

THINK ABOVE THE BOX  
Bible Study Guide for  
Where Love Is, There Is God Also\*

By Leo Tolstoy



*Looking at literature through a Biblical lens*



**2 Corinthians 4:18 TLB** So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.



## **Where Love Is, There Is God Also**

IN a certain town there lived a shoemaker named Martin Avdeitch. He lived in a basement room which possessed but one window. This window looked onto the street, and through it a glimpse could be caught of the passers-by. It is true that only their legs could be seen, but that did not matter, as Martin could recognize people by their boots alone. He had lived here for a long time, and so had many acquaintances. There were very few pairs of boots in the neighbourhood which had not passed

through his hands at least once, if not twice. Some he had resoled, others he had fitted with side-pieces, others, again, he had resewn where they were split, or provided with new toe-caps. Yes, he often saw his handiwork through that window. He was given plenty of custom, for his work lasted well, his materials were good, his prices moderate, and his word to be depended on. If he could do a job by a given time it should be done; but if not, he would warn you beforehand rather than disappoint you. Everyone knew Avdeitch, and no one ever transferred his custom from him. He had always been an upright man, but with the approach of old age he had begun more than ever to think of his soul, and to draw nearer to God.

His wife had died while he was still an apprentice, leaving behind her a little boy of three. This was their only child, indeed, for the two elder ones had died previously. At first Martin thought of placing the little fellow with a sister of his in the country, but changed his mind, thinking: "My Kapitoshka would not like to grow up in a strange family, so I will keep him by me." Then Avdeitch finished his apprenticeship, and went to live in lodgings with his little boy. But God had not seen fit to give Avdeitch happiness in his children. The little boy was just growing up and beginning to help his father and to be a pleasure to him, when he fell ill, was put to bed, and died after a week's fever.

Martin buried the little fellow and was inconsolable. Indeed, he was so inconsolable that he began to murmur against God. His life seemed so empty that more than once he prayed for death and reproached the Almighty for taking away his only beloved son instead of himself, the old man. At last he ceased altogether to go to church.

Then one day there came to see him an ancient peasant-pilgrim—one who was now in the eighth year of his pilgrimage. To him Avdeitch talked, and then went on to complain of his great sorrow.

"I no longer wish to be a God-fearing man," he said. "I only wish to die. That is all I ask of God. I am a lonely, hopeless man."

"You should not speak like that, Martin," replied the old pilgrim. "It is not for us to judge the acts of God. We must rely, not upon our own understanding, but upon the Divine wisdom. God saw fit that your son should die and that you should live. Therefore it must be better so. If you despair, it is because you have wished to live too much for your own pleasure."

"For what, then, should I live?" asked Martin.

"For God alone," replied the old man. "It is He who gave you life, and therefore it is He for whom you should live. When you come to live for Him you will cease to grieve, and your trials will become easy to bear."

Martin was silent. Then he spoke again.

"But how am I to live for God?" he asked.

"Christ has shown us the way," answered the old man. "Can you read? If so, buy a Testament and study it. You will learn there how to live for God. Yes, it is all shown to you there."

These words sank into Avdeitch's soul. He went out the same day, bought a large-print copy of the New Testament, and set himself to read it.

At the beginning Avdeitch had meant only to read on festival days, but when he once began his reading he found it so comforting to the soul that he came never to let a day pass without doing so. On the second occasion he became so engrossed that all the kerosene was burnt away in the lamp before he could tear himself away from the book.

Thus he came to read it every evening, and, the more he read, the more clearly did he understand what God required of him, and in what way he could live for God; so that his heart grew ever lighter and lighter. Once upon a time, whenever he had lain down to sleep, he had been used to moan and sigh as he thought of his little Kapitoshka; but now he only said—"Glory to Thee, O Lord! Glory to Thee! Thy will be done!"

From that time onwards Avdeitch's life became completely changed. Once he had been used to go out on festival days and drink tea in a tavern, and had not denied himself even an occasional glass of *vodka*. This he had done in the company of a boon companion, and, although no drunkard, would frequently leave the tavern in an excited state and talk much nonsense as he shouted and disputed with this friend of his. But now he had turned his back on all this, and his life had become quiet and joyous. Early in the morning he would sit down to his work, and labor through his appointed hours. Then he would take the lamp down from a shelf, light it, and sit down to read. And the more he read, the more he understood, and the clearer and happier he grew at heart.

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It happened once that Martin had been reading late. He had been reading those verses in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke:

***"And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*** [Luke 6:29-31]

Then, further on, he had read those verses where the Lord says:

***"And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the storm beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."*** [Luke 6:46-49]

Avdeitch read these words, and felt greatly cheered in soul. He took off his spectacles, laid them on the book, leaned his elbows upon the table, and gave himself up to meditation. He set himself to measure his own life by those words, and thought to himself:

"Is my house founded upon a rock or upon sand? It is well if it be upon a rock. Yet it seems so easy to me as I sit here alone. I may so easily come to think that I have done all that the Lord has commanded me, and grow careless and—sin again. Yet I will keep on striving, for it is goodly so to do. Help Thou me, O Lord."

