

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Study to show "The Way of True life,"

Bible Study Outline

TOPIC: Elizabeth: Receiving God's Goodness

TEXT: Luke 1:5-25, 39-45, 57-66

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: Each person in our group wept as Don and Patrice told the story of their lost baby. We had prayed together that God would grant them a child. For such a long time we waited patiently and with hope. And we celebrated wildly with ice cream and pickles when finally she conceived! Now, we felt the agony and despair of a dream gone. Would they ever be able to have a child? Whether your desire is to have a child or find a spouse or see someone come to the Lord or something else, when the desire that is deeply engraved into your heart is unfulfilled, the grief and pain is immense. This is what Elizabeth experienced—years of suffering and shame because she was childless.

1. When have you had the experience of longing for something for years?
2. Read Luke 1:5-25. How is Elizabeth described in this passage?
3. Describe the promised son, John (v. 14-17).
4. Contrast Zechariah's response to the promise of John's birth (v. 18) with that of Elizabeth (v. 25).
5. In terms of responses to God's promises, do you think you are more like Elizabeth or Zechariah?
6. Why do we sometimes not accept good gifts from God or from others?
7. Read Luke 1:39-45. The angel Gabriel had informed Mary of Jesus' coming and of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Why do you think it is so important to Mary to get together with Elizabeth?
8. Look closely at the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary. What do you see happening between these women?
- 9- How have your faith and obedience to God been affected by other believers?
10. What would be helpful in making this more a part of your experience?
11. Read Luke 1:57-66. What did Elizabeth's husband, neighbors and relatives learn about God through this experience of John's birth?
12. Elizabeth's relatives learned about God because she was able to receive God's goodness to her. How have your neighbors and relatives seen God's mercy and grace through your life.
13. Pray that your eyes will be open to the mercy and grace of God and that your life will be full of praise and thanksgiving to God.

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TOPIC: Mary: Believing the Impossible

TEXT: Luke 1:26-38, 46-56

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: We often hear or use the phrase "Nothing is impossible with God." Mary, however, is called upon not just to hear or use this phrase, but to believe it. Gabriel's sign to Mary that God can do anything is the pregnancy of her cousin, Elizabeth. If it is possible for God to allow a barren woman to become pregnant, then he can also make a virgin pregnant. Faith and the kingdom of God are prominent themes throughout this passage.

1. When do you have trouble believing God?
2. Read Luke 1:26-38. Think of yourself as Mary, a teenaged girl. Tell the story of the encounter with Gabriel to your best friend.
3. What all was Mary asked to believe?
4. Describe Jesus from verses 31-33.
5. How does Mary's question to Gabriel (v. 34) contrast with Zechariah's question (v. 18)?
6. What do you learn about Mary and her relationship with God in verse 38?
- 7- How would you like your relationship with God to be more like Mary's?
8. How would Mary's life be complicated by what was going to happen to her?
- 9- In light of these complications how might she have responded to God?
10. Read Luke 1:46-56. What attitudes and feelings toward God does Mary express in these verses?
11. How does Mary see herself as part of God's work in history as well as in the future?
12. Why do you think Mary was able to believe God for the impossible?
13. What steps do you need to take for your response to and faith in God to become more like that of Mary?
14. Pray that your response to and faith in God will grow. Herodias:

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TOPIC: The Fruit of Bitterness

TEXT: Mark 6:14-29

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: The author of Hebrews writes about the root of bitterness that springs up and grows a fruit that causes trouble and defiles many. We hear about thousands of people who are killed in tribal and ethnic wars as a result of bitterness that took root years ago. We see churches divided and destroyed because of unresolved conflict between people who are brothers and sisters in Christ. No place in Scripture is there a clearer picture of a bitter spirit and its fruit of destruction than in the story of Herodias and John the Baptist.

1. How would you describe a bitter person?
2. Read Mark 6:14-29. What do you learn about John the Baptist?
3. Contrast Herod's reaction to John the Baptist with that of Herodias.
4. How do people in our culture usually respond to men and women who are truthful, righteous and holy?
5. How do you usually respond to someone who confronts you with the truth about yourself?
6. Verse 19 states that Herodias nursed a grudge against John. What is involved in "nursing" a grudge?
7. What more do you learn about Herodias from the sentence "Finally the opportune time came" (v. 21)?
8. How were each of the following affected by Herodias's grudge: Herod, Herodias, Herodias's daughter, John, his disciples and the world?
9. What are alternatives to nursing a grudge?
10. What are some examples of how you have seen bitterness rob people of good?
11. Pray about grudges in your heart that need to be given to God and forgiven.

