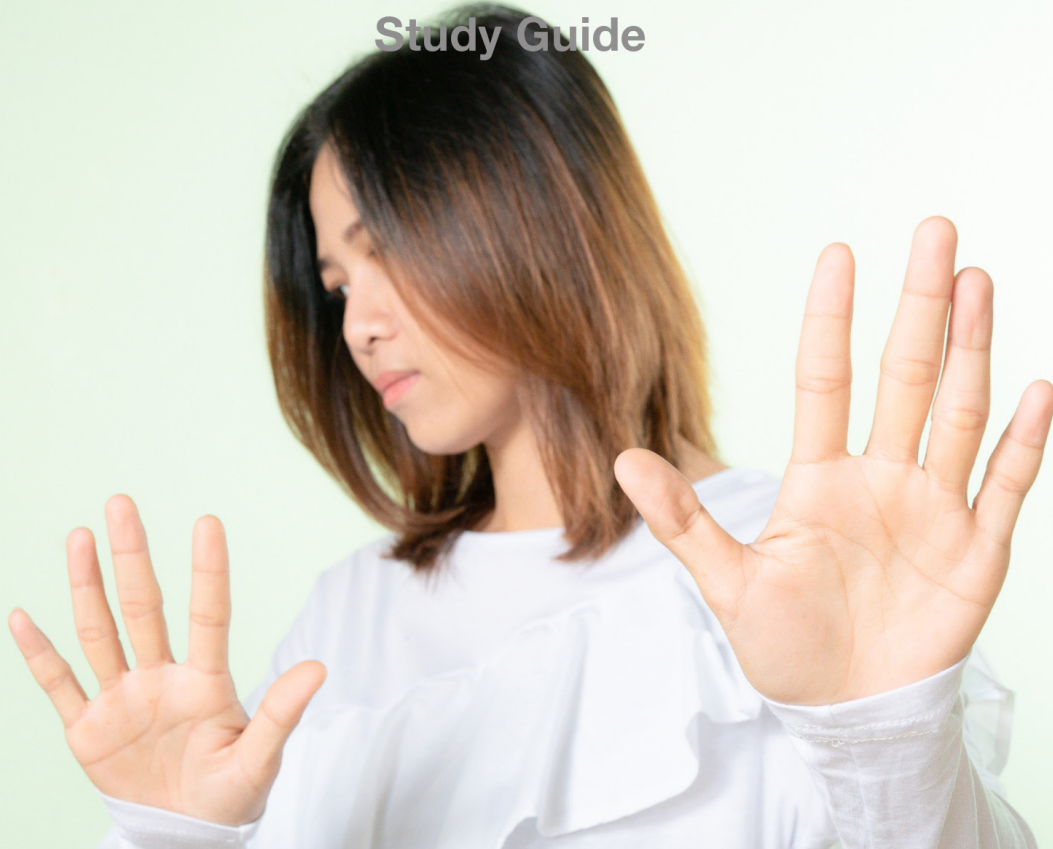


RELATIONSHIP NOT

Religion



GARY HARGRAVE



Religion Builds Protective Walls

The Scriptures tell us that Christ will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2–6). The reason for that is people’s unawareness. If we develop an awareness of Him and an understanding of His voice, then to us He is not like a thief coming by surprise in the middle of the night. This awareness comes by growing in a relationship with Christ, with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit. It is about a relationship with our God and not about religion or doctrines. It is important to understand how much our lack of awareness of the things of the Lord is actually based on our religious teaching and upbringing.

Part of the problem is that religion teaches us almost foundationally to close off to new things. Yet we know that God is going to do new things, especially in the end-time. Isaiah declares, “Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth” (Isaiah 43:19). However, our religious training often demands that we close off to anything new. So it becomes a dilemma for people to try to develop an openness and awareness of new things that seem to go against Church doctrines. The problem is that religion does not teach us a relationship with God. Instead, it tends to teach us doctrines and concepts that build protective walls around the teaching itself.

According to the Pharisees and the religious thought of the day, Yeshua (Jesus) could not have been the Messiah because He came from Nazareth (John 7:41–42). When people evaluated Him, they said, “We know the Scripture, so this cannot be the Messiah. Yeshua comes from Nazareth, and no good thing comes from Nazareth; therefore, this cannot be the Messiah” (see John 1:46). Their religious teaching said, “This is the way it is.” Therefore, that teaching became part of the bricks that developed walls around the religious belief concerning how Messiah would appear. We see that throughout the Gospels over and over again. But today we must develop the ability to see new possibilities.



