

Finally Alive

A Study Guide for the Book by John Piper

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Introduction

“You must be born again.” So said Jesus to Nicodemus during their late night conversation. The Son of God speaks to a religious leader and tells him that he must be born again. Like many of us, Nicodemus had questions. “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Those aren’t the only questions that could be asked. What happens in the new birth? Why is it necessary? What are the effects of the new birth? What role do we play in our new birth? Is it possible to help others experience the new birth?

In 2007-2008, John Piper preached 16 sermons to answer these questions. These sermons were subsequently compiled and revised and turned into a book: *Finally Alive* (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2009). In the introductory sermon to that series (“You Must Be Born Again: Why This Series and Where Are We Going?”) John Piper describes his aim in focusing so many messages on the new birth.

[One] reason I am eager to focus on the new birth is to help you know what really happened to you when you were born again. It is far more glorious than you think it is. It is also more glorious than I think it is. It is wonderful beyond all human comprehension. But that mystery is not because there is little about it in the Bible. There is much about it in the Bible. It’s because when all is comprehended there is still more. So I hope that you will know more and know better what happened to you when you were born again.

This is also the aim of this study guide. It is our hope that, after reading *Finally Alive* and completing this study guide, you will be stunned at God’s work in causing you to be born again. You were once dead in your trespasses and sins; now you are alive to God. You were once blind to the beauty of Christ; now you see him as the all-satisfying treasure of your heart. You were once enslaved to sin; now you are a servant of Christ. What happened? How did a hostile enemy of God become his beloved child? The answer is the new birth.

Our prayer for you is that through a deepened understanding of the new birth from Scripture, Christ will appear more beautiful to you, more wonderful, more desirable, and more worthy of all of your affections. And we pray that the power of sin in your life is broken, your love for God and neighbor is strengthened, and your zeal for the lost is awakened, all to the glory of God.

Explanation of This Study Guide

In an effort to encourage discussion and deeper engagement with *Finally Alive*, we have developed this twelve-week study guide. Each week consists of reading a chapter or two of the book, meditating upon concepts and Scripture passages, and answering questions. Each week’s study is divided into main two sections, “Reading and Reflection” and “Digging Deeper,” which are described below.

Note: We feel that these study resources work best in a group setting. Not only do we believe in the biblical principle that iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17), we also long to see church communities strengthened together in the foundations of the gospel. Nevertheless, we also hope these resources can be of benefit for individual study and reflection. We would strongly encourage those who choose to use these resources for their own study to find other believers whom they can discuss the material with.

- **Reading and Reflection:** Each week you will work through a chapter or two of *Finally Alive*. Seven core study questions are provided in the study guide to stimulate you to interact with the book and with Scripture. The focus of these questions ranges from comprehension of the reading, to personal examination, to group discussion. These questions are intended to help you read the Bible better. Because the chapters in *Finally Alive* were originally preached as sermons, much of the content of the book is taken up with Bible exposition. As a result, many of the questions will ask you to reflect on a biblical passage, answer a question, and then compare your understanding of the passage to John Piper’s as expressed in the book. In this way, we hope not only to increase your understanding of the new birth, but also to equip you to better read the Bible for yourself.

The underlined questions are those we think are particularly relevant for group discussion. Group participants should familiarize themselves with these questions prior to the group meeting (see “For Leaders” below for more details). Participants should also be mindful during their personal study of any other questions that would stir meaningful discussion, noting them in the guide and bringing them up in the group discussion. Such questions may be felt to be particularly suited to the group’s context, or they may be questions with which the participant is particularly wrestling and struggling to answer.

Throughout the study guide you will repeatedly be challenged to utilize your biblical knowledge by thinking of or locating relevant Scriptures, which may either add support to the concepts discussed or seem to conflict with them. You should, therefore, always plan to have a Bible with you when working through the reading and study

guide (a concordance would also be quite helpful). Regardless of how well you know the Bible, you should endeavor to bring what you *do* know to bear on the study and discussion and strive to learn more about Scripture in the process.

- **Digging Deeper:** The questions in this section are designed for those group members who desire to pursue the subject matter of the lesson further. These questions will often bring in additional passages of Scripture or additional articles and sermons by John Piper. These articles and sermons may be found by performing a title search at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org).

For Leaders

As the group facilitator, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the layout of this study guide. Read thoroughly the “Explanation of the Study Guide” above, as well as the rest of this section *before the first meeting*. It may also be helpful to skim each lesson in order to better understand when key themes will be introduced and developed.