Thus he kept on meditating, though conscious that it was time for bed; yet he was loath to tear himself away from the book. He began to read the seventh chapter of St. Luke, and read on about the centurion, the widow's son, and the answer given to John's disciples; until in time he came to the passage where the rich Pharisee invited Jesus to his house, and the woman washed the Lord's feet with her tears and He justified her. So he came to the forty-fourth verse and read:

***"And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, and thou gavest Me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears,***

***and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment.***” [Luke 7:44-46]

He read these verses and thought:

***“‘Thou gavest Me no water for My feet’ ... ‘Thou gavest Me no kiss’ ... ‘My head with oil thou didst not anoint’***” — and once again he took off his spectacles, laid them on the book, and became lost in meditation.

“I am even as that Pharisee,” he thought to himself. “I drink tea and think only of my own needs. Yes, I think only of having plenty to eat and drink, of being warm and clean—but never of entertaining a guest. And Simon too was mindful only of himself, although the guest who had come to visit him was—who? Why, even the Lord Himself! If, then, He should come to visit *me*, should I receive Him any better?”—and, leaning forward upon his elbows, he was asleep almost before he was aware of it.

“Martin!” someone seemed to breathe in his ear.

He started from his sleep.

“Who is there?” he said. He turned and looked towards the door, but could see no one. Again he bent forward over the table. Then suddenly he heard the words:

“Martin, Martin! Look thou into the street to-morrow, for I am coming to visit thee.”

Martin roused himself, got up from the chair, and rubbed his eyes. He did not know whether it was dreaming or awake that he had heard these words, but he turned out the lamp and went to bed.

The next morning Avdeitch rose before daylight and said his prayers. Then he made up the stove, got ready some cabbage soup and porridge, lit the *samovar* [a Russian tea urn], slung his leather apron about him, and sat down to his work in the window. He sat and worked hard, yet all the time his thoughts were centred upon last night. He had two ideas about the vision. At one moment he would think that it must have been his fancy, while the next moment he would find himself convinced that he had really heard the voice. “Yes, it must have been so,” he concluded.

As Martin sat thus by the window he kept looking out of it as much as working. Whenever a pair of boots passed with which he was acquainted he would bend down to glance upwards through the window and see their owner’s face as well. The doorkeeper passed in new felt boots, and then a water-carrier. Next, an old soldier, a veteran of Nicholas’ army, in old, patched boots, and carrying a shovel in his hands, halted close by the window. Avdeitch knew him by his boots. His name was Stepanitch, and he was kept by a neighboring tradesman out of charity, his duties being to help the doorkeeper. He began to clear away the snow from in front of Avdeitch’s window, while the shoemaker looked at him and then resumed his work.

“I think I must be getting into my dotage,” thought Avdeitch with a smile. “Just because Stepanitch begins clearing away the snow I at once jump to the conclusion that Christ is about to visit me. Yes, I am growing foolish now, old greybeard that I am.”

Yet he had hardly made a dozen stitches before he was craning his neck again to look out of the window. He could see that Stepanitch had placed his shovel against the wall, and was resting and trying to warm himself a little.



"He is evidently an old man now and broken," thought Avdeitch to himself. "He is not strong enough to clear away snow. Would he like some tea, I wonder? That reminds me that the *samovar* must be ready now."

He made fast hisawl in his work and got up. Placing the *samovar* on the table, he brewed the tea, and then tapped with his finger on the window-pane. Stepanitch turned round and approached. Avdeitch beckoned to him, and then went to open the door.

"Come in and warm yourself," he said. "You must be frozen."

"Christ requite [return a favor to] you!" answered Stepanitch. "Yes, my bones are almost cracking."

He came in, shook the snow off himself, and, though tottering on his feet, took pains to wipe them carefully, that he might not dirty the floor.

"Nay, do not trouble about that," said Avdeitch. "I will wipe your boots myself. It is part of my business in this trade. Come you here and sit down, and we will empty this tea-pot together."

He poured out two tumblerfuls, and offered one to his guest; after which he emptied his own into the saucer, and blew upon it to cool it. Stepanitch drank his tumblerful, turned the glass upside down, placed his crust upon it, and thanked his host kindly. But it was plain that he wanted another one.

"You must drink some more," said Avdeitch, and refilled his guest's tumbler and his own. Yet, in spite of himself, he had no sooner drunk his tea than he found himself looking out into the street again.

"Are you expecting anyone?" asked his guest.

"Am—am I expecting anyone? Well, to tell the truth, yes. That is to say, I am, and I am not. The fact is that some words have got fixed in my memory. Whether it was a vision or not I cannot tell, but at all events, my old friend, I was reading in the Gospels last night about Our Little Father [Jesus] Christ, and how He walked this earth and suffered. You have heard of Him, have you not?"

"Yes, yes, I have heard of Him," answered Stepanitch; "but we are ignorant folk and do not know our letters."