Nothing Is Impossible With God

We know that with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). Yet religion says that almost everything is impossible. And religion does everything in its power to protect orthodoxy, insisting that anything that does not line up to the orthodoxy developed over time by the great Church leaders and religious rulers is wrong. Developing an awareness of what God is doing now requires attention, observation, and an openness. And when you do that, at some point you will run into a real problem with the orthodoxy of the day.

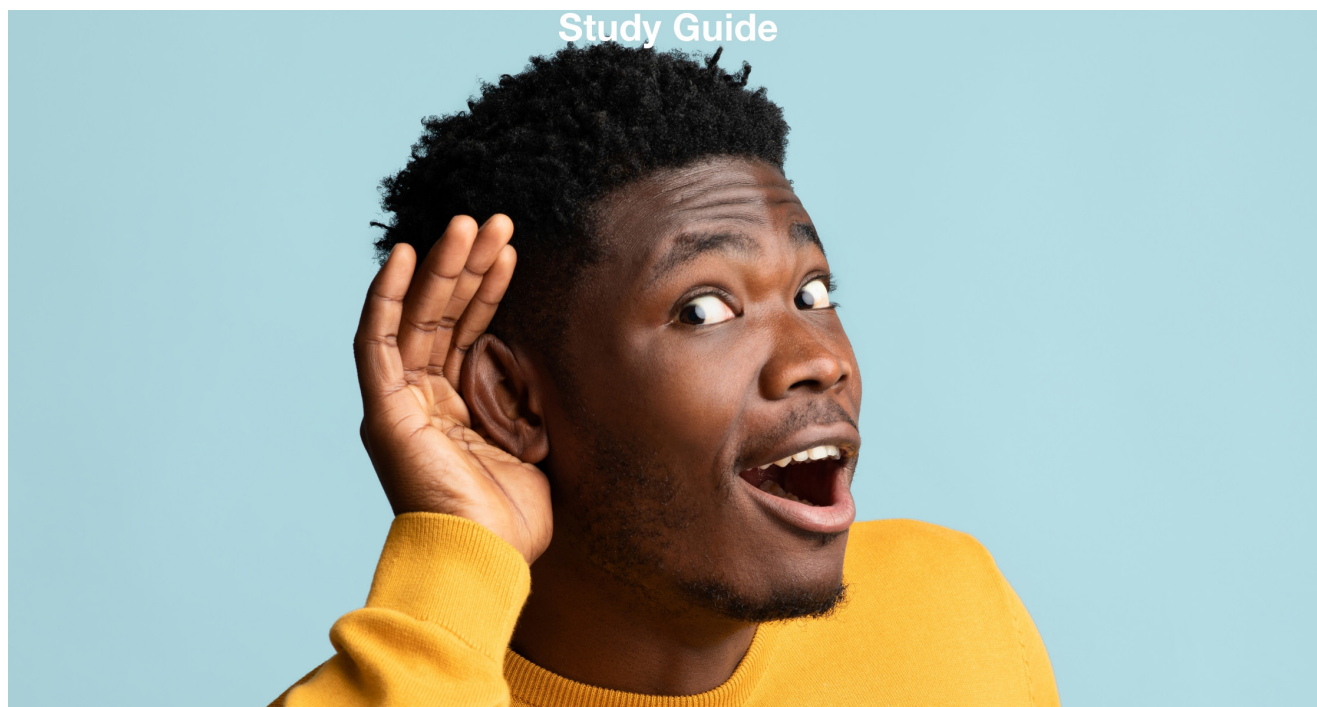
Yeshua gives us a good example of what I am talking about.

Jesus said to him, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.” Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. (John 5:8–9)

Yeshua had just healed this man who was unable to walk. What a wonderful thing! They should have all rejoiced and begun to break out into worship. But let us look at what actually happened because of this miracle that healed the man.

Now it was the Sabbath on that day. So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.” But he answered them, “He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk?’” But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. (John 5:9–16)

What if those religious leaders had simply pondered this situation and said, “Wait a minute. Maybe it’s not Yeshua who is wrong; maybe our concept of the Sabbath is what’s wrong. Let’s try to evaluate what’s really going on here.” Unfortunately, orthodoxy then, as it is today, was a wall they could not see through.