Prior to each group meeting, we recommend that you review the chapter and all of the questions in the lesson, including those in the “Digging Deeper” section. Reading the additional resources highlighted in the “Digging Deeper” section may give you a fuller understanding of the content of each lesson.

In addition, make sure that you are regularly praying at every stage of your preparation and during the group meetings. As the leader, it is up to you to communicate that life change will only happen by the grace of God, and that one of the fundamental ways that we receive God’s grace is through earnest and heartfelt prayer.

Finally, you should seek to develop a basic plan for each group meeting. A suggested plan for a one-hour meeting is given below. You should, of course, feel the freedom to adapt this resource to your group’s needs and limitations.

- **Introduction (10 minutes)**

Open with prayer. During the first lesson, if you are providing copies of *Finally Alive* and this study guide for the members of your group, distribute them at this time. If the members of your group do not know one another, this may be an appropriate time for them to introduce themselves and share why they decided to participate in this group study. Depending on the size of your group, this portion of the meeting may take longer than 10 minutes. In subsequent lessons, this portion of the meeting may be shortened to allow more time for discussion.

- **Discussion (40 minutes)**

First Lesson: If the group members have not had a chance to work through the first lesson prior to the meeting, you can just go through it together. The simplest way to do this is probably to work through the questions one at a time, reading the relevant sections of the introduction and discussing and answering as you go. If you are pressed for time, we recommend focusing on the underlined questions. The other questions can be answered at a later date. There are no “Digging Deeper” questions for this lesson.

Subsequent Lessons: We encourage you to be creative in your use of this study guide. You may find it helpful to work through the questions one at a time, discussing the answers as you go. On the other hand, it may be better to ask the members of your group which questions were most helpful for them. Encourage the group members to interact with one another and pursue a deeper understanding of the material. As the group leader, you should feel the freedom to bring in additional passages of Scripture that help illumine the topic under discussion. We also encourage you to try pressing home the practical relevance of what you’re studying.

- **Prayer (10 minutes)**

We encourage you to close each week in prayer. Pray that God would solidify the teaching that you’ve heard in your hearts and minds. Ask him to create in each member a heart that not only *knows* the truth, but *loves* the truth. Pray for opportunities to share what you’ve learned with others.

The Appendix in this study guide contains further reflection on how to lead and facilitate group discussions. This material is adapted from curriculum created by BCS Press, the publishing division of Bethlehem College and Seminary. For more information about BCS Press, visit their website at press.bethlehemcollegeandseminary.org.

May God grant you the ability to see and savor the supremacy of Jesus Christ through a deep and rich knowledge of his awesome work in the new birth, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Lesson 1: Introduction to *Finally Alive*

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapters 1 and 2

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will have reflected on your own conversion.**
- **You will grasp the difficulty of using the term “born again” in contemporary society.**
- **Your curiosity will be stirred and questions will come to mind.**

Reading and Reflection

Read from the introductory section through the section entitled “Lewis’s Story” (pp9-12).

1. Compare your conversion to the stories of Lewis and Augustine. What similarities can you find? What are some differences?
2. Reflect on the term “born again.” How is this term used in contemporary society? How do you think most people today understand this term?

Read from the section entitled “The Defamation of the Term *Born Again*” through “The New Testament Moves in the Opposite Direction” (pp12-16).

3. What mistake does John Piper think that the Barna Group makes in their use of the term “born again”? Describe the difference between Barna’s usage and the usage in the New Testament.

Read from the section entitled “Regeneration” through the end of the chapter (pp16-22).

4. Look through the questions and issues that John Piper will address in this book. Which questions are most interesting to you? What additional questions do you hope he addresses?

Before moving into the substance of the book, it will be helpful to think carefully about your current understanding of the new birth.

5. Define the “new birth” in your own words. Why do you think the new birth is necessary? If possible, cite Scripture in your answer.

6. In your current understanding, how does the new birth happen? What is God's role? What is our role?

7. How does the new birth relate to other important biblical terms like "faith," "conversion," and "salvation"?

Lesson 2: What Is the New Birth?

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapters 1 and 2

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will begin to reflect on Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3.**
- **You will be able to define what happens in the new birth.**
- **You will grasp the connections between the new birth, Jesus, the Spirit, and our faith.**

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, meditate on John 3:1-10 in your own Bible.

1. In the space below, write down any observations or questions you have about this passage. Note any puzzling aspects of the passage that you hope are addressed in the coming chapters.

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 1 through the section entitled "My Hope: Stabilize and Save, Not Just Unsettle" (pp25-28).

2. Why might Jesus' words in John 3 be unsettling to us? Do any of John Piper's concerns apply to you?

Read from the section entitled "The Plan" through "Experiencing the Supernatural, Not Just Affirming It" (pp28-31).

