

# Living *a Chocolate Life*



Savoring God's Sweet Grace

**Deb Burma**

*To Cory: I am so blessed to share this chocolaty-rich life of God's sweet grace with you. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and love. Our Savior Jesus Christ is glorified through your life of faith and in your service to Him. To God be the glory!*



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## INTRODUCTION



Sweet. Rich. Satisfying. Chocolate—can you imagine life without it? I can't either. And we're not alone. I recently purchased a gift packet of hot chocolate with big bold words across the front reading, "I LOVE YOU EVEN MORE THAN CHOCOLATE!" The cashier studied the packet, looked at me, and sighed, "You can't give this to very many people, can you?" Her implication? There is little we love more than chocolate! If we cannot imagine life without it, does that mean we live "a chocolate life"? (Sounds yummy, doesn't it?!) But what does it *really* mean? For starters, living *a chocolate life* is about so much more than our favorite confection; and it's about a love that's incomparably greater too!

Living *a chocolate life* means sampling everything from bitter nuggets of pain to sweet morsels of joy. Some days are dark and lumpy; others are light and smooth. Whatever the shape, flavor, and texture of our days and however our lives are packaged, we can savor God's rich and *endless* supply of grace in Christ! Wrapping us in forgiveness, the Holy Spirit fills us with sweet faith in our Savior.

I invite you to choose your favorite chocolate treat, ask others to join you for something sweet, rich, and satisfying, and then sink your teeth into this uniquely chocolate-filled women's Bible study. We'll explore what it means to live *a chocolate life* in several ways. During each delicious session, we will look at our lives in light of God's grace.

Before you begin, you should know that every sumptuous session contains several special ingredients:

## A CHOCOLATE SAMPLER

To start each session, check the boxes in a series of fun chocolate statements as they apply to you. (Many statements relate to the topic of the session, providing a sampler of what lies ahead.) This opportunity can help break the ice in a Bible study group and enable you to open up to one another in small ways, which will foster friendships, encourage communication, and open doors to share in larger, more significant ways throughout the study and beyond. Starting with the second session, *A Chocolate Sampler* will also provide an opportunity share a tidbit from the previous one.

## MEMORY MORSEL

Each session also begins with a theme verse, a morsel of Scripture, to commit to memory. I encourage you to write each week's verse on a card and display it in a prominent place where you'll see and recite it regularly. As a special incentive to memorize, try placing the verse card in a candy bowl with at least seven chocolate kisses (one or more per day). Each time you say the verse, grab a kiss! Begin each group study session with a *Memory Morsel* moment, tucked into that session's *Chocolate Sampler* as a reminder. Encourage one another to commit each morsel to memory, using this moment to recite the previous session's verse.

## TAKE A BITE

Scattered throughout the study are brief questions asking you to “take a bite”—to pause and ponder a personal question. Whether you are studying *Living a Chocolate Life* alone or with a group, you'll benefit by first reading through a session on your own, pausing to *take a bite*, and slowly chewing on these brief questions for personal reflection. As you gather together, revisit these questions to share more deeply in group discussion.

## DIG IN!

These numbered questions give you something to really sink your teeth into. You'll *dig in* to the study more deeply by reading Scripture, responding to questions, and applying them to your chocolate life. Allow time for rich and reflective discussion. Answers can be found in the “Answers to *Dig In!* Questions” at the back of the book. *Note:* Each session contains seven questions. You may complete a session in one sitting or savor it more slowly, *digging in* to one question each day for a weekly Bible study plan, then discuss the entire session as a group.

## CHOCOLATE FUN FACT

In each session, you'll find a tidbit of chocolate history or trivia, shared as it applies to the topic of the session. It often aids in illustration!

