this because I've seen the all-encompassing difference it makes in our lives. Because I know there are unfathomable treasures - beyond anything you can dream or imagine - waiting for you and I can't bear to see you miss them. Yes, even chocolate pales in comparison.

I come to you every two weeks encouraging you to hope in the Lord with everything you have and everything you are because my Bible used to sit on a shelf. I went to church, but I thought some people took the whole thing a little too far. I listened to women who were completely sold out for Christ and thought they were off their rocker. I avoided 'Jesus freaks' who wanted to talk about being 'saved' or 'born again.' I tried a few times to read the Bible, but quickly gave up because it was dry and boring, nothing like the latest Danielle Steele. I prayed here and there, accepted that Jesus died for my sins, and had been baptized so I thought I was OK.

I was OK. I was even safe from the fiery pit of hell and guaranteed eternal life by my faith in Christ Jesus. But, it was by the skin of my teeth. The first time I read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 it chilled me to the bone because it described me, "saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

I knew Jesus, but I wasn't giving Him everything. I believed in God, but didn't trust Him to be in control of every situation, every time, and always working for my good. I acknowledged that the Holy Spirit was part of the Trinity, but never considered that He truly dwelt in me and could change me from the inside to be more like Christ and bear fruit.

Now I know what it is to move beyond OK and love the Lord my God with all my heart, my soul, my mind and my strength. It is a full, rich and wonderful experience. Because I have seen the reward of it so vibrantly I don't want any one else to miss it the way I did (and still do sometimes).

Keep in mind that my outward circumstances haven't changed and it hasn't made me perfect. My husband and friends will attest to that! I'm still an at-home mom on a tight budget. I still live in an older, smaller house that has regularly scheduled plumbing disasters. I still have a house I can't keep clean, dishes and clothes to wash, kids that need discipline I'm no good at giving, a body that requires continual exercise, and a computer that I'd really love to toss out the window. My husband and I don't always treat each other like we should. I'm not always patient with my children. I've let my friends down more times than I can bear. My family is still faced with unspeakably bad tragedies and losses. And, as I shared with you in December, I struggle with periods of depression.

But, even in this ordinary and oh-so-NOT-perfect life, my heart sings. Even when I'm messing up and getting it wrong or when I'm faced with tragedy, a song of glory, peace, grace and forgiveness is waiting to burst forth. All I have to do is turn my heart to Jesus. The more time I spend with Him, the faster I am able to do this. The more I learn who He is, the more I am able to find peace in all situations. The more I obey Him, the more I see His blessings in my life.

My words fall so short today because what I'm trying to tell you is beyond words. So, I'm asking (begging?) and praying that you will find out for yourself. If you aren't part of a daily Bible study make sure you are doing these questions I send you twice a month. Then email me and let me know what you learned. Tell me about how God is working in your heart and your life.

My friend, read and study your Bible. Every minute you spend reading your Bible will provide a return on investment (Isaiah 55:11, 2 Timothy 3:16). What else has that guarantee? I've never seen it on the cover of In-Touch or Cosmo, or in the opening credits of any TV show.

If it's a struggle for you, pray for God to open your eyes to what He has to show you before you start. If your Bible is hard for you to follow, get a modern translation like The Message or New Living Translation (NLT). If you prefer old-style writing, use the New King James Version (NKJV) or the New American Standard Bible (NASB). I study primarily out of the New International Version (NIV). If you don't have a Bible, look up the passages on-line at www.bible.com.

Whatever you do, just do it!

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Meditate and Study

Grab your notebook and Bible and get ready to explore! Before you start, ask God to open your eyes and heart to His truth.

Lesson 2-1

1. What did you learn or apply from the last lesson?

If you didn't do the lesson, you can print it at

<http://www.hopeinthelord.org/DownloadBibleStudy.html>

Read Lamentations 3:19-25 twice.

This was written by Jeremiah to the Israelites in Babylonian captivity. Last time we looked at the captivity we live in today.

2a. What does Jeremiah remember (3:19-20)?

2b. Describe a time your soul was downcast.

3. List the reasons Jeremiah has hope (3:21-25).

4a. Define compassion (3:22) noting that some translations use the word mercy or loving-kindness.

4b. When does God's compassion/mercy/loving-kindness fail?

4c. How often are they renewed?

5. In light of this, I want you to let your mind wander over the sins of your life. Is God's compassion and mercy greater than your sin? Can it fail or run out before it covers the depth of your sins?

6. How has the Lord been faithful to you?

- 7a. What earthly things do you put your hope in?
- 7b. When have you been let down because you hoped in earthly things?
- 8. In light of your answers to questions 4b and 4c, when will your hope in the Lord fail you?

Lesson 2-2

- 1. What did you learn or apply from the last lesson?

Read Isaiah 40:28-31 twice.

Isaiah was also writing to the exiled Jews in Babylon, looking forward to what will occur when their captivity is over.

- 2. List at least five facts about God in this passage.

3a. Do you believe God created the ends of the earth? Why or why not?

3b. Go back a few verses and read Isaiah 40:22. What shape does it use to describe the earth?

3c. Centuries ago, when scientists 'knew' the earth was flat, this passage was used to discredit the Bible. How does that affect your thinking about the truth of the Bible?

- 4. Define everlasting (40:28).

5a. What does verse 29 tell you God will do for you?

5b. From the first line of verse 31, what should your response be?

5c. From the rest of verse 31, what are the effects of hoping in the Lord?

- 6. In your own words, what does God promise you in Lamentations 3:19-25 and Isaiah 40:28-31?

7. How can what you *know* overcome what you *feel* after studying these passages?

8. Write a prayer to God expressing what these promises mean to you and the comfort you find in them.

How I love these beautiful confirmations that the Lord is worthy of our hope and that He will never fail us when we hope in Him.

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength." (Isaiah 40:31)

The Hebrew word translated renew, *halap*, means "to be new, exchange, replace, renew."

Imagine bagging up your weariness, worries and struggles, carrying them to the customer service counter, and exchanging them for God's strength; the strength of a God who "will not grow tired or weary." Imagine leaving the store with an unconditional guarantee that this exchange will "never fail" and you "will not be consumed," no matter what you encounter.

My friend, make that exchange. There is no line at the counter, it's accessible from anywhere in the world, and open 24 hours a day. You simply need to walk up to it and make the exchange. Put your hope in the Lord. He will never forsake you when you seek Him out. It doesn't matter what you did yesterday. His compassion is new today. Go to Him. Hope in Him. Let His strength be yours.

When you're weary, say it out loud, "My hope is in the Lord. My hope in the Lord will renew my strength. I will soar on wings like eagles. I will run and not grow weary. I will walk and not be faint."

When you've stumbled, remind yourself out loud, "The Lord loves me greatly. He has compassion for me every day, no matter what happened yesterday, 5 minutes ago or 5 years ago. When I seek Him, I will find hope."

My friend, you can always count on the love of God. It will never fail. Whatever hurts you have, turn them over to His love and give Him a chance to heal you. Put your hope in Him so that you can soar.

I look forward to seeing you on a high perch,
Jennifer