3. What two answers does John Piper give to the question "What happens in the new birth"? Why is it shocking that Jesus would say these words to Nicodemus?

Read from the section entitled "Jesus Is the Life We Receive At New Birth" through the end of the chapter (pp31-33).

4. How does John Piper connect the reality of the new birth to Jesus, the Spirit, and our faith? Why is it so vital that we not separate these realities?

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 2 through the section entitled "New Creation, Not Improving the Old" (pp35-38).

5. What is the third way of describing the new birth that John Piper offers in this section?

Read the section entitled “Why ‘Water’ Is Not a Reference to Baptism” (pp38-39).

6. Why does the phrase “born of water” in John 3:5 probably not refer to water baptism? Of the arguments that John Piper gives, which do you feel is the strongest?

Read from the section entitled “Water and Spirit in Ezekiel 36” through the end of the chapter (pp39-42).

7. What two aspects of our newness does John Piper draw out from Ezekiel 36? Why are both aspects important and necessary for us to understand as we contemplate the new birth?

Digging Deeper

1. In this chapter, John Piper notes one of the major dangers of focusing on signs and wonders. Where do we see this danger in Nicodemus? Where do you see this danger in our contemporary culture? Do you see it in your own life? Does the fact that it is dangerous mean that we should cease to pray for God to do miraculous things in the world? Explain your answer.

Read the sermon entitled “The Free Will of the Wind” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

2. According to John Piper, how does the wind provide an apt illustration of the work of the Spirit in the new birth? List all four ways. In this sermon, John Piper emphasizes the sovereign, irresistible nature of the Spirit’s work in regeneration. What objections have you heard to this doctrine? Do you have any initial responses? Record any questions provoked by this sermon.
3. John Piper notes that there are two responses to the sovereign, decisive power of the Spirit in regeneration: threatened or thrilled. Which one best describes your response? Why do you respond this way?

Lesson 3: Why Must We Be Born Again? Part 1

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapters 3 and 4

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- You will understand why the new birth is necessary.
- You will grasp the many ways that the Scriptures describe our sinful condition.
- You will praise God for the power of the new birth.

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, meditate on Ephesians 2:1-10 in your own Bible.

1. Identify the metaphor that Paul uses for the new birth in this passage. According to this passage, why is the new birth necessary?

2. In the space below, record every description of our sinful condition that Paul uses in Ephesians 2:1-3. What is paradoxical about the combination of these descriptions?

Read all of Chapter 3 in *Finally Alive* (pp45-53).

3. In the fourth description of our sinful condition, John Piper argues that any ignorance of God that we have is a "guilty ignorance." How can he say this? What lies beneath our ignorance of God?

4. Why is the mind set on the flesh unable to submit to God's law? What kind of inability is this?

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 4 up to the section entitled "The Other Half of the Question" (pp55-59).

5. In one sentence, summarize all ten descriptions of our sinful condition set forth in these two chapters.

6. Of the ten descriptions of our sinful condition provided, which ones were new to you? Which ones were the most difficult to accept?

Read from the section entitled “The Other Half of the Question” through the end of the chapter (pp59-62).

7. Identify the five blessings that we would not have apart from the new birth. Why is it important to stress both sides of the question “Why is the new birth necessary?”?

Digging Deeper

1. Respond to the following statement in light of what you’ve read in these chapters: “God cannot hold me morally responsible for any type of ignorance or inability. If I am unable to come to God, then it would be wrong for him to judge me for not coming.” Use Scripture in your answer.

2. In light of the teaching of this lesson, how might you explain the good actions of unbelievers? In other words, if, apart from the new birth, human beings are enslaved to Satan and sin, unable to come to God and having no good thing dwelling in them, then how do we explain the fact that unbelievers can be kind and loving and generous?

Read the section entitled “Total Depravity” in an article by John Piper entitled “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism” (www.desiringgod.org).

3. In what sense is our rebellion against God total? Does “total depravity” mean that man is as sinful as he could possibly be? How did this article answer the other Digging Deeper questions? How did your answers compare to John Piper’s?

Lesson 4: Why Must We Be Born Again? Part 2

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapters 5 and 6

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- You will understand the connection between Christmas and the new birth.
- You will better understand the imagery of “birth” as a description of God’s work in our lives.
- You will be able to distinguish the general call of the gospel from the internal call of God.

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, meditate on 1 John 3:1-10 in your own Bible.

1. According to this passage, why did Jesus come to earth?

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 5 through the section entitled “The Great Love of God” (pp65-69).

