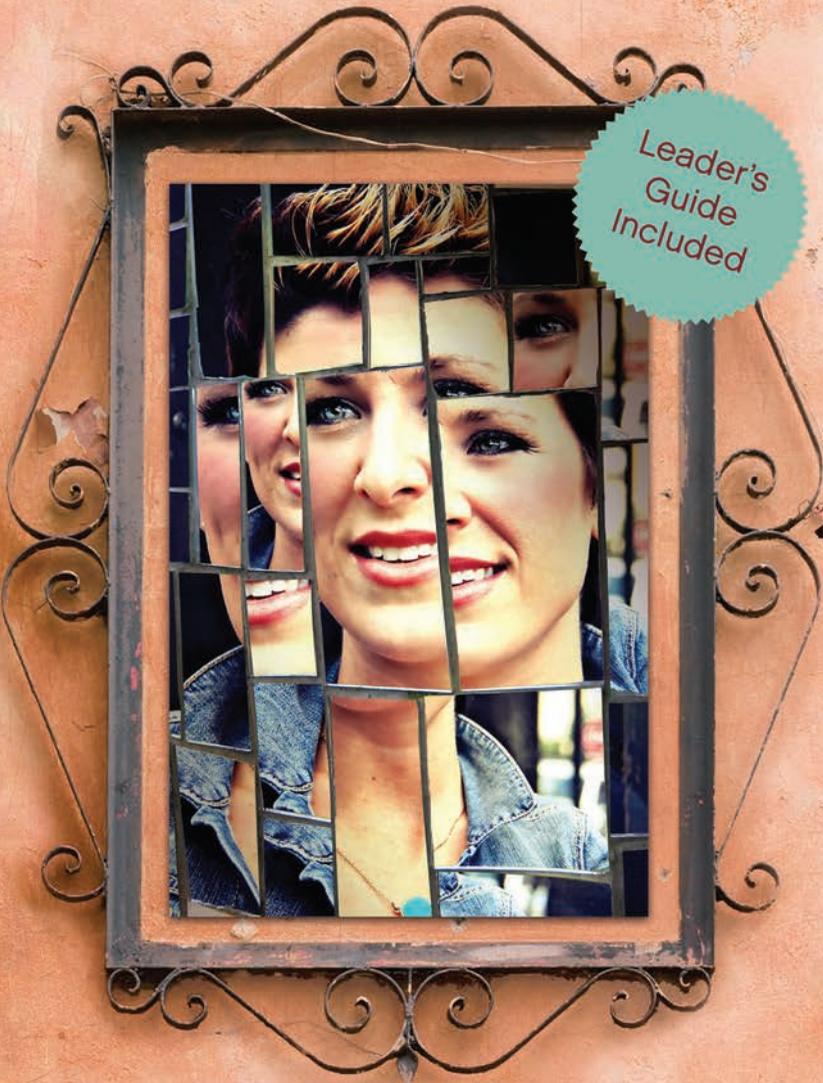


Leader's  
Guide  
Included



Bible Study

# Raw Faith

kasey  
van norman

what happens when  
God picks a fight

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# Before You Get Started

I'm not sure what your perspective is on God right now, but I'd like to assure you: he's a lot bigger than any of us even imagine him to be.

I'm not sure why you're doing this study—whether your friend talked you into it or you feel guilty about your lack of Bible reading or you're looking for something to kick-start you out of the spiritually dry place you've been in. Whatever the case, I believe we're ultimately here for the same reason: God wants to draw us closer to him and teach us something about faith over the next six weeks.

So here we are. You and me—complete and utter screwups, despite our best efforts otherwise. We're trying to be faithful even when we're unsure of our faith. Trying to be steady even when we're drowning in uncertainty. Trying to live well, even when we feel like giving up.

Where are you right now, dear reader? What if the past 365 days were a miniature lifetime, set apart for you to examine yourself? Have you lived well? Have you kept the faith? Have you run the race?

Wherever you find yourself on this journey of faith, you aren't where you need to be. Neither am I. In fact, none of us are. I'm here on this journey with you—not because it's easy or fun, but out of my desire to obey God.

My prayer is that by the end of this study, God will have transformed our hearts. I pray that we'll be unwilling to settle for anything less than complete and total transformation and that we will engage the very depths of our souls—the places that have been squashed by life and damaged beyond recognition. I pray that we will allow God's light to break the silence and darkness of the trenches we crawl into when we don't want the world to see how broken and foolish and messed up we truly are.