"Well, I was reading about how He walked this earth, and how He went to visit a Pharisee, and yet received no welcome from him at the door. All this I read last night, my friend, and then fell to thinking about it—to thinking how some day I too might fail to pay Our Little Father Christ due honor. 'Suppose,' I thought to myself, 'He came to me or to anyone like me? Should we, like the great lord Simon, not know how to receive Him and not go out to meet Him?' Thus I thought, and fell asleep where I sat. Then as I sat sleeping there I heard someone call my name; and as I raised myself the voice went on (as though it were the voice of someone whispering in my ear): 'Watch thou for me to-morrow, for I am coming to visit thee.' It said that twice. And so those words have got into my head, and, foolish though I know it to be, I keep expecting *Him*—the Little Father—every moment."

Stepanitch nodded and said nothing, but emptied his glass and laid it aside. Nevertheless Avdeitch took and refilled it.

"Drink it up; it will do you good," he said. "Do you know," he went on, "I often call to mind how when Our Little Father walked this earth, there was never a man, however humble, whom He despised, and how it was chiefly among the common people that He dwelt. It was always with *them* that He walked; it was from among *them*—from among such men as you and I—from among sinners and working folk—that He chose His disciples. '**Whosoever,**' He said, '**shall exalt himself, the same shall be**

***abased; and whosoever shall abase himself, the same shall be exalted.*** [Luke 14:11] ***'You,'*** He said again, ***'call me Lord; yet will I wash your feet.'*** [John 13:14] ***'Whosoever,'*** He said, ***'would be chief among you, let him be the servant of all.'*** [Matt 20:27] ***Because,'*** He said, ***'blessed are the lowly, the peacemakers, the merciful, and the charitable.'*** [Matt 5:1-10]

Stepanitch had forgotten all about his tea. He was an old man, and his tears came easily. He sat and listened, with the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Oh, but you must drink your tea," said Avdeitch; yet Stepanitch only crossed himself and said the thanksgiving, after which he pushed his glass away and rose.

"I thank you, Martin Avdeitch," he said. "You have taken me in, and fed both soul and body."

"Nay, but I beg of you to come again," replied Avdeitch. "I am only too glad of a guest."

So Stepanitch departed, while Martin poured out the last of the tea and drank it. Then he cleaned the crockery, and sat down again to his work by the window—to the stitching of a back-piece. He stitched away, yet kept on looking through the window—looking for Christ, as it were—and ever thinking of Christ and His works. Indeed, Christ's many sayings were never absent from Avdeitch's mind.

Two soldiers passed the window, the one in military boots, and the other in civilian. Next, there came a neighboring householder, in polished galoshes; then a baker with a basket. All of them passed on. Presently a woman in woollen stockings and rough country shoes approached the window, and halted near the buttress outside it. Avdeitch peered up at her from under the lintel of his window, and could see that she was a plain-looking, poorly-dressed woman and had a child in her arms. It was in order to muffle the child up more closely—little though she had to do it with!—that she had stopped near the buttress and was now standing there with her back to the wind. Her clothing was ragged and fit only for summer, and even from behind his window-panes Avdeitch could hear the child crying miserably and its mother vainly trying to soothe it. Avdeitch rose, went to the door, climbed the steps, and cried out: "My good woman, my good woman!"

She heard him and turned around.

"Why do you need to stand there in the cold with your baby?" he went on. "Come into my room, where it is warm, and where you will be able to wrap the baby up more comfortably than you can do here. Yes, come in with you."

The woman was surprised to see an old man in a leather apron and with spectacles upon his nose calling out to her, yet she followed him down the steps, and they entered his room. The old man led her to the bedstead.

"Sit you down here, my good woman," he said. "You will be near the stove, and can warm yourself and feed your baby."

"Ah," she replied. "I have had nothing to eat this morning." Nevertheless she put the child to her breast.

Avdeitch nodded his head approvingly, went to the table for some bread and a basin, and opened the stove door. From the stove he took and poured some soup into the basin, and drew out also a bowl of porridge. The latter, however, was not yet boiling, so he set out only the soup, after first laying the table with a cloth.

“Sit down and eat, my good woman,” he said, “while I hold your baby. I have had little ones of my own, and know how to nurse them.”

The woman crossed herself and sat down, while Avdeitch seated himself upon the bedstead with the baby. He smacked his lips at it once or twice, but made a poor show of it, for he had no teeth left. Consequently the baby went on crying. Then he bethought him of his finger, which he wriggled to and fro towards the baby’s mouth and back again—without, however, actually touching the little one’s lips, since the finger was blackened with work and sticky with shoemaker’s wax. The baby contemplated the finger and grew quiet—then actually smiled. Avdeitch was delighted. Meanwhile the woman had been eating her meal, and now she told him, unasked, who she was and where she was going.

“I am a soldier’s wife,” she said, “but my husband was sent to a distant station eight months ago, and I have heard nothing of him since. At first I got a place as a cook, but when the baby came they said they could not do with it and dismissed me. That was three months ago, and I have got nothing since, and have spent all my savings. I tried to get taken as a nurse, but no one would have me, for they said I was too thin. I have just been to see a tradesman’s wife where our grandmother is in service. She had promised to take me on, and I quite thought that she would, but when I arrived today she told me to come again next week. She lives a long way from here, and I am quite worn out and have tired my baby for nothing. Thank Heaven, however, my landlady is good to me, and gives me shelter for Christ’s sake. Otherwise I should not have known how to bear it all.”