2. What is the common bridge between 1 John 3 and Ephesians 2? Note the four connections that John Piper draws out.

Read from the section entitled “Jesus’ Birth and Our New Birth” through the end of the chapter (pp70-74).

3. How does the birth of Jesus relate to our new birth? What vital aspects of our salvation are made possible by the incarnation? Cite Scripture in your answer.
4. Before proceeding to the next chapter, consider the imagery of “birth” that is often used to describe regeneration. Describe key aspects of “being born.” How might reflections on physical birth shed light on what the new birth is like?

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 6 through the section entitled “Now the Question *How*” (pp77-79).

5. What are the two sides of the key question that John Piper will address in these chapters? With your current understanding, how would you answer these questions?

Read from the section entitled “How Does God Regenerate Us?” through the section entitled “Ransomed, Raised, Called” (pp79-84).

6. What key word does John Piper focus on from 1 Peter 1? What three works of God does he highlight? Describe the order in which they occur.

Read from the section entitled “The Call Creates What It Commands” through the end of the chapter (pp84-85).

7. Explain the distinction between the external call and the internal call using 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. Why is this distinction so important?

Digging Deeper

Read the story of Lazarus in John 11.

1. John Piper uses Lazarus as an illustration of the sovereign, irresistible power of God’s call. Having reflected upon the story, do you think that this is an apt analogy? What other analogies can you think of that illustrate the power of God’s call?

Read the sermon “God Called Us into Life and Hope” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

2. In this sermon, John Piper further develops the distinction between external and internal call. What additional insights on this passage did you gain from this sermon? What is the internal call of God designed to guarantee? Why should this encourage us?
3. At some point this week, try to explain the power of God’s effective call to another Christian. Distinguish between the general call of the gospel and the internal, effective call of God. Show them the biblical roots of this distinction. After your explanation, ask them if they have any questions or objections. Record them in the space below.

Lesson 5: Born Again Through the Washing of Regeneration

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 7

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will connect your new birth to the ultimate destiny of creation.**
- **You will better grasp the divine origins of the new birth.**
- **You will look away from your own good works as the cause of your new birth.**

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, meditate on Titus 3:1-8 and Matthew 19:23-30 in your own Bible. The only two occurrences of the Greek word *palingenesis* are in these passages. In Titus 3:5 it is translated “regeneration” and in Matthew 19:28 it is translated “new world.”

1. Compare the use of *palingenesis* in these two passages (“regeneration” and “new world”). What is significant about these two uses of this word? What might be the relationship between these uses? (For additional help, compare the use of the term “groaning” in Romans 8:20-23.)

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 7 through the section entitled “The Material Creation Born Again” (pp87-90).

2. According to Romans 8 and Matthew 19, what is God’s final purpose for creation? How would you respond to someone who believed that the ultimate hope of Christians is that our souls go to heaven when we die?

Read from the section entitled “A New Signal about Why We Need the New Birth” through “The Meaning of Grace: But God...” (pp90-91).

3. What is the precious phrase that appears in Titus 3? Where else have we seen this phrase? What contrast is drawn between what Paul says before this phrase and what he says after this phrase?

Read the section entitled “How? By Washing and Renewal” (pp91-93).

4. What are the two aspects of the new birth in Titus 3? In what other biblical passage have we seen these two aspects expressed?

5. Look again at Titus 3:4-7. What is the basis of the new birth in this passage? After answering this question, read from the section entitled “By the Kindness of God” through “By the Mercy of God, Not Our Deeds” (pp93-95) and compare your answer to John Piper’s answer.
6. When did the “goodness and loving kindness of God” appear? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

Read the section entitled “Not Our Best Works and Best Motives” (pp95-96).

7. John Piper draws attention to Paul’s negative statement in Titus 3:5. What key point does he make about this negative statement? Why is this point so important for us to remember?

Digging Deeper

Read the sermon entitled “The Triumph of the Gospel in the New Heavens and the New Earth” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

1. According to John Piper, what does the futility of creation and the reality of physical pain and suffering depict? What effect ought this to have on us? Think of a recent example of suffering and futility in the world. How does this sermon help you to understand what God is communicating in it?
2. According to John Piper, who subjected the world to futility? How do we know? Cite Scripture in your answer. What is the hope toward which creation groans?
3. Though John Piper doesn’t mention the new birth in this sermon, what connections can you draw between the teaching of this sermon and the teaching of *Finally Alive*? Record any additional insights you have on the new birth in light of Romans 8.