Sometimes truth burns like a fire, but that pain is the good kind, the productive

## Raw Faith Bible Study

kind. When it comes to faith, the truth will no doubt cause us mighty discomfort as the flesh and muscle and bone of our hearts are laid bare before his glory. But it's actually a good thing when the raw places of who we think we are and what we think we know about our Creator are torn to shreds. Because only then can we see that his truth is the one ointment that can truly heal us.

May we be willing to empty everything before him over these next several weeks—our illnesses, our betrayals, our unforgiving hearts, our addictions, our depression, our insecurity, our pride, our money, our complacency, our damage, our stupidity, our brokenness, our small-mindedness. As we ponder faith in its purest, most organic, most vulnerable form, may his very Word come alive before our eyes.

And by the end of this season of study, may we raise our voices in victory, seeing that in his mercy, God is opening a new year, a new time, a new way of existing. May we desire Christ in all things—in the wounding and in the healing. May we triumph with hearts that renounce Satan's power and fight with a faith that goes beyond words, beyond comprehension.

Welcome to raw faith.

# How to Use This Study

There is not one moment in our lives that takes place without first passing through the fingertips of our almighty Creator, and these moments you'll spend in Bible study are no different. I believe that, despite my own shortcomings and yours as well, the God of the universe has divinely appointed these weeks of study to change us, grow us, and water the dry, cracked soil of our faith. I beg you not to take this moment lightly. One day you and I will stand before God and answer to him for how we handled his Word. So let's make this moment in time count!

Whether you're doing this study as an individual on your lunch break or going through it alongside fellow faith diggers in a small group or studying it with a large class, these pages have been written with you in mind.

Before you begin, here are a few tools I'd like to make sure you have so you can get the most out of this study.

## ***Raw Faith* Leader's Guide**

I'm always saying to myself, *Keep it simple, stupid*. So in honor of such grand words of wisdom (ha!), I've included the leader's guide for this study in the back of this book. If you complete this study in the context of a group, I recommend that you designate a leader, as this tends to keep the chaos to a minimum. Having held the role of small group leader before (with all the grace of a bull in a china closet), I know the comfort of having a warm blanket in the form of a leader's guide to cling to on lonely, dark nights.

If you are the lucky one nominated as leader, be sure to use the section at the back of this study to your full advantage. I've included notes about what to expect from this experience, pointers for leaders, group tips, and scheduling options.

## Discussion/Reflection Questions

Note that I've included questions at the end of each week of this study. These questions are designed for either personal reflection or group discussion time. They can help you review what you've learned, clarify key truths, and give you some thoughts to ponder in the week ahead.

## ***Raw Faith (The Book)***

What's a cupcake without icing? Only half as good, if you ask me! If this Bible study is the cupcake, then the book is the icing (or perhaps it's the other way around, depending on who you ask). While this study can be used alone, it will be a fuller experience for you if you read them together. While the content is different, the themes overlap and are meant to be used in conjunction.

If you are serious about digging into real faith, I encourage you to work through this study alongside the book *Raw Faith*. In it I tell my personal story of finding out I had cancer, being faced with what faith really means in difficult times, and uncovering both my doubts about God and a deeper love for him. It was a season when everything I thought I knew about God, faith, others, and myself was squashed by chemotherapy, loneliness, and depression. But it was also the season God ultimately used to change the course of my life and my faith.

## Other Resources

### ***A Bible (duh!)***

While my story might be captivating enough to change your mind, it will never have the power to change your heart. God's Word is the only tool that can even come close to making real, lasting, eternal changes where it matters—in your heart! I encourage you to never leave home without your Bible. And certainly don't start this study without one.

### ***A journal and a pen***

You'll need a pen to jot down your answers to the questions in this study. If you tend to write long answers or if you want to record your reflections in a more permanent place, you may want to keep a journal handy as well.

***Note cards***

You might want to get some note cards too—one of my personal favorite tools. This may sound simple and old school, but I find note cards work well for Scripture memorization. I encourage you to write down Scriptures that speak to you and bits of truth that jump off the page—you know, the ones that stick to your skin in a good way. Display these note cards on your fridge, on your dashboard, or on your mirror. Hey, I even have some taped to my shower door!



## Week 1

.....