## PRAYER: SWEET SUPPLICATION

Included at the end of each session is a prayer, a *sweet supplication* to the Lord, as you wrap up each grace-filled *chocolate life* study. I encourage you to also open each study time with prayer, whether reading alone, preparing for group study, or as you are gathering with your group. Ask the Lord to guide and grow you through the Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## CHOCOLATE RECIPE

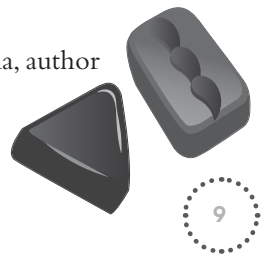
A rich chocolate recipe is included with each session, connected closely by theme and topic. As you make and bake, savor and serve each mouthwatering dessert, let it serve as a reminder that you live a *chocolate life* by the grace of God. Share a related nugget from God's Word with those who indulge beside you!

## CHOCOTIVITY (CHOCOLATE GROUP ACTIVITY)

Each unique *chocotivity* is tied to the session's theme, serving as a tangible reminder of that topic and of our chocolate-rich life in Christ! These creative *chocotivities* provide an occasion to continue dialogue about each powerful topic with one other in your Bible study, while offering fun fellowship and a hands-on reason to bring even more women together. Several *chocotivities* result in the creation of gifts, tangible ways to share God's Word and His lavish grace with others. You may choose to have your *chocotivity* time immediately following or included with Bible study, or you may wish to set another place and time, especially if inviting others!

Are you ready for a treat? As you savor your first bite from this assortment of chocolate topics, it is my prayer that you will **“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,”** living a chocolate-rich life in Christ. **“To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).**

—Deb Burma, author



SESSION I

# SAVOR

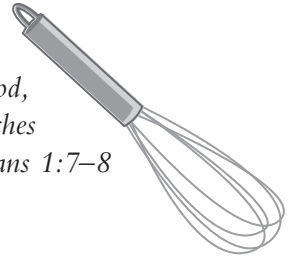
## A CHOCOLATE SAMPLER

Check all that apply to you, and then discuss as a group:

- You have savored a rare, expensive European chocolate.*
- You have survived a chocolate baking catastrophe.*
- You often keep chocolate nearby to savor during Bible study or devotion time.*
- Milk chocolate is your preference. Or dark. Or white.  
(Circle one. Or more.)*
- You live a chocolate life as you savor God's sweet grace in Christ!  
(Intrigued? Read on!)*

## MEMORY MORSEL

*"In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us." Ephesians 1:7–8*

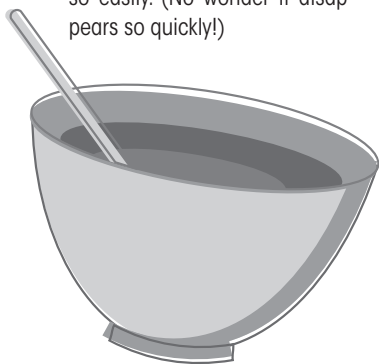


## savoring Grace

Imagine you are about to receive the most exquisite chocolate indulgence. Not your average grocery-store candy, not even a finer, specialty-shop variety, but an extremely rare, delicate chocolate made from the highest quality cacao beans found only in the most remote region of Africa and shipped to

### CHOCOLATE FUN FACT

Cocoa butter, the fat naturally found in the cacao bean, melts just below body temperature, which is precisely why fine chocolate melts in your mouth so easily. (No wonder it disappears so quickly!)



### ⇒ CHOCOTIVITY

Chocolate-Savoring Taste Test! (Turn to the end of this session to read about it in detail. Consider including this special activity at this point during your study time.)

only one exclusive shop, where each delicacy is handmade. There is a price to pay for this most exclusive chocolate. And someone who loves you has gone to great lengths to find and purchase this delicacy from the finest chocolatier in the world.

Now your loved one is ready to give this precious gift to you. You hold out your cupped hands to receive this extravagant present. As you look down, your jaw drops! A rare, foil-wrapped delicacy lies in your hands, waiting to be gently opened. *Go ahead; unwrap it.* What will you do next? Will you pop the candy in your mouth, chew quickly, and swallow as soon as possible to get rid of it? Oh my, *no!* For a once-in-a-lifetime moment like this, move the delicacy slowly toward your mouth. Observe the beautiful color. Take in the rich aroma. Lay this pure chocolate perfection on your tongue and allow your taste buds to dance with joy as you *savor* this exquisite morsel. Hold its delicate richness on your tongue for as long as possible, taking in the indescribable flavor and the smooth, creamy texture. And then notice how, ever so slowly, the sumptuous treat melts, trickles down your throat, and disappears.