Lesson 6: Born Again Through Faith in Jesus Christ

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 8

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will see the tremendous relevance of the doctrine of the new birth.**
- **You will begin to understand our involvement in the new birth.**
- **You will grasp the sequence in which God brings about new birth, faith, and love.**

Reading and Reflection

1. Before reading the chapter, respond to the following statement: “Christians should focus on addressing the pressing issues of our day. Teaching doctrines like the new birth is simply counterproductive when there are so many real problems in the world.”

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 8 through the section entitled “Seeing and Savoring the Magnificence of Jesus” (pp99-101).

2. Explain the two types of relevance mentioned by John Piper. Revisit Question 1 above. How would you revise your answer?

Read the section entitled “What Is Our Involvement in the New Birth?” (pp101-102).

3. According to John Piper, how are we involved in the new birth? What analogy does John Piper give to illustrate his point?

Before reading the rest of the chapter, meditate on 1 Peter 1:20-23 in your own Bible.

4. This passage contains a primary command and two supporting statements. What is the primary command? What are the two supporting statements? How do the two supporting statements relate to the primary command and to each other? Note any key words in the passage that help you answer these questions.

Read the section entitled “Obedience to the Truth” (pp102-104).

5. According to John Piper, what does Peter mean by “obedience to the truth” in 1 Peter 1:20? Give two reasons that support this interpretation.

Read from the section entitled “Believing: Acting Out the New Birth” through “God Is the Decisive Cause” (pp104-107).

6. According to John Piper, what is the relationship between our action and God’s action in the new birth? How does his interpretation of this passage compare to your interpretation from Question 4?

Read the section entitled “What This Means for Us” (pp107-108).

7. Do you agree with John Piper’s four concluding points? Why or why not? What remaining questions do you have about the relationship between God’s action and our action in the new birth?

Digging Deeper

Meditate on 2 Timothy 2:24-26 in your own Bible.

1. How are the opponents of the Lord’s servant described in this passage? What must happen in order for them to escape from their bondage? Why might some people find this teaching controversial?

Now read Philippians 1:29-30 and Ephesians 2:8-9.

2. What two things are granted to believers in Philippians 1:29? In light of this, what do you think is included in the “gift of God” in Ephesians 2:8-9?

Read the article entitled “How Do You Obey the Command to Be Born?” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

3. What paradox does John Piper address in this article? How does he resolve it? Are you persuaded by his answer? Why or why not?

Lesson 7: Born Again Through Intelligible Good News

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 9

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- You will be able to distinguish between the gospel and the practice of mantras.
- You will see the importance of understanding the gospel in bringing about the new birth.
- You will embrace the proper relationship between the new birth and our faith.

Reading and Reflection

1. In this chapter, John Piper will reflect on the use of mantra in Eastern religions. What is a mantra? How is it similar to prayer? How is it different? Do you think Christians should incorporate mantra into our religious practices?

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 9 through the section entitled “It Doesn’t Work Like That” (pp111-115).

2. How does John Piper define a mantra? What is the primary contrast between a mantra and the gospel?
3. What warning does John Piper give regarding Christian participation in yoga? Why is it important for Christians to understand the origins and worldview out of which practices like yoga come?

Before reading any further, meditate on John 1:1-18 in your own Bible.

4. How does John refer to Jesus in this passage? Write down 5 truths about Christ that you learn in John 1.

Read the section entitled “The Word Became Flesh” (pp115-116).

5. According to John Piper, why can God’s Word *not* be a mantra? What amazing truth does he point to in John 1?

Read the section entitled “Born Not of Man But of God” (pp116-118).

6. What negations are made in John 1 with respect to the new birth? How are we *not* born? Why are these negations important for us to grasp?

7. Which statement best reflects your current understanding: “Our faith causes the new birth” or “The new birth causes our faith”? After you give your answer, read the final section of the chapter entitled “God’s Begetting Causes Our Believing.” Compare John Piper’s answer to your own and note the key biblical passage he uses to support his view.

Digging Deeper

Read Acts 16:11-15 in your own Bible.

1. Try to picture the situation described in this passage. Many people heard Paul preach. Some believed; others didn’t. According to this passage, what makes the difference?

Read the article entitled “How the Lord of Life Gives Life” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

2. What are some possible answers that John Piper gives to the question posed above? Why do some believe and others don’t?

3. Carefully consider John Piper’s interpretation of Lydia’s conversion. Do you agree with it? Can you think of other instances in the Bible where something similar happens?

Lesson 8: The New Birth Overcomes the World

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 10

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will understand why the book of 1 John was written.**
- **You will be able to identify many tests of life given in the Bible.**
- **You will avoid common misconceptions about these tests of life.**

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, look up the following passages in your own Bible: 1 John 1:4, 2:1, 2:12-13, 2:21, 2:26, and 5:13.