# A Raw Look at Faith

For most of my life, *faith* has been a word I kicked around when I couldn't really think of anything better to say.

"Why do you believe in God, Kasey?"

My response: "Well, because I have faith, of course."

"Kasey, what makes you sure you will get to heaven?"

My response: "My faith, of course."

Someone could have just as easily asked me, "Hey, Kasey, do you believe in rainbow-colored unicorns that shoot fairy dust from their backsides?" Because at that point, faith was just as far fetched and unrealistic as the notion of pixie-dust-snorting unicorns.

I knew the classic verse about faith in Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV). But although I accepted it in theory, I never really dug deep and figured out what that would look like if I put it into practice in my own life.

What about you, my brave companion? Are you embracing a shallow, "safe" version of faith? Do you want to live out the full, abundant faith God has in mind for you?

Describe what comes to mind when you hear the word *faith*.

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## Raw Faith Bible Study

Why are you joining me on this crazy adventure toward raw faith?

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# Day 1

Both Christians and non-Christians can have a defective view of what the Christian life really is and what faith has to do with it. There are plenty of voices out there whispering lies to us about faith: the world, Satan, other people, and our own feelings. But God is an expert at blowing away the fog of confusion around us to show us who he really is and what his calling is for our lives.

Hebrews 11 is one of the clearest passages to help us brush away the cobwebs and get a sense of what real, authentic faith looks like. Let's take a look at Hebrews 11:29-38.

It was by faith that the people of Israel went right through the Red Sea as though they were on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to follow, they were all drowned.

It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. Women received their loved ones back again from death.

## Raw Faith Bible Study

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

What miracles or unexplainable experiences take place in this passage?

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What circumstances do the people in these verses experience?

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How would you describe the faith of the people in this passage?

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What did these people place their hope in during tough times?

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What were these people of faith too good for?

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For the men and women listed in Hebrews 11, life surely didn't turn out the way they'd expected. When children of God are permitted to experience suffering, rejection, and mistreatment, when children of God end up destitute and afflicted, we have trouble understanding what's happening. We think blessing follows faith, but blessing doesn't always look the way we think it will.

When faithful people suffer, God is ultimately giving a gift to the world. He is

spreading his love and grace to the world through those who suffer and even die while clinging to the unshakable belief that the Lord is better than life itself.

Once upon a time, my aim was to live as comfortable a life as possible—to survive the brutal blows this world hands out with as little damage as possible and then move on. My goal was to wade in the shallow pool of contentment—go to church, have a loving husband and healthy children, get a house with a white picket fence and maybe a small dog, and above all to never venture far outside my religious box in my Southern Baptist small town, complete with sweet tea and steeples. I didn't want to look under the covers or ask questions that would stop preachers in their tracks or do anything to make waves.

But God wanted me to look closer. He invited me to dig deeper. With a single phone call and a dreaded diagnosis, I no longer had the option of shallow faith.

There's good news, though: it doesn't have to take a crisis for us to start embracing authentic faith. You can start living it today!

What is compelling to you about digging in and experiencing a deeper level of faith?

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As you think about your life right now, what is holding you back from raw faith?

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# Day 2

During the two agonizing years I battled cancer, I experienced sides of God I never would have imagined. I saw him as my Provider, giving me the strength I needed to make it through each day. I saw him as my Father, gently caring for me when I was in pain. I saw him as my Friend, always near me when I was afraid and lonely. I saw him as my Redeemer, bringing good out of the worst circumstances. I saw him as the Lover of my soul—someone who loved me unconditionally, even when I had nothing to bring to the relationship. But I also experienced an aspect of God’s character I’d never encountered before: God as a fighter.

And when I talk about God as a fighter, I’m not referring to God as one who fights for us, although he certainly does. In this case, I’m thinking more along the lines of a big guy in a boxing ring, a tough cage fighter, someone who lands a sucker punch in your gut out of nowhere.

Think of *that* guy.

Are you ticked off yet?

Good.

It may strike you as sacrilegious to talk about God as a fight picker—someone waiting to pounce when you least expect it. We’ve been taught that God is love and that he is a good Father—and he is all those things. But Scripture also makes it clear that sometimes God uses drastic measures to get our attention. In fact, some of God’s greatest acts of love for us come through pain. Like a parent taking the training wheels off a child’s bike or letting him fight his own battles, God knows that sometimes the most loving thing he can do is to let us fall down and get hurt.