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TOPIC: A Sinful Woman: A Forgiven Heart

TEXT: Luke 7:36-50

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: I know what I feel like when I have sinned and am intensely aware of my depravity: hopeless. Even despairing. Darkness threatens to overcome me. I also know what it is to be forgiven by God and by others; the freedom of being released from my sin. The joy of beginning again. The exhilaration that comes from being loved completely and accepted for who I am.

In stark contrast to Herodias, who chose to be locked into her bitterness and sin, is another sinful woman who seeks and receives Jesus' forgiveness.

1. How does it feel to approach someone you have offended?
2. Read Luke 7:36-50. What clues does the passage give as to how the woman is regarded by others? How would Simon the Pharisee have been regarded by others?
3. Put yourself in the sandals of this sinful woman. Would you have entered Simon's house uninvited? Explain.
4. How do you think you would feel as you entered Simon's house?
5. Describe the actions of the woman toward Jesus.
6. Contrast Simon's attitude toward the woman (v. 39) with Jesus' attitude toward her (w. 48-50).
7. How do you think Jesus receives you when you come to him in repentance?
8. What is the point of the story Jesus tells Simon in verses 41-43?
9. Contrast the way Simon acted toward Jesus with the way the woman acted toward him (w. 44-47).
10. How did these actions demonstrate the point of Jesus' story?
11. How are you like Simon in your response to Jesus? How are you like the woman?
12. How can you become more like the sinful woman in your love for Jesus?
- 13- Ask God to give you a humble and repentant heart. Ask him to increase your awareness of how much he has forgiven you. 5

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TOPIC: The Canaanite Woman: Persevering in Prayer

TEXT: Matthew 15:21-28

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: Sometimes when I pray I feel like the heavens are open and I can soar directly into God's presence. I know that he is there, eagerly waiting to respond to my words. At other times, the heavens seem like brass, and it feels like every approach to God goes no further than the ceiling and falls right back down on my heavy soul. When the former happens, it is not difficult at all to pray. However, when the heavens are like brass, persevering in prayer is hard work. The faith of the Canaanite woman in prayer is an example to us when we feel that our prayers are falling flat.

1. When have you felt discouraged because you thought God was ignoring your prayer?
2. Read Matthew 15:21-28. How was the Canaanite woman viewed by those mentioned in the story?
3. Why did she address Jesus as "Lord, Son of David" (v. 22)?
4. At this time there was tension between Jews and Gentiles, and women were not allowed to approach men. How would this dialogue be affected by each of these facts?
5. In what ways is the content of her request an excellent model of how we should approach Jesus?
6. What was Jesus' first reaction to her prayerful cry (v. 23)?
7. How do you feel when someone responds to you in dead silence?
8. How did the disciples react to the woman?
9. How do you respond when someone rejects you?
10. Describe the increasingly severe obstacles the woman faces as she continues to ask Jesus for help (w. 24-27). How did she respond to each?
11. What does her reply in verse 27 suggest that she recognized?
12. Jesus was pleased with her faith, and her request was granted. Describe what your prayer life is like when facing difficult, even seemingly hopeless situations.
- 13- How would you like to grow in your prayer life?
14. Ask God to allow you to see him more clearly and for your confidence in him to grow as you make your requests known to him.

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TOPIC: The Widow's Offering: Generosity Beyond the Tithe

TEXT: Mark 12:38-44

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: Hudson Taylor, well-known missionary to China and founder of the China Inland Mission, was called to a home to pray for a sick woman. He was chosen because, unlike other religious leaders of the day, he did not charge the family to pray for her. The woman was very poor. When Taylor saw her poverty, he clutched the coin in his pocket. It was the only money he had. He wished that there were two so he could give one to her. After all, he had only two meals left at home for himself. He knelt to pray for the woman, but found that he could not pray. God was asking him to give up his precious coin. He tried again to pray. How could he walk away with nothing to live on? Again he could not pray. Finally he gave her the coin. He was released by God and felt great freedom and blessing as he prayed. Pure, true generosity-giving with no strings attached-doesn't come naturally. True generosity, being able to freely give to others or to God, is a gift from God-a response to his marvelous grace to us.