Avdeitch sighed and said: “But have you nothing warm to wear?”

“Ah, sir,” replied the woman, “although it is the time for warm clothes I had to pawn my last shawl yesterday for two *grivenki*. [about 5 cents]”

Then the woman returned to the bedstead to take her baby, while Avdeitch rose and went to a cupboard. There he rummaged about, and presently returned with an old jacket.

“Here,” he said. “It is a poor old thing, but it will serve to cover you.”

The woman looked at the jacket, and then at the old man. Then she took the jacket and burst into tears. Avdeitch turned away, and went creeping under the bedstead, whence he extracted a box and pretended to rummage about in it for a few moments; after which he sat down again before the woman.

Then the woman said to him: “I thank you in Christ’s name, good grandfather. Surely it was He Himself who sent me to your window. Otherwise I should have seen my baby perish with the cold. When I first came out the day was warm, but now it has begun to freeze. But He, Our Little Father, had placed you in your window, that you might see me in my bitter plight and have compassion upon me.”

Avdeitch smiled and said: “He did indeed place me there: yet, my poor woman, it was for a special purpose that I was looking out.”

Then he told his guest, the soldier’s wife, of his vision, and how he had heard a voice foretelling that to-day the Lord Himself would come to visit him.

“That may very well be,” said the woman as she rose, took the jacket, and wrapped her baby in it. Then she saluted him once more and thanked him.

“Also, take this in Christ’s name,” said Avdeitch, and gave her a two-*grivenka* piece with which to buy herself a shawl. The woman crossed herself, and he likewise. Then he led her to the door and dismissed her.



When she had gone Avdeitch ate a little soup, washed up the crockery again, and resumed his work. All the time, though, he kept his eye upon the window, and as soon as ever a shadow fell across it he would look up to see who was passing. Acquaintances of his came past, and people whom he did not know, yet never anyone very particular.

Then suddenly he saw something. Opposite his window there had stopped an old peddler-woman, with a basket of apples. Only a few of the apples, however, remained, so that it was clear that she was almost sold out. Over her shoulder was slung a sack of shavings, which she must have gathered near some new building as she was going home. Apparently, her shoulder had begun to ache under their weight, and she therefore wished to shift them to the other one. To do this, she balanced her basket of apples on the top of a post, lowered the sack to the pavement, and began shaking up its contents. As she was doing this, a boy in a ragged cap appeared from somewhere, seized an apple from the basket, and tried to make off. But the old woman, who had been on her guard, managed to turn and seize the boy by the sleeve, and although he struggled and tried to break away, she clung to him with both hands, snatched his cap off, and finally grasped him by the hair. Thereupon the youngster began to shout and abuse his captor. Avdeitch did not stop to make fast his awl, but threw his work down upon the floor, ran to the door, and went stumbling up the steps—losing his spectacles as he did so. Out into the street he ran, where the old woman was still clutching the boy by the hair and threatening to take him to the police, while the boy, for his part, was struggling in the endeavor to free himself.

“I never took it,” he was saying. “What are you beating me for? Let me go.”

Avdeitch tried to part them as he took the boy by the hand and said:

“Let him go, my good woman. Pardon him for Christ’s sake.”

“Yes, I will pardon him,” she retorted, “but not until he has tasted a new birch-rod. I mean to take the young rascal to the police.”

But Avdeitch still interceded for him.

“Let him go, my good woman,” he said. “He will never do it again. Let him go for Christ’s sake.”

The old woman released the boy, who was for making off at once had not Avdeitch stopped him.

“You must beg the old woman’s pardon,” he said, “and never do such a thing again. I saw you take the apple.”

The boy burst out crying, and begged the old woman’s pardon as Avdeitch commanded.

“There, there,” said Avdeitch. “Now I will give you one. Here you are,”—and he took an apple from the basket and handed it to the boy. “I will pay you for it, my good woman,” he added.

“Yes, but you spoil the young rascal by doing that,” she objected. “He ought to have received a reward that would have made him glad to stand for a week.”

“Ah, my good dame, my good dame,” exclaimed Avdeitch. “That may be *our* way of rewarding, but it is not God’s. If this boy ought to have been whipped for taking the apple, shouldn’t we also receive something for our sins?”

The old woman was silent. Then Avdeitch related to her the parable of the master who absolved his servant from the great debt which he owed him, whereupon the servant departed and took his own debtor by the throat. The old woman listened, and also the boy.

"God has commanded us to pardon one another," went on Avdeitch, "or *He* will not pardon us. We ought to pardon all men, and especially the thoughtless."

The old woman shook her head and sighed.

"Yes, that may be so," she said, "but these young rascals are so spoiled already!"

"Then it is for us, their elders, to teach them better," he replied.