## Raw Faith Bible Study

Read the following passages and then write down what strikes you about God's role in each passage.

Oh, why give light to those in misery,  
and life to those who are bitter?  
They long for death, and it won't come.  
They search for death more eagerly than for hidden treasure.  
They're filled with joy when they finally die,  
and rejoice when they find the grave.  
Why is life given to those with no future,  
those God has surrounded with difficulties?  
I cannot eat for sighing;  
my groans pour out like water.  
What I always feared has happened to me.  
What I dreaded has come true.  
I have no peace, no quietness.  
I have no rest; only trouble comes.

JOB 3:20-26

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O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?  
How long will you look the other way?  
How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,  
with sorrow in my heart every day?  
How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

PSALM 13:1-2

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Without mercy the Lord has destroyed  
every home in Israel.  
In his anger he has broken down  
the fortress walls of beautiful Jerusalem.

He has brought them to the ground,  
dishonoring the kingdom and its rulers.

All the strength of Israel  
vanishes beneath his fierce anger.  
The Lord has withdrawn his protection  
as the enemy attacks.  
He consumes the whole land of Israel  
like a raging fire.

He bends his bow against his people,  
as though he were their enemy.  
His strength is used against them  
to kill their finest youth.  
His fury is poured out like fire  
on beautiful Jerusalem.

Yes, the Lord has vanquished Israel  
like an enemy.  
He has destroyed her palaces  
and demolished her fortresses.  
He has brought unending sorrow and tears  
upon beautiful Jerusalem.

He has broken down his Temple  
as though it were merely a garden shelter.  
The LORD has blotted out all memory  
of the holy festivals and Sabbath days.  
Kings and priests fall together  
before his fierce anger.

LAMENTATIONS 2:2-6

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## Raw Faith Bible Study

Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.”

MATTHEW 16:24-25

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We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-9

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To me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

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Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

JAMES 1:2-4

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This list only skims the surface of people in the Bible who got “beat up” and experienced suffering of some kind. In fact, if Scripture is any indication, suffering isn’t the exception for believers; it seems to be the default. There’s a long line of faithful followers of Christ who have gone before us and have the black eyes, broken bones, and bloody noses to show for it.

You probably won't like my saying this, but the truth is, God can be a bit of a bully. Now, he's not like your average school bully who gives you a wedgie and dunks your head in the toilet just for the sake of proving his power. God isn't like that. He does pick fights sometimes, but his motivation in doing so is always love.

From our limited human vantage point, we can't see the big picture, so what he's doing may not seem like love. But in the end, his love always shines through. Always.

Tell about a time you felt you were "sucker punched" by God. What happened? How did you respond to God in that moment?

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Read Genesis 32:22-32 for the account of Jacob's spiritual wrestling match.

During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

"What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

"Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip. (Even today the people of Israel don't eat the tendon near the hip socket because of what happened that night when the man strained the tendon of Jacob's hip.)

## Raw Faith Bible Study

What did Jacob learn about God through this experience?

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Have you ever felt like you were wrestling with God? What did you learn in the process?

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Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News? And also,

“If the righteous are barely saved,  
what will happen to godless sinners?”

So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.

What are three truths we can learn about suffering from this passage?

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## Kasey Van Norman

Based on these words from 1 Peter, how should we respond when we feel like God is picking a fight with us?

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# Day 3

Let's begin today reading the following verses. As you read, look for the recurring theme that runs through each passage:

Do you remember what I told you? "A slave is not greater than the master." Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you.

JOHN 15:20

After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

ACTS 14:21-22

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

1 PETER 4:12

## Raw Faith Bible Study

Recurring theme:

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For me the theme is simple: you'd better get ready. "Get ready for what?" you might ask. God wants us to get ready for suffering.

Suffering can come in many forms. It may come as a result of another person's sin or simply from living in a fallen world. We may suffer from grief, from a broken relationship with a loved one, from sickness, from financial strain, or from persecution that comes as a result of following Christ. When the things that give us security and enjoyment—money, reputation, health, children, self-esteem, relationships, success—are taken away, either by force or by choice, we suffer. Whatever the specific circumstances, we often find our faith shaken, and we ask, "How could you, God?"

Journal about a personal time of suffering—not just any suffering, but a time that caused you to wonder, *Why, God?*

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The Bible is full of examples of people who suffered for a variety of reasons and in different ways. Here are just a few examples.