1. Describe a time when someone who appeared to be more needy than you (emotionally, spiritually, physically or financially) was very generous to you.
2. Read Mark 12:38-40. Describe the teachers of the law. What seems to motivate them?
3. The kingdom of God is a primary theme throughout the Gospel of Mark. What do you learn about the values of the kingdom of God from what Jesus says about the teachers of the law?
4. In what situations is it difficult for you to be motivated by God's values in the way you live, act and serve?
5. Read Mark 12:41-44. What were Jesus' observations as he watched the crowd?
6. What does Jesus do and why?
7. Why do you think the story of the poor widow follows the story of the teachers of the law? What do the two stories have in common?
8. How does Jesus contrast the poor widow's giving with that of the wealthy?
9. What do you learn about true generosity from this passage?
10. How should our giving be like that of the poor widow?
11. Why might it be more difficult for those of us who are wealthy to give freely than for those who possess less?
12. How might your giving become more like that of the poor widow and less like that of the teachers of the law?
- 13- Ask God to help you grow in generosity. Pray about specific ways that you know you need to be more generous.

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TOPIC: Mary and Martha: Facing Death & Grief

TEXT: John 11:1-44

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: The Sunday-school lesson was about Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. Jill was abrupt, typically honest and refreshing. "It isn't fair," she said. "When my friend dies, I have to deal with it. When Jesus' friend dies, he just raises him from the dead!"

Though Jill's feelings were legitimate, there is much more to John 11. Jesus is not just avoiding the sting of death by raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. He related to Mary and Martha in their grief. He experienced their sorrow as well as his own. He comforted them. And then he demonstrated his power over death.

1. How do you express personal grief?
2. Read John 11:1-16. Describe Jesus' relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus.
3. How does Jesus' response to the news that Lazarus is sick (w. 4-6) seem to contrast with the close relationship that he has with Lazarus and his sisters?
4. What are Jesus' primary objectives in this episode of Lazarus's sickness (w. 4, 14)?
5. In what ways can you help others believe God and see some of his glory?
6. Read John 11:17-44. Compare and contrast the ways that Martha and Mary each responded to Jesus and he to them.
7. What hope did Jesus offer to Martha (w. 21-27)?
8. How did Jesus comfort Mary (w. 32-37)?
9. How does each sister communicate that she believes Jesus?
10. In what ways have you received comfort and hope from Jesus?
11. Jesus wanted people to believe and wanted God to be glorified. What do you think it was like for them to see Lazarus come out of the grave?
12. Because of the love between Jesus and Mary and Martha, they came to him honestly in their grief and he ministered to them. Do you trust Jesus enough to be open and honest with him about your pain? Explain.
13. Whenever we are vulnerable and open with people about our losses, there is potential for them to hurt us. Do you trust Jesus in others enough to share your grief and pain with them? Explain.
14. Talk to Jesus about your love relationship with him, and ask him to cause it to grow and deepen. Talk to him about pain that you are experiencing. Allow him to be your comfort and hope

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TOPIC: Women at the Cross & Tomb: The Courage to Care

TEXT: Matthew 27:45—28:10

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: When mother of three lovely daughters stood to speak on women in leadership at our congregational meeting. Sanna gently said, "I long for my daughters to see women at the table serving Communion to our church family." Sanna was expressing her desire for women to share in the privilege of being called as elders. It is an honor to be a woman! Not superior to being a man, but certainly not inferior; indeed, special. In an age when women were second-class citizens, they are esteemed by God and play a vital role in Jesus' life, his last hours and his burial. They are honored as the first witnesses to his resurrection.

1. From what you know about history and the Bible, what do you think it was like to be a woman in the culture in which Jesus lived?
2. Read Mat 27:45—28:10. Describe what the women saw in Jesus' final three hours on the cross (v. 45-56).
3. What is the significance of the darkness (v. 45)?
Why do you think Jesus cried out "My God" instead of his usual "My Father" (v. 46)?
What is the significance of the curtain of the temple's being torn from top to bottom (v. 51)?
4. Now look through the eyes of the women who were watching all this take place. What do you think it was like for them to be there?
5. Contrast the response of Joseph of Arimathea to Jesus' death and burial (v. 57-60) with that of the religious leaders (v. 62-65).
6. The response of the religious leaders demonstrates the hardness of their hearts. In what ways might our hearts be hardened to the truth about Jesus?
7. What did the women have in common with Joseph of Arimathea?
8. Why did it take courage for the women to remain at the cross and the tomb?
9. How does it take courage today to live a life of devotion to Jesus?
10. Continue looking through the eyes of the women as you observe what happened at dawn on the first day of the week (28:1-8). What would you feel and think?
11. Finally they see Jesus! How did they respond to him (28:9)?
12. What hinders you from truly "seeing Jesus"?
13. How does your response to Jesus compare to that of the women?
14. How does this passage demonstrate that women are honored by God?
15. Spend time worshiping Jesus.

