

# The Pilgrim's Progress Study Guide

A Bible Study Based on John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress

Part 1

By Alan Vermilye



The Pilgrim's Progress Study Guide:  
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Brown Chair Books

ISBN-13: 978-1-948481-14-4

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Version 1

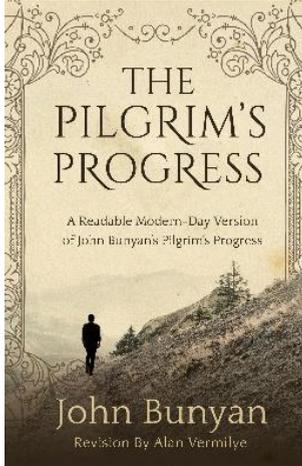
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# Required Book for Study

Do you have the right book for this study?



Although there are many versions of this Bunyan classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Modern-Day Revised Version of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* is the only book that is made specifically for this study.

Each chapter, subsection, and study question is designed to be used in conjunction with each other. Other books will feel drastically different and not match up with the study questions and format of this study.

Why is that? Well, Bunyan's original version of the book is not only very difficult to read but is broken into ten segments that he refers to as "stages" rather than the twelve chapters and subsections that this book and study utilize. Other more "readable" versions might include chapter headings, but it will not align with the sessions that correspond with this

study. In addition, many leave out key text and do not keep with Bunyan's original intentions for the book.

If you are completing this study in a group setting, it would also be helpful if each participant had the same book to make class discussion time more beneficial.

Learn more about this book at [www.BrownChairBooks.com](http://www.BrownChairBooks.com).

# Course Notes and Study Format



*The Pilgrim's Progress Study Guide* is divided into twelve weekly study sessions that correspond with the twelve chapters of *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Modern Revised Version of John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress*. This study guide can be used for individual study or for weekly small groups that gather to discuss each chapter.

## **HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE**

Each week you will read a chapter in the book and answer the questions that correspond with that chapter. The book and study have been divided up to allow plenty of time to read each chapter and answer questions in a week's time. Many of the sections are very short and will not require much time, while others are a little longer.

As you read, make notes in your book and underline or highlight sections that interest you. As you work through each session, make note of other questions or observations that you would like to share in your small group time.

## **GROUP FORMAT**

The study is ideal for Sunday school classes as well as midweek times at the church or in the homes of group members. Session length is variable, but ideally, you should allow at least 60 minutes per session. If you feel that you cannot get through all the questions in a single session, pick and choose the questions you want to make sure you cover.

Pace yourself or your group, and do not rush the study. If you feel you need additional weeks for certain sections, be flexible and allow the learning process and class discussion to happen naturally. It's most helpful for learning purposes if each person has their own book and study guide and works through the questions prior to each class. However, couples might find it convenient to share a book.

## **ANSWER AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCE GUIDES**

The answers to each question as well as a Scripture Reference Guide can be found at [www.BrownChairBooks.com](http://www.BrownChairBooks.com). However, do not cheat yourself. Work through each session prior to viewing the answers. The Scripture Reference Guide is a handy tool that saves time in class that would be spent looking up Bible passages.

## Author Summary



John Bunyan was born in Elstow near Bedford, England, in 1628. His parents were poor, and his father was a metalworker, or “tinker,” who traveled around mending pots and pans; John followed in his father’s trade. He had no formal education but learned to read and write.

Although we have few details about his early life, in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he tells us that he was not encouraged in matters of spirituality at home. He was rough, enjoyed dancing and playing tipcat, and was given to “cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God.”

In 1644 Bunyan lost both his mother and sister Margaret. Later that same year, when an edict demanded 225 recruits from Bedford, he entered the Parliamentary Army as a private at the age of sixteen.

There are few details about his military service, which took place during the English Civil War. However, during one battle, a fellow soldier was killed when he requested to go forward in Bunyan’s place. This dramatic event led Bunyan to believe God had spared his life for some purpose. His military service exposed him to a variety of religious sects while indulging in all sorts of ungodly behavior.