"That is what I say myself at times," rejoined the old woman. "I had seven of them once at home, but have only one daughter now." And she went on to tell Avdeitch where she and her daughter lived, and how they lived, and how many grandchildren she had.

"I have only such strength as you see," she said, "yet I work hard, for my heart goes out to my grandchildren—the bonny little things that they are! No children could run to meet me as they do. Aksintka, for instance, will go to no one else. 'Grandmother,' she cries, 'dear grandmother, you are tired'"—and the old woman became thoroughly softened. "Everyone knows what boys are," she added presently, referring to the culprit. "May God go with him!"

She was raising the sack to her shoulders again when the boy darted forward and said, "Nay, let me carry it, grandmother. It will be all on my way home."

The old woman nodded assent, gave up the sack to the boy, and went away with him down the street. She had quite forgotten to ask Avdeitch for the money for the apple. He stood looking after them, and observing how they were talking together as they went.

Having seen them go, he returned to his room, finding his spectacles—unbroken—on the steps as he descended them. Once more he took up his awl and fell to work, but had done little before he found it difficult to distinguish the stitches, and the lamplighter had passed on his rounds. "I too must light up," he thought to himself. So he trimmed the lamp, hung it up, and resumed his work. He finished one boot completely, and then turned it over to look at it. It was all good work. Then he laid aside his tools, swept up the cuttings, rounded off the stitches and loose ends, and cleaned his awl. Next he lifted the lamp down, placed it on the table, and took his Testament from the shelf. He had intended to open the book at the place which he had marked last night with a strip of leather, but it opened itself at another instead. The instant it did so, his vision of last night came back to his memory, and, as instantly, he thought he heard a movement behind him as of someone moving towards him. He looked round and saw in the shadow of a dark corner what appeared to be figures—figures of persons standing there, yet could not distinguish them clearly. Then the voice whispered in his ear:

"Martin, Martin, dost thou not know me?"

"Who art Thou?" said Avdeitch.

"Even I!" whispered the voice again. "Lo, it is I!"—and there stepped from the dark corner Stepanitch. He smiled, and then, like the fading of a little cloud, was gone.

"It is I!" whispered the voice again—and there stepped from the same corner the woman with her baby. She smiled, and the baby smiled, and they were gone.

"And it is I!" whispered the voice again—and there stepped forth the old woman and the boy with the apple. They smiled, and were gone.

Joy filled the soul of Martin Avdeitch as he crossed himself, put on his spectacles, and set himself to read the Testament at the place where it had opened. At the top of the page he read:

***“For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in.”*** [Matthew 25:35]

And further down the page he read:

***“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto Me.”*** [Matthew 25:40]

Then Avdeitch understood that the vision had come true, and that his Saviour had in fact visited him that day, and that he had received Him.

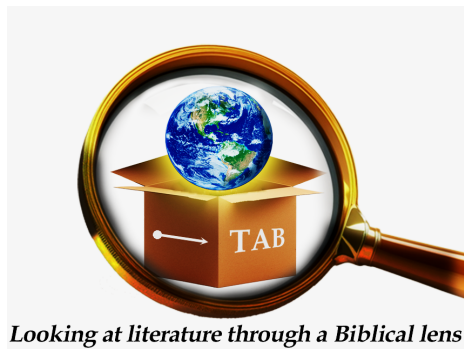
The End

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*Minor changes to the text were made for today's audience. Definitions added are within brackets.*

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Looking at literature through a Biblical lens

1. The cobbler Martin Avdeitch certainly had many ups and downs in his life, with the downs outweighing the ups with the death of his beloved wife and then his young son, Kapitoshka. This left him feeling empty, inconsolable and angry at God. When he was an old man, he remarked to a pilgrim visitor,

*"I no longer wish to be a God-fearing man," he said. "I only wish to die. That is all I ask of God. I am a lonely, hopeless man." "You should not speak like that, Martin," replied the old pilgrim. "It is not for us to judge the acts of God. We must rely, not upon our own understanding, but upon the Divine wisdom. God saw fit that your son should die and that you should live. Therefore it must be better so. If you despair, it is because you have wished to live too much for your own pleasure."*

**Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV** Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

He then counseled Avdeitch to live for God alone. But how does one *do* that?

*"A life lived for God glorifies God. We pursue God with our entire being – heart, soul, mind, and strength. We abide in Christ (**John 15:4, 8**) and therefore act like Him by loving others. In doing that, we bring glory to His name and also enjoy the relationship for which we were originally created."*

- **Got Questions**

## How do I live my life for God? | [GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org)

The old pilgrim then advised the cobbler to buy a New Testament Bible and actually read it. How many of us have numerous copies of the Bible collecting dust on our shelves not to mention the myriad of online Bible resources? Maybe there is something to be gained by actually *reading* the Word of God! Who knew?