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TOPIC: Sapphira: Dishonest to God

TEXT: Acts 4:32—5:11

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: I love the cartoon that shows a picture of an answering machine. When the phone rings, the recorded message says: "I am listening to your voice. If, when I hear you, I want to talk to you, I will pick up the telephone. Otherwise, leave a message." The caption under the cartoon says, "Finally, an honest answering machine." Sometimes we find ourselves in Christian communities where dishonesty prevails. Rather than "speaking the truth in love" we talk about others behind their backs and, worse yet, sometimes in the form of prayer requests. Or we live double lives with an outward appearance of Christian behavior which barely disguises our fractured relationships, sexual sin and brokenness. It is sad when it is only on rare occasions that we find ourselves saying, "Finally, an honest Christian."

1. How would you describe the level of honesty in churches, fellowships and Christian organizations you know?
2. Read Acts 4:32-36. What was the evidence that "all the believers were one in heart and mind" (v. 32)?
3. How does your Christian community compare with the one described in this passage?
4. What can you do that will help your community become more like the early church?
5. Read Acts 5:1-11. All is not perfect, however, in the early church. How do the actions of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-2) contrast with the actions of Barnabas (4:36-37)?
6. Pretend that you are a news reporter and are watching the action between Peter and Ananias and Sapphira. How would you report it?
7. What is the sin that Peter confronted (5:1-4)?
8. In what ways are you tempted to lie to the Holy Spirit; to other believers; to yourself?
9. Today teaching that wives submit to their husbands is sometimes distorted to suggest that husbands are responsible for all the actions of their wives. How does Peter demonstrate that Sapphira is responsible to God for her own behavior (5:7-9)?
10. How was the church affected by these startling deaths (5:11)?
11. How does this story illustrate the high value that God places on truth?
12. How does the practice of dishonesty in our Christian communities result in spiritual and emotional death?
13. Up to this point in the book of Acts, Luke talks about attacks on the church from the outside. In this incident, however, the church comes under criticism from within. How does this reveal the craftiness of Satan?
14. How do you see Satan attacking the Christian community from within today?
15. Pray for your own church and the church worldwide. Ask God to protect it from within and without and to give it great unity.

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TOPIC: Lydia: A Businesswoman Turns to Christ

TEXT: Acts 16:6-15

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: The memory is still vivid. The event was Inter-Varsity's Urbana Mission Conference. The place, a dormitory room. The person, a student who was in my small group Bible study. I was just walking down the hall in the dormitory when I sensed the prompting of the Holy Spirit to stop by Susan's room. As I walked in to say hello, she looked up from the booklet she was reading and said, "I would like to become a Christian. Will you help me?" The journey to Urbana and into Susan's room was not quite as dramatic as Paul's missionary journey to Philippi. But it was just as exciting to see the Lord open Susan's heart to the message of the gospel as it was to see him open Lydia's.

1. When is it easy for you to obey God? When is it difficult?
2. Read Acts 16:6-15. How is Paul directed to where he should go (w. 6-10)?
3. What principles of guidance do you see here?
4. When have you experienced God's leading in this way?
5. Paul and his companions arrived in Philippi on the Sabbath. They were looking for a place of prayer, but instead found a gathering of women. What does their response tell us about their view of women?
6. What principle of evangelism do you see in verse 14?
7. How is your outreach to others affected by the fact that it is the Lord who opens hearts to his message?
8. What is the significance of the fact that a woman is the first convert in Europe?
9. Lydia was a leader in business, in the community and in her household. What contributions would she make to the church?
10. Hospitality is one of the contributions Lydia made. It is directly spoken of in this passage (v. 15). What difference would her hospitality make to Paul, Silas, Luke and the church?
11. How could the story of Lydia's conversion, leadership and contributions to the first church in Europe encourage women today who desire to be used by God in the church?
12. Pray that God will make us more faithful in hearing him, obeying him and reaching out to others with the good news of the gospel. Ask him to help us use our unique gifts for the furtherance of his kingdom.