1. In your own words, explain why the apostle John wrote this letter. After giving your answer, read from the introductory section of Chapter 10 through the section entitled "Why Did John Write This Letter?" (pp123-125). Compare your explanation to John Piper's summary on p125.

The next two questions may take some time to complete.

2. Read through the entire book of 1 John in one sitting. As you read, write down any evidences of the new birth in the space below along with the Scripture references.
3. Summarize your findings from Question 2 in one sentence. According to John, how can we know that we're born again? After answering these questions, read the section entitled "Eleven Evidences of the New Birth" (pp125-128) and compare your list to the evidences given by John Piper.

Read the section entitled "No Perfection, No Defection" (pp128-130).

4. What two mistaken effects does John Piper warn about in relation to the "tests of life"? Can you relate to either of these effects?
5. How do we know that the phrase "walk in the light" does not mean that Christians must be sinless?

6. What evidence does John Piper provide that the apostle John did *not* believe that Christians can lose their salvation? How then can we explain professing Christians who fall away?

Read from the section entitled “A Three-Link Chain in 1 John 5:3-4” through the end of the chapter (pp130-131).

7. What does John Piper mean by the “three-link chain” in 1 John 5:3-4? What are the three links?

Digging Deeper

Read Revelation 3:5 in your own Bible.

1. Does this passage imply that some people have their names erased from the book of life? How would you answer someone who believed that those who are born again can be erased from the book of life? Cite Scripture in your answer.

Read the article entitled “Can the Regenerate Be Erased from the Book of Life?” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

2. How does John Piper respond to the argument presented above? What Scripture passages does he use? Compare your answer to his answer. What similarities do you notice? What differences?
3. Does the truth that the names of the regenerate can never be erased from the book of life *necessarily* lead to the conclusion that we can live however we wish and still attain eternal life? Why or why not? Suppose someone you know argued that they didn’t need to persevere in faith in order to enter the kingdom. What would you say to them?

Lesson 9: Regeneration, Faith, Love

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 11

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will grasp the order of causality between faith, the new birth, and love.**
- **You will recognize the importance of this order for practical Christian living.**
- **You will be encouraged to combat the forces of the world by relying on God's work in the new birth.**

Reading and Reflection

Read the introductory section of Chapter 11 (pp133-134).

1. What is John Piper's aim in this chapter, and why is this so important? Can you relate to the struggle he describes in this section?

Before reading the rest of the chapter, meditate on 1 John 5:1-5 in your own Bible.

2. Why might some people find the commands of God burdensome? What could make the commands of God not burdensome to a person?
3. Reflect on the relationship between v.3 and v.4. What key word connects these verses? How does this connecting word help to explain the chain of thought in 1 John 5:3-4?

Read from the section entitled "The First Link: Loving Others" through "Which Commandments?" (pp134-136).

4. Compare John Piper's reflections on the burden of God's commands to your answer in Question 2. What differences do you note? According to John Piper, which commandments does the apostle John have in mind?

Before reading the rest of the chapter, meditate on 1 John 2:15-17 in your own Bible.

5. What are the forces of the world that threaten believers in this passage? Give practical illustrations of each one. How is it possible for us to overcome these forces? After answering this question, read the section entitled "The Second Link: The New Birth" (pp136-138) and compare what you've written to John Piper's reflections.

Read from the section entitled “The Third Link: Faith in Jesus” through “The Order: New Birth, Faith, Love” (pp138-139).

6. How does the new birth conquer the forces of the world? What does it produce in us? Why is it important that we get the order right?

Read from the section entitled “Faith and Love: Inseparable But Distinguishable” through the end of the chapter (pp139-141).

7. If love is the sign of the new birth, how can we deal with the fact that all of our attempts at love are flawed and imperfect? How can we avoid despair at our imperfection?

Digging Deeper

1. In this chapter, John Piper argues that faith and love are inseparable, but distinguishable. In your mind, what is the difference between faith and love? What makes each one unique? How do faith and love relate to each other? If possible, come up with an analogy to illustrate this relationship.

Read the article entitled “The Necessity of Perseverance in Faith and the Assurance of Salvation” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

2. Choose two of the eight theses set forth in this article and look up each Scripture cited. Do these passages support the conclusion drawn by John Piper? Record your reflections below.
3. What questions are provoked by this article? Record two of them in the space below and seek to discuss them with another person this week.

Lesson 10: Freedom from the Practice of Sinning

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 12

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- You will recognize the connection between our understanding of Christ and our understanding of morality.
- You will be equipped to respond to false teaching about Christian obedience.
- You will be better guarded against presumption and despair.