*"Thus he came to read it every evening, and, the more he read, the more clearly did he understand what God required of him, and in what way he could live for God; so that his heart grew ever lighter and lighter. Once upon a time, whenever he had lain down to sleep, he had been used to moan and sigh as he thought of his little Kapitoshka; but now he only said—"Glory to Thee, O Lord! Glory to Thee! Thy will be done!"*

*"Ain't no worry gonna bring me down / Ain't no losing the joy I've found / Should I praise Him / Yes I should / God is great / Life is good."*

- Matthew West



**▶ Matthew West - Life is Good (Lyric Video)**

*"Daily reading of God's word is an indispensable practice for every Christian. As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we encounter His wisdom, guidance, and life-transforming power. By meditating on Scripture, we allow God to illuminate our path, prosper our ways, equip us for His work, and transform us into His image."*

- **On Mission**

## How studying the bible every day can change your life | On Mission

EXTRA CREDIT: 'Cuz it *will* change your life!

*"We were created to have intimacy with our heavenly Father and the best way to do this is to immerse ourselves in the Word of God. After all there is no better source to nourish our souls than the Bible."*  
- Curt Blattman

## The Bible – Nourishment for the Soul - Bible Apologetics - A DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2. *'Thou gavest Me no water for My feet' ... 'Thou gavest Me no kiss' ... 'My head with oil thou didst not anoint...'* After reading several verses from the Gospel of Luke, Martin had a very sobering revelation:

*"I am even as that Pharisee," he thought to himself. "I drink tea and think only of my own needs. Yes, I think only of having plenty to eat and drink, of being warm and clean—but never of entertaining a guest. And Simon too was mindful only of himself, although the guest who had come to visit him was—who? Why, even the Lord Himself! If, then, He should come to visit me, should I receive Him any better?"*

That's quite a convicting statement, isn't it?

**1 Corinthians 10:24 NLT** Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.

*"If you live for yourself, you make yourself both the boss and the servant...It is dangerous to serve an unhappy boss and even more dangerous to serve an uncrowned king. Self is a pretender to the throne of God. What will happen to self and its servants when the true King returns?"*  
- Colin Smith

## The Inevitable Misery of Living for Yourself | Colin Smith

What's *your* job title?

EXTRA CREDIT: Here's Pastor Greg Laurie's short take on the subject:

**Jesus is saying "It's obvious you already love yourself. Can you love your neighbor too?"**



*Looking at literature through a Biblical lens*

**Think Above the Box:** I think you know where this is going! Are there things that you could do differently in your life to live more for others than yourself and consequently model Jesus for them by your actions?

3. That night, Martin was awakened by a voice in his ear:

*"Martin!" someone seemed to breathe in his ear. He started from his sleep. "Who is there?" he said. He turned and looked towards the door, but could see no one. Again he bent forward over the table. Then suddenly he heard the words: "Martin, Martin! Look thou into the street to-morrow, for I am coming to visit thee."*

What do you think, too much spicy borscht and cabbage for dinner? Was it a dream or something more?

*"The [Holy] Spirit speaks into our hearts, minds, and lives just as we are, gently leading us toward the truth when we need it most. Not as an outside, easily distinguished booming voice from the heavens, but as the quiet whisper that's always drawing our heart and spirit back to rest in God's love."*  
- Monica LaRose

### Hearing the Spirit's Whispers

*"We may not always audibly hear the voice of the Lord, but in the power of His Word, we will recognize the gentle voice of our Shepard. His Word is already written out for us; poured out onto paper and the Holy Spirit will help bring it to life. Through our willingness to sit close with Him & know His Word intimately, we will be able to fine-tune to hear the whispering voice of the Lord amid the static of our lives."*  
- Haley Donaldson

### A Whisper: The Love Language of God

*"Holy Spirit, You are welcome here. / Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere. / Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for, / To be overcome by Your presence, Lord..."*  
- Francesca Battistelli



### 🔴 Holy Spirit (You Are Welcome Here) Francesca Battistelli (Live w. Lyrics)

4. The next day found Martin going about his usual activities, but with a new anticipation of a visit from Jesus!

*"I think I must be getting into my dotage," thought Avdeitch with a smile. "Just because Stepanitch begins clearing away the snow I at once jump to the conclusion that Christ is about to visit me. Yes, I am growing foolish now, old greybeard that I am."*

He then kindly invited the old veteran in to warm up and over cups of tea, he told his tale of the whispered message he had received the night before. Martin said to him,

*"I often call to mind how when Our Little Father [Jesus] walked this earth, there was never a man, however humble, whom He despised, and how it was chiefly among the common people that He dwelt. It was always with them that He walked; it was from among them—from among such men as you and I—from among sinners and working folk—that He chose His disciples."*

Could it be that Jesus would choose one of *us* to follow Him? We are so used to honoring, idolizing, adoring and worshiping the most powerful people in our culture that it is quite a revelation to think that the Creator of the universe could use *little people* such as ourselves to follow Him!