Finished. A memory. Fleeting, wasn't it? That's how it is with chocolate. And that's how it is with most precious things we savor. We hold onto them as long as we can.

We revel in joys and friendships of our school years only to part ways upon graduation. We delight in our children's youth; then, before we know it, the nest is empty. We treasure the time spent with a loved one who lives far away; then, all too soon, we say good-bye. We relish getaway moments and weekends of rest, when we receive respite from the routine pressures of life; and in the blink of an eye, Monday morning arrives again. We savor the



best things of life as long as possible because, far too quickly, they disappear. Finished. A memory. Fleeting, weren't they?

As women *living a chocolate life*, we get to savor something so much greater than all the other things of life: we savor the gift of *God's sweet grace!* His sweet, saving grace is the one thing we can savor that will not melt, grow up, or leave. It will not change, fade with time, or disappear. God's Word assures us that grace is ours for much more than a fleeting moment; it does not become a mere memory but lasts for a lifetime.

So what exactly is grace? By definition, *grace* is “unmerited, undeserved favor.” In our sin, we certainly don't deserve God's favor, do we? And there is nothing we can do to earn or merit it. But does God ever favor us! He is crazy about us! And what do we receive as a result?

Check this out: **“In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us” (Ephesians 1:7–8).**

## #1 *dig in!*

**Ephesians 1:7–8** above (this session's *Memory Morsel*) is full of good stuff. It proclaims clearly what we receive by God's grace and how He accomplished that for us. Explain here in your own words:

- a. What is meant by the word “redemption”? How does this powerful word help to further define the forgiveness that we receive through Christ for our “trespasses” (sins)?

- b. What does it mean to “lavish” something upon someone? (Think of a chocolaty example.) What is being lavished here? What does this say about the measure of our Savior’s loving mercy toward us?

Earlier we talked about the best things of life, the things that we savor. By far, grace is the best *thing* of life. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).** Grace is the best gift we will ever receive, even finer and richer and more extravagant than the most exquisite chocolate!

## #2 *dig in!*

Open your Bible to **Ephesians 2:4–9** and read the context that surrounds the grace-filled words of **verse 8**, telling us of God’s free gift of salvation that is ours by grace through faith. Write down the words that speak of God’s demeanor toward us and His actions on our behalf:

### ✦ TAKE A BITE

Have you ever felt that your sins outweigh the size of God’s grace? that your mess has spread beyond the reaches of His mercy? Perhaps you keep falling into the same sinful trap and have begun to wonder how you can possibly be forgiven. Ponder this, but don’t stop here! Read on . . .



Every fleeting moment and all the other valued things of life are also gifts from God to enjoy. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can savor our many blessings, giving thanks to the Lord for them while continually savoring His rich, lavish grace, His unending mercy, and His promised salvation in Christ.

While it's difficult to grasp the extent of God's grace, to comprehend how great is His love, how rich is His mercy, how generously He lavishes His grace upon us, we have His Word on it! These things are ours, although we've done nothing—and can do nothing—to deserve them. Maybe you've heard only the Law. The shame of your sins rings loud in your ears, condemns you, and reminds you that you do not deserve forgiveness. Maybe others have attempted to place conditions on God's grace, causing you to wonder if you've sinned beyond the reaches of His mercy. As a result, maybe you find yourself falling into faulty thinking: *Yes . . . but you don't know what I've done. I continue to fall in the same sinful traps. You wouldn't believe how badly I've messed up.*

### Chocolate-Frosted Grace

Let me tell you a story about mess-ups. One day I was expecting guests, and I planned to create a special dessert of unparalleled quality—a rich, extravagant, three-layer chocolate cake. (The recipe is included at the end of this session.) The made-from-scratch batter rose beautifully in my round layer cake pans as it baked and filled the house with a chocolaty aroma.