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, meditate on 1 John 3:1-10 in your own Bible.

1. What questions are provoked in your mind by this passage? Why might this passage trouble the souls of Christians?

Read the introductory section of Chapter 12 (p143).

2. Rewrite the key question that John Piper will be addressing in your own words. Have you ever wrestled with this question before? Note any of your current thoughts in the space below.

Read from the section entitled “God Calls Us to Full Assurance” through “What the False Teachers Said” (pp143-145).

3. What was the key teaching of the false teachers that the apostle John is addressing? Note relevant passages from Scripture.

Read the section entitled “Bad Christology Yields Bad Morality” (pp145-146).

4. Explain the connection between the bad Christology of the false teachers and their likely teaching about morality.

Read from the section entitled “Christ’s Incarnation Lasts Forever” through “Christian Doing Confirms Being” (pp146-147).

5. What does John Piper mean by “doing confirms being”? How is this different from “doing *causes* being” or “doing *is* being”?

Read from the section entitled “The Regenerate Are Not Sinless” through the end of the chapter (pp148-151).

6. Give two reasons from 1 John for why we know that the regenerate are not sinless.

7. What are the two common dangerous scenarios mentioned by John Piper? Which of these scenarios are you most prone to? How does the teaching of this chapter aid in combating both of them?

Digging Deeper

1. In this chapter, John Piper addressed the danger of despair. Do you ever struggle with assurance of your salvation? Describe your struggle in the space below. What causes you to doubt your salvation? What helps you fight these doubts?

Read the article entitled “The Agonizing Problem of the Assurance of Salvation” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

2. What is the “agonizing problem of the assurance of salvation”? What are some poor strategies for addressing this problem? What is a better way to address this problem?

Read the article entitled “Helping People Have the Assurance of Salvation” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

3. Choose three of John Piper’s recommendations and expand upon them in your own words. Using your expanded notes, what would you say to someone who was struggling with the assurance of their salvation? What questions would you ask? What Scripture would you use?

Lesson 11: Loving Others with the Love of God

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapter 13

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will grasp the connection between God's love for us and our love for others.**
- **You will understand how God's nature and actions in history free us to love others.**
- **You will seek to better love others by rejoicing in their good and meeting their needs.**

Reading and Reflection

Before reading the chapter, meditate on 1 John 4:7-21 in your own Bible.

1. In the space below, write down any observations you have on the love of God from this passage. In particular, you may seek to answer these questions: Where does love come from? How can we see the love of God? What is our response to the love of God for us?

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 13 through the section entitled "God's Nature Is Love" (pp153-154).

2. 1 John 4 says that "love is from God" (v.7) and "God is love" (v.8) How can we make sense of these two statements? What analogy does John Piper use to illustrate the connection between them?

Read the section entitled "God's Love Revealed in Sending His Son" (pp154-156).

3. How was God's love manifested in history? What was so shocking about this manifestation of love?

Before reading the rest of the chapter, reflect upon 1 John 4:11 in your own Bible.

4. According to this verse, why ought we love one another? How does this obligation to love flow from the first half of the sentence? After answering this question, read the section entitled "What Does *Ought* Mean?" (pp156-157) and compare your answer to John Piper's.

Before reading the rest of the chapter, meditate upon 1 John 3:11-14 in your own Bible.

5. What do we learn about Cain from this passage? According to John, why did Cain murder Abel? After answering this question, read from the section entitled “How the Born Again Love” through “Humbly Rejoicing in the Goodness of Others” (pp157-159) and compare your answer to John Piper’s.
6. On p159, John Piper draws out an important lesson from 1 John 3:11-14. Consider your own life and seek to determine if you can apply this lesson to any of your relationships. Record any reflections in the space below.

Read the section entitled “Meeting the Needs of Others—Even at Great Cost” (pp159-161).

7. How should we love others? How should we *not* love others? Write down one relationship in which you plan to apply this exhortation, and pray for God’s help in following through.

Digging Deeper

Read the sermon entitled “Faith: The Link Between God’s Love for Us and Ours for Others” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

1. In the chapter examined above, John Piper argues that the new birth is the connection between God’s love for us and our love for others. In this sermon, John Piper gives a slightly different answer. What is this answer? Describe both aspects of it. How do we reconcile the arguments in these two sermons?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 in your own Bible.

2. Make a list of all the characteristics of love in this passage. Choose three of them and do a careful self-assessment of your life. Pray that God would reveal areas of your life where you are failing to love others. Remind yourself of what you’ve learned in this lesson about the origins of our love for others. Be as specific as you can.