Read Job 1:13-19.

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting at the oldest brother's house, a messenger arrived at Job's home with this news: "Your oxen were plowing, with the donkeys feeding beside them, when the Sabeans raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with this news: “Three bands of Chaldean raiders have stolen your camels and killed your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: “Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother’s home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

What hardships did Job face?

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Read Job 42:5.

I had only heard about you before,  
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.

After months of suffering, what does Job finally say to God?

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Job was a godly, upright man who sought to please God. But he gained a new perspective on God in adversity that he never could have grasped in prosperity. The difference between how he saw God before and after his suffering was the difference between hearing and seeing.

Read Acts 6:8-15.

Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, “We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God.” This roused the people, the elders, and the

## Raw Faith Bible Study

teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.

The lying witnesses said, “This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel’s.

Why was Stephen experiencing suffering? How did he respond to the trials he was going through?

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Read Acts 7:55.

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand.

As Stephen is being dragged into the city to be stoned to death, what vision is revealed to him?

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When Stephen was arrested and put on trial for his faith and given a chance to preach, the Holy Spirit overwhelmed him with a special revelation. God has prepared a special intimacy for those who suffer alongside him—a kind of intimacy that can only be experienced when we’re facing trials and difficulties.

Read 1 Peter 4:14.

If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.

What does this verse say will happen for those who suffer because of Christ?

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If we understand that suffering is an inevitable part of life, then our love for Christ will run deeper than the pain, grief, and sorrow we experience when we are stripped of our lesser comforts.

Why? Because all the things that we count on for our happiness, our stability, or our reward are nothing when compared with Jesus Christ.

Everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

PHILIPPIANS 3:8-11

Suffering has a way of bringing us into the depths of knowing Jesus in a way we can never experience when our lives are "comfortable" and "happy." But this doesn't happen automatically. We have to be willing to dig deep and lean into him during those seasons of trials.

So what about you? Are you willing to go deep with Jesus?



# Day 4

Faith anchors everything we do and everything we are as followers of Christ. It's the only way we can have a close, intimate relationship with him. I don't know about you, but I want to be close—*really* close. I mean, I want to be smell-his-breath-on-my-skin kind of close!

Before I experienced the deep end of faith, I knew the right answers. I knew, at least in my head, that faith was about trusting what I couldn't see. But it was just a cliché for me.

I don't want you to stay stuck like I was, so I'd like to invite you on an adventure with me. It's a journey of stepping out of a safe faith and embarking on a risk-taking faith.

From this point on, I hope you will toss aside shallow faith and your soul will shout, "Faith is so much more than that!"

In order to embrace a deeper level of faith, we need to understand what Scripture says is true about faith. Match the verse on the left to its corresponding truth on the right.

Romans 10:17	Faith is powerful enough to fight evil.
Galatians 5:6	We will only understand faith through hearing God's Word.
Hebrews 11:6	We are made right in God's sight through faith.
Ephesians 6:16	Faith isn't about ceremonies or rituals; it's expressed through love.
Romans 1:17	Without faith, we cannot please God.

## Raw Faith Bible Study

Read Hebrews 13:12-14.

Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make his people holy by means of his own blood. So let us go out to him, outside the camp, and bear the disgrace he bore. For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.

What words or phrases stand out to you in this passage?

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This passage says that Jesus goes outside the camp or outside the gates. What do you think that means?

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In order for our minds to be blown when we read this passage, we need to think like the writer of Hebrews. He was most likely referencing the Israelites' mobile community that would settle for a time along a river or in a mountain valley. A camp was a place of safety for people. If you went outside the camp, you'd face dangers like wild animals, enemies, and the obvious threat of being vulnerable to the elements. The camp was a place of comfort, safety, and familiarity. In addition, according to Jewish tradition, the camp represented all that was sacred in their society, while everything outside the camp was considered unclean.

So when the author tells us to join Jesus "outside the camp," it's as if he is saying, "Hey, you—take a risk with me, be dangerous, step out of your comfort zone, be willing to get a little dirty."

When we step outside our "camp" of religious safety, we encounter people who don't look like us, talk like us, or act like us. Some places outside the camp are uncomfortable, muddy, and downright scary. But there are lost and needy men and women and children who are living in darkness and in need of the light we can bring from the warm, safe huddle of our camp.