Fresh out of the oven came my beautiful cakes. Eager to complete the sumptuous layered dessert, I began to frost and stack the round layers as soon as they cooled. What I didn't realize was that I needed to shave the mounded center of each layer before stacking them. (Could it be that I also failed to read the recipe's directions?)

My work was almost complete when the top two layers, balanced carefully over the mound beneath them, split in half! Crumb-filled frosting and large chunks of cake tumbled down the sides of the cake plate and onto the table. What a mess!

I was distraught, but I had no time to start over. I didn't want to waste the cake, so I disassembled each gooey layer and sliced off the rounded tops. (They were delicious, by the way.) I pieced my catastrophe together with extra loads of frosting, slathered on, layer upon layer. Somehow, all the flaws

of my messed-up, broken cake vanished under the grace-filled cover of rich, fudgy frosting.

God's rich, extravagant grace covers all our mess-ups, failures, and flaws, much like the thick, fudgy frosting that so beautifully concealed and healed my messed-up flop of a cake.

When we fail, when we make mistakes, when we crumble under the weight of our sin, our heavenly Father lavishes His thick, indulgent grace upon us. He covers our sins and forgives us through Christ's atonement on the cross.

A botched cake is a minor thing; a botched relationship or situation can be major. Maybe you think your failures, mistakes, and mess-ups are beyond repair, can't be covered up or patched back together. Do you wonder how God can forgive the crumbling mess you made? Remember this: no sin, no mess is too much for our Lord to clean up. **Romans 5:8** says, **"But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Did you catch that? *"While we were still sinners."* Recall the similar words we read earlier in **Ephesians 2**, that He made us alive in Christ even while we were dead in our transgressions! He chose you and me and saved us *in the midst* of our sin. He doesn't wait for us to try to get our act together by ourselves (as if we could!). He comes to us in the middle of our mess.

### **In the Middle of a Mess**

Do you want to hear about someone else who made one crumbling mess after another? He was the man we know as the apostle Paul, the writer inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen many of the letters to Early Churches (the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament). The man chosen by God to carry the Good News of Christ to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. This man, formerly known as Saul, had been a zealous Jew, a Pharisee (religious leader) with great authority. Saul was convinced that he had his act together, but he was sadly mistaken. He was so zealous for the Jewish law, so bent on persecuting followers of the Way (Christianity), that he used his authority to pursue, imprison, and oversee the stoning of early Christians. Years later, looking back, Paul said, regarding his former way of life, **"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women"** (Acts 22:4).

### *#3 dig in!*

Read **Acts 26:9–11** to hear more from Paul recalling and lamenting his former way of life. Next, turn to **Acts 7:58–8:1** to see Saul in the middle of his mess, doing the very thing he describes later. Note the connection between the two passages concerning one of Saul's specific actions. How can we tell that he was a man with great authority, and why is that significant here?

Then, right there, in the middle of Saul's mess, Christ came to him. The Lord called him out of the darkness and into the light of His grace! Our Savior chose Saul, speaking to him as he traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute Christians there too.

### *#4 dig in!*

Read this amazing account as recorded in **Acts 9:1–19**. Discuss significant details, especially as they relate to God's lavish grace upon Saul and His work through a disciple named Ananias.

Years later, Paul would share the story of his conversion, how the Lord came to him in the midst of his sin (his mess), showered amazing grace upon him, and chose him for a special purpose. (Check out **Acts 22:4–16; 26:12–18; Galatians 1:13–17.**)

## #5 dig in!

Paul spoke plainly and repeatedly of God’s grace working in him. Read **1 Corinthians 15:9–10**. How can you tell that Paul, now an apostle chosen by God to spread the Good News, recognized the crumbling mess of his former life? What does Paul say about God’s grace here? How can you relate to God’s grace in your life?

### Chocolate-Frosted Grace, Revisited

As I look back to my chocolate cake catastrophe, I realize that although I was able to cover and “fix” my broken chocolate mess, none of us can fix our sins and our state of brokenness. Brokenness takes many forms: *selfish desires* and *sinful pride*, *hurtful words* and *lack of forgiveness*, *critical spirit* and *crippling insecurity*, *lustful thoughts*, and *failure to reach out to others* with His love (and this is just a sampling).