We Must Look Beyond the Walls of Our Orthodoxy

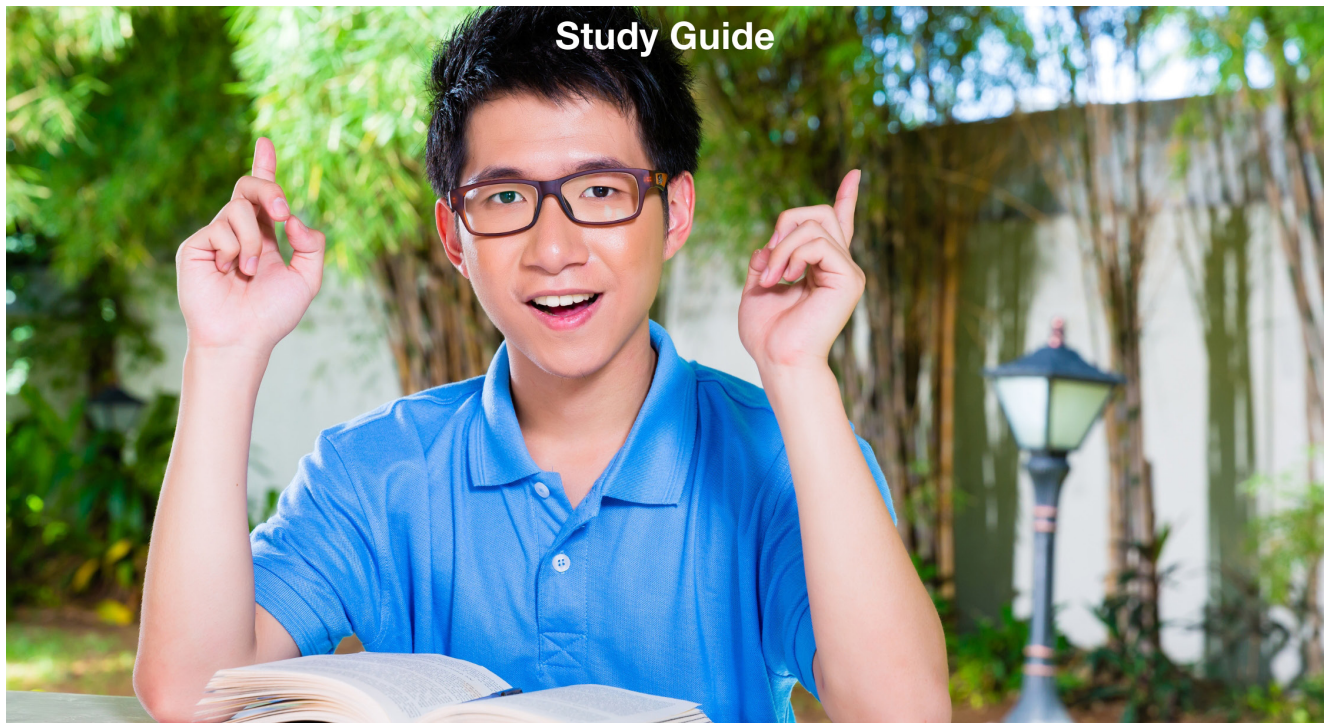
Everything Yeshua did, everything He said, and all His parables and teachings were born out of a relationship with the Father. Yeshua was not going by orthodoxy. He was not looking at what was considered right and wrong by religion. He was responding to the Father and flowing with the Father. Yeshua said, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (John 5:17). He knew the Father. But religion just teaches about God and never knows Him. Even if the teaching comes out of the Bible, it does not necessarily mean that people understand what God is saying.

Some of the greatest travesties in history, especially where the Jewish people are concerned, were caused by the Church Fathers who used the Bible to teach hate and anti-Semitism against the Jews and against Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. So just because someone is reading or teaching out of the Bible does not mean that there is an understanding. It is true that Christ read the Scriptures, but He knew the Father. What Yeshua read in the Scriptures was not in conflict with what He heard the Father say and what He saw the Father do. However, we face quite a bit of conflict today born out of the various church teachings from the Scriptures.