*"The question isn't whether what we have is good enough for God—it's whether we will offer what we have for his service."*  
- Rich Stearns

### 4 Reasons God Uses Us Fools to Shame the Wise

**EXTRA CREDIT:** Want to take a deep dive into the concept of the simple people spreading the Gospel? Step right up!

*"Why not use the wealthiest innovators, the smartest geniuses, the most articulate orators, the world's greatest athletes and most recognizable movie stars to spread his gospel around the world? Why does God prefer to choose and use the weak in his mission?"*  
- John Piper



## Why Does God Choose the Foolish?

5. After Stepanitch left, Martin went back to his work while also keeping up his search for Christ's arrival outside his window. After spotting a woman and her baby in threadbare clothes, he implored her to come in to warm up and to have some hot food. After hearing her sad story, Martin gave her a warmer jacket and some money which caused her to burst into tears. The following verses certainly apply to this encounter:

**Proverbs 14:21 AMP** He who despises his neighbor sins [against God and his fellow man], But happy [blessed and favored by God] is he who is gracious *and* merciful to the poor.

**Acts 20:35 AMP** In everything I showed you [by example] that by working hard in this way you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed [and brings greater joy] to give than to receive.'

*"Then the woman said to him: "I thank you in Christ's name, good grandfather. Surely it was He Himself who sent me to your window. Otherwise I should have seen my baby perish with the cold. When I first came out the day was warm, but now it has begun to freeze. But He, Our Little Father, had placed you in your window, that you might see me in my bitter plight and have compassion upon me."*

*Avdeitch smiled and said: "He did indeed place me there: yet, my poor woman, it was for a special purpose that I was looking out."*

*"God's Word gives us insight into His heart for the poor and instruction in how we are to care for them. If we truly have faith in Jesus, we must also share His concern for the poor. Jesus commanded us to love one another ([John 13:34–35](#)). And what better way to demonstrate the love and kindness and compassion of Jesus Christ than by reaching out to the 'least of these' among us?"*

- **Got Questions**

## What does the Bible say about giving to the poor? | GotQuestions.org

*"Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills. / Work for the craftsman, trade for their skills. / Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak. / Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak ... "*

- Graham Kendrick



## **Beauty for Brokenness (God of the Poor) Graham Kendrick, Composer**

6. After the pair left, he once again looked out his window and caught a little crime taking place involving an old peddler woman and a young boy, who had snatched an apple from her basket. After a bit of a struggle and Martin's intercession, the woman wanted the boy taken to the police and to be beaten with a rod.

*"Let him go, my good woman," he said. "He will never do it again. Let him go for Christ's sake." The old woman released the boy, who was for making off at once had not Avdeitch stopped him.*

*"You must beg the old woman's pardon," he said, "and never do such a thing again. I saw you take the apple." The boy burst out crying, and begged the old woman's pardon as Avdeitch commanded. "There, there," said Avdeitch. "Now I will give you one. Here you are,"—and he took an apple from the basket and handed it to the*

*boy. "I will pay you for it, my good woman," he added. "Yes, but you spoil the young rascal by doing that," she objected. "He ought to have received a reward that would have made him glad to stand for a week."*

*"Ah, my good dame, my good dame," exclaimed Avdeitch. "That may be our way of rewarding, but it is not God's. If this boy ought to have been whipped for taking the apple, shouldn't we also receive something for our sins?"*

Oh, burn!!! But Martin made an excellent point, just as Jesus did in the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor:

**Matthew 18:21-35 NLT** Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven! "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

*"God expects those whom He forgives to forgive everyone who sins against them up to the amount they themselves have been forgiven. Since every sin we commit is committed against God, those who are forgiven by Him are forgiven for every sin, every wrong and wicked choice, we ever do over the course of our lifetimes. Nobody will ever sin against us anywhere near to the amount we have sinned against God."*

- **Bible Ref**

### **What does Matthew 18:35 mean? | BibleRef.com**

Note: click on the right column for the meaning, context and chapter summaries.

This Scripture also makes the point:

**John 8:1-11 NKJV** But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

*"No matter how much you've wronged others, it's small compared with the wrongs we've committed against God. And yet He still loves us, and Christ stands ready to forgive us."*  
- Billy Graham

## Seek the forgiveness of those you've hurt

*"It's the hardest thing to give away and the last thing on your mind today. / It always goes to those who don't deserve / It's the opposite of how you feel when the pain they caused is just too real. / It takes everything you have to say the word...Forgiveness."*  
- Matthew West



### ▶ Matthew West - Forgiveness (Lyrics)



*Looking at literature through a Biblical lens*

**Think Above the Box:** Discuss a time you had to forgive someone or when you had to ask for forgiveness. How could the verses above help someone to forgive someone or on the other hand, to accept forgiveness?

7. Have you ever had your Bible fall open and you glanced at the verses on the page and they were just what you needed to read? This is what happened to Martin that night after a whole day of waiting for Christ's visit:

*Next he lifted the lamp down, placed it on the table, and took his Testament from the shelf. He had intended to open the book at the place which he had marked last night with a strip of leather, but it opened itself at another instead. The instant it did so, his vision of last night came back to his memory, and, as instantly, he thought he heard a movement behind him as of someone moving towards him.*

*"Martin, Martin, dost thou not know me?" "Who art Thou?" said Avdeitch. "Even I!" whispered the voice again.*

And in turn, the figures of his friend Stepanitch, the young woman with her baby, the old peddler woman and the young boy all appeared to Martin stating that it was them, which led him to **Matthew 25** which was what his Bible had flipped open to!