 **TAKE A BITE**  
What precious things of life do you savor the most?  
How are they fleeting?

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## #6 dig in!

- a. *“I’ve messed up.”* We’ve all made one crumbling mess after another. Incomparably worse than a broken chocolate cake, our brokenness takes many forms. Look again at the list above. In what other ways may we be broken?

Even after the apostle Paul became a humble servant of the Lord Jesus, he admitted his ongoing struggle with sin. We commiserate with Paul, who laments in **Romans 7:19**, **“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”**

Only by the Holy Spirit’s leading can we, with repentant hearts, acknowledge and confess our sins before the Lord, laying them at the foot of the cross. God, through the glorious riches of Christ, heals our brokenness. He covers all these messes and more with His perfection. Jesus makes us brand-new and mess-free! Christ’s blood, shed for us, covers those sins. Our heavenly Father declares our sins forgiven!

- b. In what broken messes are you stuck today? Confess those areas of brokenness in which you struggle. If you feel comfortable doing so, write some of them below and share in your group. If you are studying this alone, consider sharing with a pastor, a trusted friend, or a loved one. As you confess your broken mess aloud or on paper, envision yourself laying each sin at the foot of Christ’s cross, knowing God lavishes His rich grace and forgiveness upon you in your Savior, Jesus, who heals your brokenness.





Looking back to my chocolate cake catastrophe, if I had had time to start over, I might have thrown out the messed-up cake. In our world, we often dispose of messed-up things, don't we? God's Word reveals to us that He thinks and behaves differently. He finds us to be worth salvaging, fixing, healing in Christ. Because of that, you can lay each broken mess at the foot of the cross, knowing that God lavishes His rich grace upon you in Christ to heal your brokenness. That is grace. The grace we *savor*.

*Living a Chocolate Life,  
we savor God's sweet grace!*

#### PRAYER

### Sweet Supplication

Dear Lord, I praise You for Your endless supply of mercy and grace that You have lavished on me, forgiving my sins in Christ and healing my broken mess! Strengthen me by Your Spirit. Lead me to savor this grace that knows no end. In Your name. Amen.

### Extravagant Chocolate Three-Layer Cake

3 c. flour	3 c. sugar
1½ tsp. soda	1½ tsp. salt
¾ tsp. baking powder	1 c. + 2 tbsp. water
1 c. + 2 tbsp. buttermilk	¾ c. butter, softened
1½ tsp. vanilla extract	3 eggs
6 oz. unsweetened chocolate, melted	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour three 8- or 9-inch round cake pans. Sift together dry ingredients. Mix sifted ingredients with all remaining ingredients in large mixing bowl. Mix 30 seconds on low speed, then 3 minutes on high. (Batter will be creamy.) Pour batter into prepared pans. Bake 25 to 30 minutes. Cool 10 minutes, then remove layers from pans and cool completely on wire racks before filling and frosting with *Rich Chocolate Frosting*.

#### Rich Chocolate Frosting:

1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened    ¼ c. butter, softened  
2 oz. unsweetened chocolate, melted    Milk  
16 oz. (½ bag) powdered sugar (or more)

Cream cream cheese and butter together. Add chocolate and mix well. Add powdered sugar; beat until light and creamy. Alternately add more powdered sugar and a few drops of milk to reach desired consistency and quantity. Frost on completely cooled cake layers, **shaving the mounded center of each baked layer before frosting and stacking!**

## CHOCOTIVITY

### Chocolate-Savoring Taste Test!

Savor an assortment of chocolate varieties to kick off your Bible study. (What a great way to further a discussion centered on *savoring* God's grace!) Purchase fine chocolate bars: white (at least 20 percent cocoa butter), milk (30–40 percent cacao), semisweet (35–45 percent cacao), bittersweet/dark (50–70 percent cacao), extra dark (70–99 percent), and so forth. You may wish to include special varieties that contain added flavors, fruits, or nuts. Break each bar into small pieces and pass them around, one flavor at a time. Begin by passing around the mildest, lightest colors and flavors, then move on to progressively darker, richer varieties. Pause after each sample to share comments before moving on to the next.