Recently, I did a Google search using artificial intelligence (AI). It said, “There are more than 45,000 distinct Christian denominations worldwide as of 2024. This fragmentation is due to differences in beliefs, practices, and historical developments within the religion.

While estimates vary, some sources suggest that by 2025, there will likely be around 49,000 denominations.” So it does not sound like this is getting any better. Probably all these denominations were based on what they considered to be the absolute foundational teaching of the Bible. But if all it takes is reading the Bible to have an understanding of exactly what God is saying and what He is wanting, then we would not have thousands of denominations surrounding us now.

I wish the religious leaders in Christ’s day who observed the miracle of the lame man could have looked beyond the walls they had built around their orthodoxy. Christ was standing right before them, but they were not able to see Him. Yeshua said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (John 5:39). But these scholars would not come to Yeshua, even though they were very intelligent in the realm of human wisdom and understanding. When Christ appeared, they were unable to hear Him or understand Him or follow and walk with Him. That is tragic.



Understanding Comes by a Relationship With the Father

There is a lot of criticism today in the Church about the Jewish people and what is written about Judaism in the New Testament. Yet we need to take the Scriptures as our teacher and an example, and say, “These things were spoken to us as an admonition that we do not fall into the same trap.”

But unfortunately, we may already be in the same trap as these men in Christ’s day. They were not necessarily bad people; they were just unaware because they had no relationship with the Father. All they cared about was finding out who had told this lame man to pick up his pallet

and walk; in their thinking that man was teaching people to violate their understanding of the Sabbath. These religious leaders had carefully read the principles of the Sabbath from the Scriptures, and they had tried to design scriptural practices that allowed people to keep the Sabbath and honor the Sabbath. Yet the Sabbath rest of God was standing right before them in the person of Yeshua, and they were unable to see or hear or comprehend it.

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. (John 5:14–16)

What is going to happen in this day when people start violating the orthodoxy that exists in Christianity? Will there be persecution of Christian against Christian? Certainly, we know there will be accusations of heresy. We have seen it throughout history and unfortunately, we will see it again. It is terrible because it divides the Body of Christ. Yeshua Himself said that the Body of Christ should all be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:22). But we will never become one as Christ and the Father are one until we have the same relationship of oneness as They do. And that is what Yeshua was pointing to in these verses in John the fifth chapter.



We Must Learn the Voice of the Father

So if we are going to be aware, we must have a relationship with the Father and know Him.

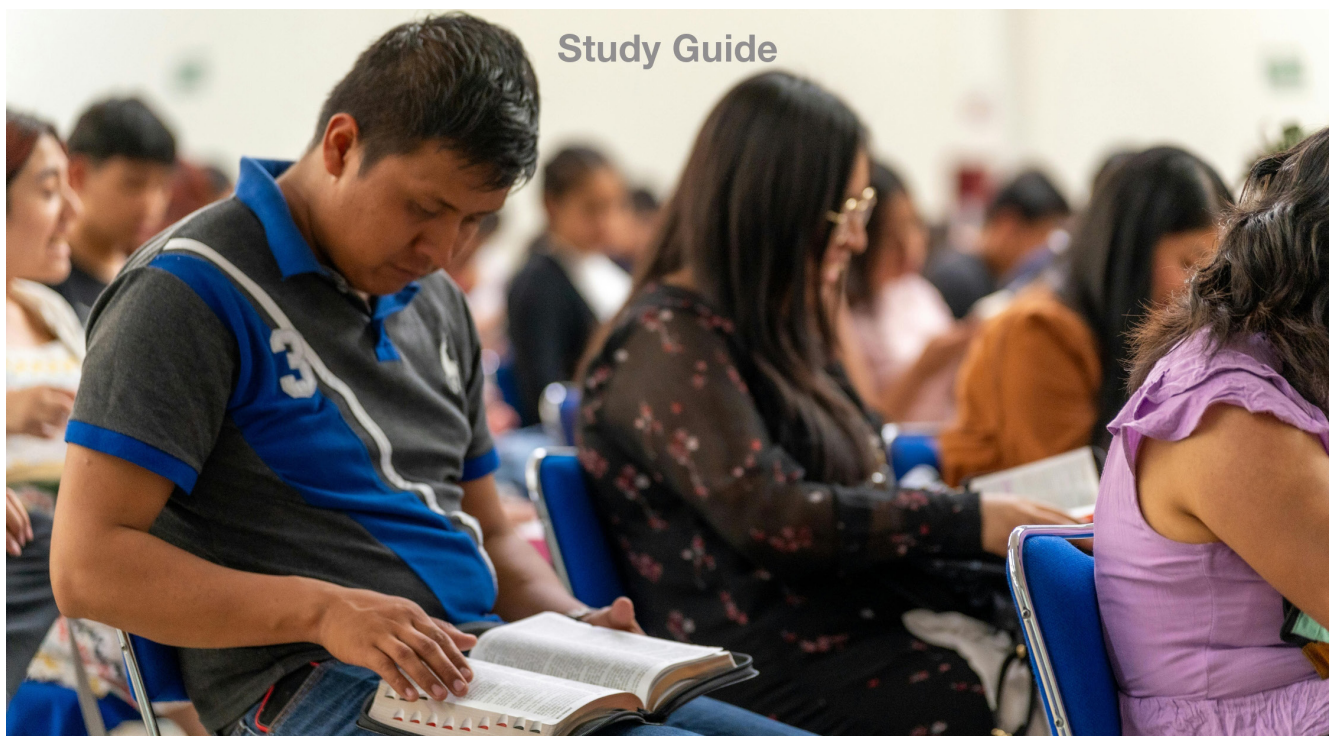
Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For