Kasey Van Norman

Who in your life is “outside the camp”? What would it look like to bring light to them?

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Journal about a time you took a risk for God. What was the experience like? How did you feel before you went for it? How did you feel when it was all over?

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Journal about a time you felt God asking you to take a risk and you chose not to do it. What regrets did you have afterward?

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What holds you back from taking risks for God?

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Do you want this life-changing, gut-wrenching, as-close-as-your-breath faith? If so, you have to be willing to go outside the camp.



# Day 5

For most of us, death and danger are most likely not at the top of our bucket lists. But if we dig into Scripture, we realize that perhaps they should be.

At the very least, the Bible makes it clear that we'd be wise to ponder our own death. That may sound morbid or senseless, but when we do so in a healthy way, it's actually a faith-building experience.

You sweep people away like dreams that disappear.  
They are like grass that springs up in the morning.  
In the morning it blooms and flourishes,  
but by evening it is dry and withered.  
We wither beneath your anger;  
we are overwhelmed by your fury.  
You spread out our sins before you—  
our secret sins—and you see them all.  
We live our lives beneath your wrath,  
ending our years with a groan.

Seventy years are given to us!  
Some even live to eighty.  
But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble;  
soon they disappear, and we fly away.  
Who can comprehend the power of your anger?  
Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.

## Raw Faith Bible Study

Teach us to realize the brevity of life,  
so that we may grow in wisdom.

PSALM 90:5-12

What does this psalm say we can expect about life on this earth?

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How does a healthy perspective on the brevity of life affect our faith?

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Before I received my cancer diagnosis, I suppose this psalm would have seemed sad to me. But now I breathe it in like life-giving medicine—especially that last part about pondering our own mortality so we can grow in wisdom. Now I know what the psalmist meant when he talked about “the brevity of life.”

I didn’t know how much I needed God when everything was going fine in my life. It was only when things fell apart that I realized how desperate I was for him—even in the things I thought I was in control of. I didn’t need God until it was time for me to number my days.

List some areas of your life that seem easy, manageable, and comfortable—circumstances in which you rarely think to consider God.

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Numbering our days doesn’t have to be a scary thing. It just means remembering that our lives are short and that we need to spend our days with an eternal perspective. Great wisdom—life-revolutionizing wisdom—comes from periodically pondering these things.

If we run away from the truth that we are simply a mist that appears for a moment and then vanishes, we become arrogant and fail to recognize how much we need God. We begin to believe that we are the masters of our lives and forget that we owe every moment to the sovereign will of God. But if we look our suffering and impending death in the face, then we will have the humility to yield ourselves to God.

Kasey Van Norman

Take a moment to number your days before the Lord. How do you feel about suffering—whether in the present or in the future? How do you feel when you think about the brevity of life?

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Read Philippians 1:29.

For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.

This passage makes the surprising statement that it's not only a privilege to trust Christ but also a privilege to do what? How does this change your perspective on suffering?

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Read Hebrews 2:18.

Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

What does it mean to you that Jesus went through suffering and testing himself?

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Read James 5:11.

We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

What does the story of Job show us about God's character and how he treats us in the long term?

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The question isn't whether we'll face suffering in our lives; it's how we will respond when we do. Will suffering break our faith or make it stronger?

## Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

1. In your own words, how would you define faith? What role does it play in your relationship with God?

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2. Looking back over the course of your life, how has your faith changed and grown?

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3. What questions do you have about faith?

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4. Which of God's characteristics do you most often relate to (Father, Friend, Helper, Redeemer, Shepherd, Lord, Fighter, etc.)?

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5. Have you ever considered God as someone who would pick a fight with you? How does it make you feel to think of him in this way?

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6. How do you respond when bad things happen to you? Do you get angry and blame God? Do you ask him for guidance and encouragement? What do you think your responses reveal about your faith?

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7. Think of a time when you remained close to God in your suffering and a time when you did not. What do you think accounted for the difference?

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8. On day 4 we discussed going “outside the camp.” What is your huddle—the place where you feel safe and comfortable? What would it look like to take a risk and go outside your camp for the sake of Christ?

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9. Have you ever taken the time to ponder your death? How do you think your life would be different if you had an increased awareness of the brevity of life?

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10. What Scripture verse mentioned in the study so far do you want to cling to this week as you consider what deep, authentic faith looks like?

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