Remember how you imagined savoring an exquisite, rare chocolate? Now, take each real bite-size piece and savor it. For fun, follow the same savoring instructions given when you imagined. Describe the flavors and textures you experience. Can you pick out added flavors? Is it particularly sweet and light or bitter and intense? Is the texture smooth or gritty? (Texture and flavor work together in the chocolate-savoring experience.) After several seconds, you'll notice how the savored delicacy melts, trickles down your throat, and disappears.

## ANSWERS TO DIG IN! QUESTIONS

### Session 1

- #1** (Wording of explanation will vary.) We receive forgiveness of our sins and eternal life through Christ's perfect atoning sacrifice, by the shedding of His blood, His death on the cross. He died that we can live!
- a.** In the original Greek language of the New Testament, the word for "redemption" (*apolytrosis*) means literally "to buy back" a slave or captive, to set the person free. Christ's life was the price paid to buy back sinners from captivity to our trespasses.
- b.** To "lavish" is to give generously, in abundance. Examples may include pouring hot fudge liberally over a loved one's sundae until the ice cream is covered and fudge runs down the sides of the dish; or giving someone a most extravagant, expensive chocolate gift. God's grace is lavished upon us; the verse even speaks to the *riches* of His grace. The measure of our Savior's mercy and grace is rich, overflowing, extravagant!
- #2** He is rich in mercy; He has great love for us and kindness toward us in Christ. He shows us the immeasurable riches of His grace: He made us alive together with Christ, even when we were dead in our sins, raising us up with Him and seating us with Him in the heavenly places—securing for us a place in heaven for eternity with Him.
- #3** We first learn of Saul in **Acts 7**, at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Saul was not only present but also giving his approval at the stoning. Similarly, in **Acts 26**, Paul admits that he cast his vote against those who were being stoned; both are indications that Saul was a Pharisee (Jewish religious leader) with great authority, leading the charge as an enemy of the cross of Christ. We are reminded of the extent of God's limitless grace, that He would forgive and choose even Saul; and that He forgives and chooses even you and me.
- #4** Discussion will vary. Christ speaks to Saul from heaven in a blinding light. He speaks also to a disciple named Ananias in a vision, giving the grace-filled message that Saul (of all people!) is His chosen instrument. Though afraid, Ananias responds in obedience, and by God's power, restores Saul's sight. Saul is immediately baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit.

- #5 He humbly admits he is unworthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the Church; he refers to himself as “the least of the apostles.” He recognizes that it is solely by God’s grace that he has been chosen to carry the Good News to the world; it’s the grace of God enabling him to work as he does. It’s by His grace that we, too, are chosen to follow Him, and it’s the grace of God, working through the Holy Spirit, that enables us to work as we do.
- #6 *a.* Answers will vary as women share areas of brokenness. More possibilities include: worry, greed, hate, envy, sexual immorality, idolatry, jealousy, anger, addictions.
- b.* Whether confessing aloud or silently, give and receive reassurance that your sins are forgiven. You are healed—covered by the riches of God’s grace in Christ.
- #7 *a.* **“He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).**
- b.* Because Christ bore our sins, dying in our place (“wounded for our transgressions”), we as believers are dead to sin and live new lives; we are made righteous (*justified*, made right with God) through Christ by faith. Though, like Paul, we struggle with sin, it no longer holds us captive. We are healed. We have victory and eternal life in Christ!

## ANSWERS TO DIG IN! QUESTIONS

### Session 2

- #1 *a.* Be kind and tenderhearted; forgive one another; be imitators of God; walk in love. (Personalization will be unique to each person.)
- b.* To imitate God is to live a chocolate-rich life of grace and love, forgiving undeserving sinners as He forgave us (who are also undeserving sinners) through Christ’s cross, and walking in sacrificial love—the kind of love Christ has for us. The Greek word used here for “walk” (*stouicheo*) means “be in line with” or “keep in step with.” As imitators, we keep in step with the One we desire to emulate. We are able to do any of this only because of what He first did for us, through the power of the Holy Spirit!