the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.” (John 5:19–20)

Later in the sixth chapter of John, Yeshua said,

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.” (John 6:44–45)

This is an amazing statement: those who came to Christ had heard and learned from the Father. We must learn the voice of the Father. We must come to an understanding. It is one thing to hear Him; it is another thing to learn and know and understand what He is saying. We can read the Bible, but it may still be totally beyond our ability to grasp what it is saying. That is where the Holy Spirit comes in. Understanding comes in the relationship with the Holy Spirit who has been sent to us from the Father (John 14:26).

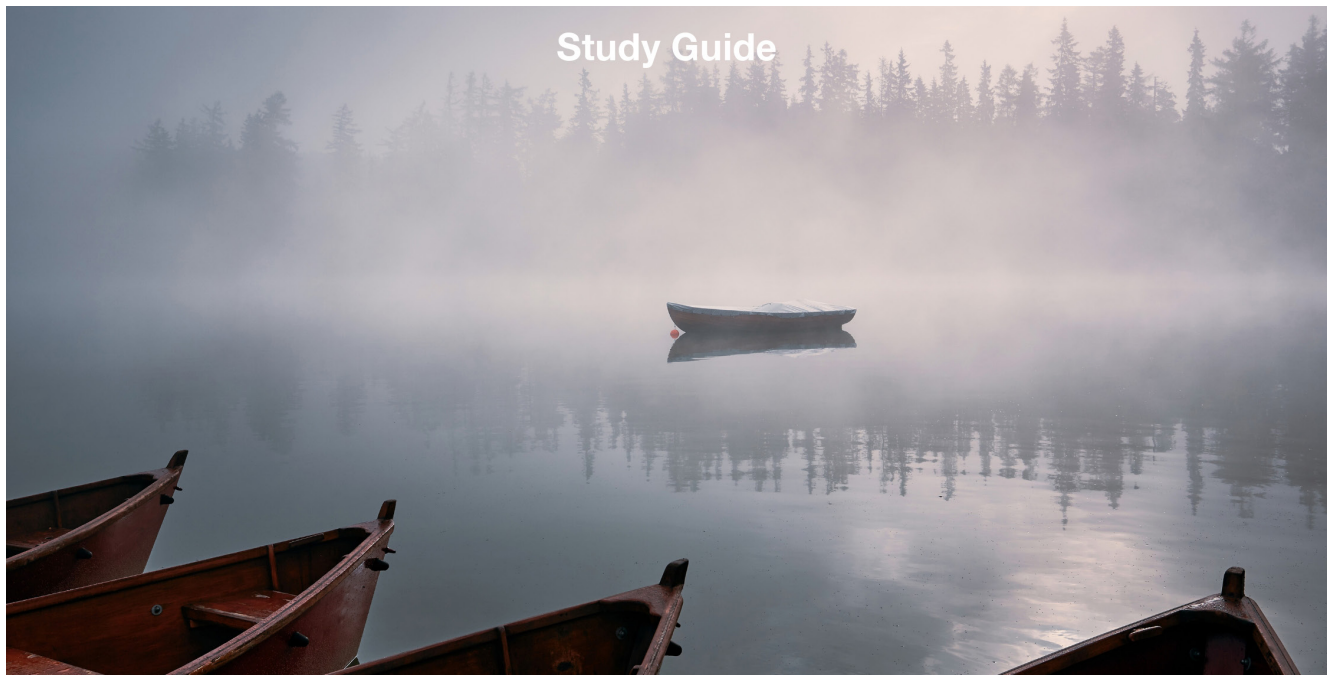


We Can Hear and Learn From the Father

Yeshua said, “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father” (John 6:45–46). You might think, “Well, I’ve never seen God.” That is not the issue. Christ was not making an issue out of the fact that they had not seen the Father. Instead, He was making an issue about everyone who had “heard and learned from the Father.” So there is an ability to hear and to learn from our Father. We can develop this awareness to hear His voice and know

what He is saying. We can know what He is teaching without having to see the Father face to face.