Read the sermon entitled “Dying As a Means of Loving, Part 2” by John Piper (www.desiringgod.org).

3. After reading this sermon, review your self-assessment from the previous question. What additional insights have you gained? What additional applications are you planning to make? Record them in the space below.

Lesson 12: Helping Others Be Born Again

A Companion Study to *Finally Alive*, Chapters 14 and 15 and the Conclusion

Lesson Objectives

It is our prayer that after you have finished this lesson...

- **You will understand the need for humans in God's work of regeneration.**
- **You will be emboldened to share the gospel.**
- **You will reflect on what you have learned in this study and feel gratitude to God for the new birth.**

Reading and Reflection

1. Interact with the following statement: "If God is the decisive and ultimate cause of the new birth, then what is the point of evangelism? People who believe that God causes us to be born again will be fatalistic and lose their zeal for evangelism."

Read from the introductory section of Chapter 14 through the section entitled "Good News, Heart of Love, Life of Service" (pp165-167).

2. John Piper says that God's role in the new birth is "decisive" and that our role is "essential." What is the difference between decisive and essential?

Read from the section entitled "The Most Important Verse" through the end of the chapter (pp167-174).

3. According to John Piper, how can we help people be born again? What practical encouragements does he offer for us to better help others experience the new birth?

Before reading chapter 15, seek to apply all that you've learned in these lessons to 2 Corinthians 4:1-7 in your own Bible.

4. According to this passage, why is the new birth necessary? What imagery does Paul use to describe the new birth? What is the fruit and effect of the new birth in this passage? After answering these questions, read from the introductory section of Chapter 15 through the section entitled "God Makes Light Shine in Our Hearts" (pp177-179) and compare your answers to John Piper's.

5. According to 2 Corinthians 4:1-7, what is the human means God uses to accomplish the new birth? Cite the relevant Scripture in your answer. After answering this question, read the section titled "God Sends You to Open Their Eyes" (pp179-181) and compare your answer to John Piper's.

Read the first five points in the section titled "Ten Encouragements for Gospel-Telling" (pp181-185).

6. Which of these five points encourages you the most? Which one challenges you the most? Choose one of them and seek God's help in applying it to your life this week.

Read the last five points in the section entitled "Ten Encouragements for Gospel-Telling" (pp186-188).

7. Which of these five points encourages you the most? Which one challenges you the most? Choose one of them and seek God's help in applying it to your life this week.

Digging Deeper

Read the Conclusion to the book (pp189-192).

1. According to John Piper, what is the root cause of all of our problems? Cite Scripture in your answer. What implications does this have for us as we seek solutions to problems such as social injustice, war, sexual immorality, disease, etc?

Look back over the past twelve lessons and answer the following questions.

2. What was the most significant part of this study for you? List one or two adjustments in your own thinking as a result of this study. How was your faith strengthened by what you read here?
3. Write out a prayer to God for his regenerating work in your life. Thank him specifically for what he's done in causing you to be born again. Ask him to confirm the reality of your new birth by causing the effects of the new birth to be manifested. Finally, pray for one person you know who needs to be born again.

Appendix: Leading Productive Group Discussions

Note: This material has been adapted from curricula produced by BCS Press, a ministry of Bethlehem Baptist Church. It is used by permission.

It is our conviction that the best group leaders foster an environment in their group that engages the participants. People of all ages learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from ever “lecturing” for the entire lesson. Although group leaders need to direct the conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they should not talk for the majority of the lesson. This study guide is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the group leader and the participants. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a “fellow-learner” who invites participation from everyone in the group.

It might surprise you how eager people can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your group participants to share their discoveries. Here are some of our “tips” on facilitating discussion that is engaging and helpful:

- Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first participant shares his or her response, others are likely to join in. But, if you cut the silence short by prompting them, then they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- Affirm every answer, if possible, and draw out the participants by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to “shut down” a participant's contribution or “trump” it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- Don't allow a single participant, or group of participants, to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone, if possible, and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- Labor to show the significance of each person's study. Emphasize the things that the participants could not have learned without doing the homework.
- Avoid talking too much. The group leader should not monopolize the discussion, but rather guide and shape it. If the group leader does the majority of the talking, the participants will be less likely to interact and engage; and therefore they will not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the “definitive last word.”
- The group leader should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The group leader should also pursue digressions that are helpful and relevant. There is a balance to this, however: the group leader *should* attempt to cover the material. So avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.
- The group leader's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. If you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your participants will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, and if you truly think Bible study is worthwhile, then your group will be impacted positively. Therefore it is our recommendation that, before you come to the group, you spend enough time working through the homework yourself and praying over it, so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and his Word!