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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TOPIC: Euodia and Syntyche: Women in Conflict

TEXT: Philippians 3:20—4:9; 2:1-8

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: I trusted Betty. We had shared a lot of life: dormitory days in nursing school, difficult instructors, the death of Betty's grandfather, Betty's becoming a Christian, fun times and exciting Bible studies. She was one of the first people I had ever been vulnerable with.

We made plans to go back to college together to finish work on our degrees. Then suddenly Betty changed her mind. It was more convenient for her to stay where she was. I was hurt deeply. I felt unimportant to her, betrayed. The hurt then turned to anger and the unresolved anger to bitterness. Because we were leaders in our fellowship group, many others felt the effects of our broken relationship. What had once been a bright testimony of sisters walking together in unity now became a slam to the gospel. Through this experience, I learned very important lessons about relationships, resolving conflict and forgiveness. Is it any wonder that Paul pleaded with the Philippians for the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche to be resolved?

1. How have you seen public conflict between leaders affect a church?
2. Read Philippians 3:20—4:3. How does Paul feel about this church (4:1)?
3. In 4:1 Paul instructs the Philippians to stand firm. What is the basis of this instruction (3:20-21)?
4. How seriously does Paul take the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche? Explain.
5. What do you think this says about their importance and influence in the church and their value to Paul?
6. How would you describe your feelings when you see conflict between your Christian brothers and sisters?
7. Paul begged that the women would "agree with each other in the Lord." Earlier in this book Paul gave instructions about agreeing. Read Philippians 2:1-8. According to 2:1-2, why is it important for the Philippian Christians to be like-minded?
8. What can they do to be like-minded (2:3-5)?
9. What is Jesus' attitude (2:6-8)?
10. In what ways do you struggle with taking on Jesus' attitude?
11. How do you see yourself growing more like Jesus?
12. Read Philippians 4:4-9. How would following each of these instructions contribute to unity among believers?
- 13- How would you like to grow in following these instructions?
14. Ask God to make your heart tender toward those who are in conflict and cause you to grieve over disunity in the church. Ask him to make you sensitive to any wrong attitudes that you may have that lead to conflict with others. Ask him to give you a heart of repentance.

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TOPIC: Priscilla: A Partner in Leadership

TEXT: Acts 18:1-4, 18-28

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain follow-up questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: One of the greatest joys of my marriage is the partnership that Andy and I share. This is lived out in all sorts of ways. For instance, he enjoys the kitchen more than I do and adds creativity to our cooking. We raise kids together. We are both responsible for driving and taking care of the car. I pay the bills. He balances the cheque-book. We also share leadership in ministry. In this study we will look at an early church couple who also enjoyed shared leadership.

1. Describe a time when you have enjoyed sharing leadership in ministry with someone.
2. Read Acts 18:1-4. Describe the circumstances of the beginning of Paul's relationship with Aquila and Priscilla.
3. If you were Paul, how do you think you would be affected by the relationship with Aquila and Priscilla?
4. Read Acts 18:18-28. What advantages were there for Paul in having Aquila and Priscilla with him on this trip to Ephesus?
5. If you were writing a recommendation for Apollos, how would you describe him (w. 24-25)?
6. What did Aquila and Priscilla contribute to Apollos's spiritual journey?
7. How have others encouraged your spiritual growth?
8. What aspects of modern culture make it difficult to help someone in their spiritual growth?
9. To whom might God be calling you to "explain the way of God more adequately"?
How do you feel about this responsibility?
10. Look closely at the description of Apollos. How do his qualities, experience and heritage prepare him for the ministry God had for him in Achaia?
11. What do you think are the advantages of a married couple or close friends sharing leadership in ministry today?
12. Read Romans 16:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 16:19. What did Aquila and Priscilla contribute to Paul's life and the life of the church?
- 13- How can you encourage leaders in their ministry?
14. Pray for the zeal and desire to obey God that you see in Aquila and Priscilla. Ask God to lead you to a person you can build into spiritually and to make you faithful to that person. Thank God for his faithfulness to you.