Certainly, you can say that about Moses. He definitely came to know the Father; but when he asked to see Him face to face, the Father just showed Moses His back (Exodus 33:23). That was enough. But Moses definitely learned of the Father and heard directly from the Father. This is what we are looking for. If we are going to develop an awareness, it is going to come because we learn it. This is what the prophet Samuel did. Samuel heard the voice of the Father speaking to him. Then as he grew, he learned what that voice was saying. At first he did not know it was the voice of the Father, but he learned that voice. That is what being a prophet is all about. And that is what we will become in the Body of Christ as we hear and learn from the Father.



God Is Going to Do a New Thing

Christ went on to say,

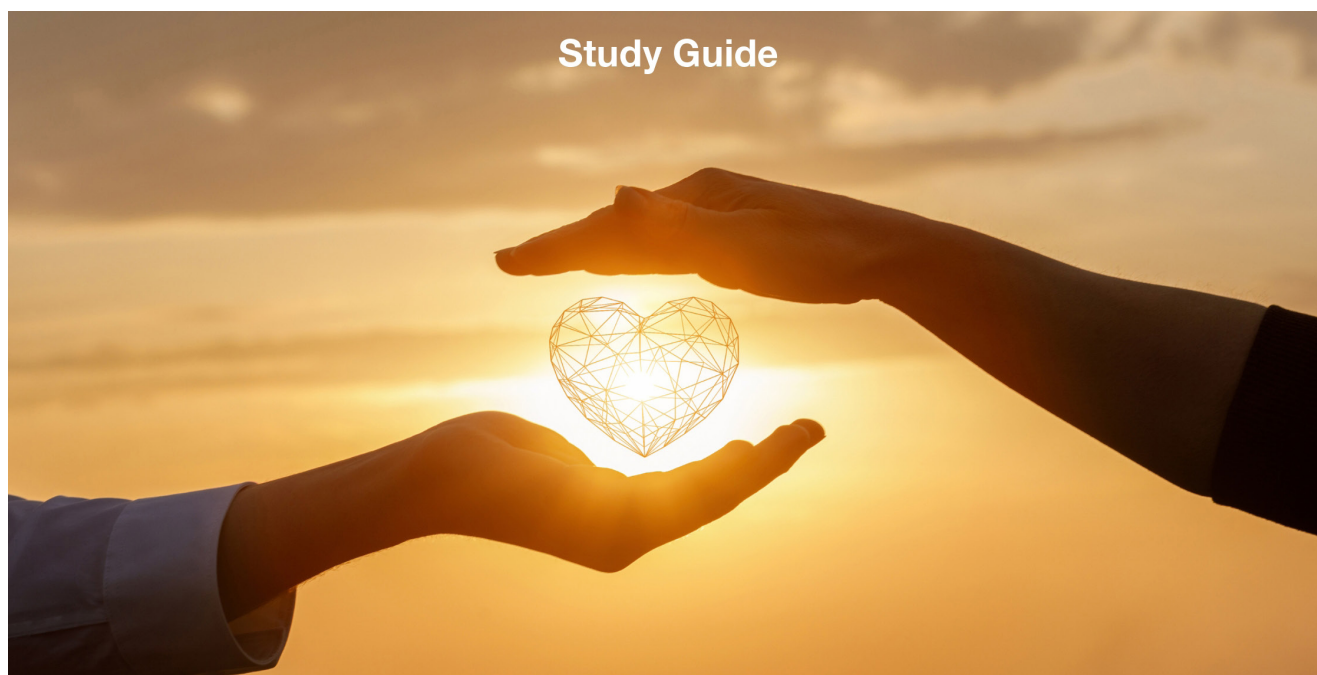
“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” (John 6:49–52)

We know from reading the Scriptures that you do not drink blood (Leviticus 17:14). And you do not eat the flesh of a human. So what Christ was saying here was blowing their minds because of their orthodox understanding of the Word of God. This is important for us to recognize because that history can repeat itself. God will move, but He is going to do a new thing.