**Matthew 25:35-43 NKJV** "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.**'

*"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see*

You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

That must have been an amazing moment for our cobbler friend!

*Then Avdeitch understood that the vision had come true, and that his Saviour had in fact visited him that day, and that he had received Him.*

Martin realized that while looking for Christ, he *was Christ* to all of them!

**Matthew 10:42 NKJV** “And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

*“Notice that loving our neighbor would include sharing with the poor and the alien; compassion and absolute honesty and justice in our relationships with others; impartiality; a refusal to be a party to gossip or slander; an absence of malice toward anyone and a refusal to bear a grudge; taking care never to put another’s life at risk and never taking private vengeance upon another.”*

- **Got Questions**

### **What does it mean to love your neighbor as you love yourself? | GotQuestions.org**

**EXTRA CREDIT:** Feel like a little old school video for the visual learners amongst us? This 1977 Claymation short film is just the ticket, including having Tolstoy’s daughter Alexandra as the narrator! Since we have discussed forgiveness in this study, please practice it as the musical audio of this old film is in need of mercy.

*“A poor cobbler has a dream in which he hears the Lord promise to visit him. Instead poor people in need of food, clothing, warmth, and understanding come to him. In the end he understands that this is how the Lord visits men today.”*

- Lisa Shaklee

### **Martin the Cobbler by Leo Tolstoy Claymation**

**REAL LIFE:** “There is a remarkable, haunting verse found in **Micah 6:7b**, which says, *Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* Don’t sacrifice your own child. Let your child live, and watch what God will do. In my family, we have biological and adopted grandchildren, and we love them all the same because we are one family. Someone out there wants your child, even if you don’t or are unable to provide for him/her. **Choose life**, and see the blessings that await you in return.”

- Pastor Jack Hibbs

### **Jack Hibbs Abortion Survivor — Calvary Chapel Magazine**

**EXTRA EXTRA CREDIT:** Pastor Jack Hibbs provides “A BIBLICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE PRO-LIFE POSITION FROM SCRIPTURE” asking the following questions: “Is It Life? Is It Science? Is It Logical? Is It Violent? Is It Fair? Is It Sinful? Is It Personal? Is It An Abortion? Is It A Murder? Is It Just? Is It Normal? Is It Responsible? Is It Ethical? Is It Forgivable? Is It Redeemable?”

Watch Pastor Hibbs’ Sanctity of Life message here. [Note: duration is just over 1 hour]

### **Sanctity of Life Sunday - Real Life with Jack Hibbs**

**APOLO-GET-ITS:** We have all been taught in school that everything in Creation came about by chance and that there is no proof of intelligent design and that life on this planet is just one big happy accident. The more

scientists explore, the more it becomes evident that there is Intelligence behind the design. Let's look at your DNA for starters:

*"The world of electronics constantly demands smaller data storage devices with higher capacities of space. It is ironic that God mastered the design for such a "device" when He created DNA. It is said that every book, photograph, written work, and every bit of information generated by humans could fit in a tablespoon of DNA."*

### **Wonders of Creation: DNA - Apologetics Press**

**EXTRA CREDIT:** *"J. Warner Wallace is a Dateline featured cold-case homicide detective, popular national speaker and best-selling author. J. Warner became a Christ-follower at the age of thirty-five after investigating the claims of the New Testament gospels using his skill set as a detective. He eventually earned a Master's Degree in Theological Studies from Gateway Seminary."*

- **Cold Case Christianity**

 **THE ORIGIN OF LIFE IS EVIDENCE FOR GOD**

## **LOVE TO LINK!**

The depth of content offered in the Think Above the Box Study Guides would not have been possible without the many talents and Spirit-inspired links that are included for each book. Isn't it great that while you use the study guides you can click on a link and go to these great sites without searching for them?

We would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to all the Bible publishers, pastors, bloggers, filmmakers, musicians and Christian media websites for the vast amount of information they provide online. Your efforts are truly a blessing to all who access your sites!

TAB highly encourages students to explore each of the links at their leisure as it is like going down a holy rabbit hole!

**Project Gutenberg**

**Bible Ref**

**Got Questions**

**Matthew West**

**On Mission**

**Bible Apologetics**

**The Gospel Coalition**

**Harvest.org**

**God Hears Her**

**Northern Colorado FCA**

**Francesca Battistelli**

**Outreach Magazine**

**Desiring God**

**Graham Kendrick**

**Billy Graham Evangelistic Association**

**Blue Letter Bible**

**Calvary Chapel Magazine**

**Pastor Jack Hibbs**

**Apologetics Press**

**Cold Case Christianity**



## *Afterword*

Please check out our site **Think Above the Box** for more study guides, blogs, and links to thought-provoking material.

*And please leave us a note on our site about your experience!  
We would love to hear your comments!*



*Looking at literature through a Biblical lens*



**2 Corinthians 4:18** TLB So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