In the days of Yeshua, God did a new thing. He brought forth the Word made flesh, and He gave it as true food and true drink in the body and blood of Christ. Yet in the mind of orthodoxy at the time of Christ, all that was absolute heresy and against the teaching of the Word of God. There was no way to bring these things together and justify them. So all this turmoil started to happen.

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” (John 6:63–65)

If you are going to really have an awareness of the truth and what the voice and the teaching are saying, you must develop an ability to hear the voice of the Father.



Religion Does Not Teach Relationship

When we look at religion, it does not tend to teach a relationship with the Father. It does not emphasize that you have to come to know the Father and that you must come to know His voice and be taught by Him.

That is part of what Jeremiah prophesied:

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34)

That relationship must be the emphasis in our churches. Otherwise, we are just building denominational walls based on doctrines so that we can protect our understanding and not let anyone else violate it.

Somehow, we must come to the place where we are teaching a relationship with the Father. You must know the Father. Part of the new covenant says, “‘They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD.” Yet when I go to most churches, someone is teaching everyone else how to know the Lord. I have done this myself. Are we missing something? Rather than just teaching people about the Lord, we need to introduce them to a relationship with Him so that everyone comes to know the Lord personally. The understanding must be granted by the Father. You must learn from the Father so that you will be able to walk in the new thing God is going to do. Otherwise, you will call the new thing heresy.

The story in John 6 continues,

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:66–69)

These disciples were not just with Yeshua because of His teaching; rather, they connected with Him because they knew the Father. We are not to be teaching every man his neighbor, saying, “I want you to know the Lord.” We are to all know Him from the youngest to the oldest. This is what we should be reaching for.

Father, bring us out of religion and into a relationship with You. It is true that newborn babies need to be fed the pure milk of the Word of God so they can grow. But that better not be an end in itself. We must come to a place of maturity and be taught directly by the Father. As we reach into Him, we can live through these days ahead of us aware of our Father’s voice and understand what He is saying to us.

Listen to this entire message: [GIG242 Religion or Relationship?](#)

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All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB1995).

ABOUT GARY HARGRAVE



GARY HARGRAVE has a passion for leading people into spiritual maturity. Gary effectively ministers the life-changing truth of God's Word through Bible teaching and prophetic revelation that emphasizes the Lordship of Christ.

Gary embraces the teachings and insights of the Hebrew Scriptures as the essential foundation of God's Kingdom and the roots of Christian faith.

By cultivating spiritual maturity in Christians, Gary is deeply committed to teaching and inspiring unity in the Body of Christ and between Christians and the Jewish people.

Throughout decades of ministry, Gary has worked closely with leaders in the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities to build relationships based on commonality and understanding. He frequently leads study tours to Israel in the land of the Bible.

Gary is the host of a weekly podcast entitled *Growing In God* and is the founder of Shiloh University, an accredited online Bible college and seminary.

Gary and his family reside in Hawaii.

For other insightful resources by Gary Hargrave, including podcasts, books, articles, videos, and other educational materials, please visit: www.HargraveMinistries.org.

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Everything we do flows from the revelation of the Jewish foundations of our Christian faith. It is our desire and privilege to bless the land and people of Israel. Our Israel outreach includes our ability to:

- **Feed the poor and break the cycle of poverty in Israel.**
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- Provide physical and emotional care to **child victims of terrorism.**
- **Build bridges between Christians and Jews with biblical study and research.**
- Support archaeology and preservation of the **biblical City of David.**
- Provide 24/7 **care for Holocaust survivors.**
- **Help persecuted Jews around the world return to Israel and start new lives.**
- Plant trees to **reforest Israel** and help create **"The Gospel Trail"** between Nazareth and Capernaum.

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