Bunyan spent nearly three years in the army before returning home in 1647 to continue his trade as a metal worker. His father was now remarried and had more children, so Bunyan moved to a cottage in Elstow High Street.

His first marriage, in 1648, was to a girl who was poor like himself but came from a godly family. Her name is not known, but she owned two books, of which Bunyan said, “Her only portion was two volumes which her father had given her, ‘The Plain Man’s Pathway,’ and ‘The Practice of Piety.’ In these I sometimes read, wherein I found some things pleasant to me.”

During his first five years of marriage, his wife would have a profound influence on his life as he began to attend church regularly and gave up his sinful life. He also began to pore over the Scriptures, leading him to his own thoughts about conviction that he would later write about in detail.

He joined a Baptist society at Bedford and by 1653 had become a lay preacher as a member of the congregation at Bedford. Over time, Bunyan’s popularity exploded, and great crowds in the thousands would come to hear him preach.

Bunyan and his wife’s first child, Mary, was born blind in 1650. They would have three more children: Elizabeth, Thomas, and John. But in 1658, ten years into their marriage, Bunyan’s wife died, leaving him with four small children under ten. A year later, in 1659, he got remarried to an eighteen-year-old young woman named Elizabeth.

However, their first year of marriage was interrupted when the religious tolerance that had allowed Bunyan to preach was curtailed when the monarchy was restored to power. In 1660 King Charles II came to the throne and ordered that all preachers that did not belong to the Church of England be imprisoned or banished.

Bunyan was no longer allowed to preach at the Anglican church where his congregation met. Still, he continued preaching in other places and later that year was warned that he would soon be arrested. He refused to escape and was arrested and sentenced to three months imprisonment. He was threatened with more jail time, banishment from England, and possible execution if he did not agree to stop preaching.

Although he could have his freedom whenever he wanted it, Bunyan refused to renounce preaching, opting to stand firm and keep a clear conscience instead; he was imprisoned for a total of 12 years in the Bedford County Jail.

Bunyan's imprisonment brought great hardship to his family. Elizabeth, who was pregnant at the time of his arrest, would later give birth to a stillborn child. She continually made attempts to secure her husband's release while caring for Bunyan's four small children, one of whom was blind. She relied on the charity of fellow church members and on what little Bunyan could earn in prison making shoelaces.

On occasion, he was allowed out of prison, where he attended the Bedford meetings and even preached. His daughter Sarah was born during his imprisonment, and a son, Joseph, was born after his release.

While imprisoned, he became the pastor of a congregation of inmates and stayed busy writing religious tracts, sermons, and nine books, including *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, which was published in 1666.

In 1671 King Charles II issued a declaration of religious indulgences that released thousands of non-conformists from prison, including Bunyan in 1672.

He immediately returned to preaching but three years later was put back in jail again for around six months. It was during this time that he began work on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which was published after his release.

Bunyan was never jailed again but spent the last 15 years of his life preaching all over England, including a visit to London every year to deliver sermons to large Baptist congregations.

In August 1688, on his way to London to preach, Bunyan went to Reading Berkshire on a ministerial visit to help resolve a quarrel between a father and son. As he returned to London on horseback, he was caught in a heavy rainstorm and fell ill with a violent fever, dying at the age of 60.

He died at the house of his friend, John Strudwick, a grocer and chandler on Snow Hill in Holborn. His grave lies in the cemetery at Bunhill Fields in London.

## Book Summary



John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was first published in 1678 and is second only to the Bible in the number of copies sold, having never been out of print. Written almost 350 years ago, Bunyan created the most famous allegory in all of English literature while imprisoned in the Bedford County Jail.

Charles Spurgeon, known as the "Prince of Preachers," loved the book and said, "Next to the Bible, the book I value most is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It is a volume of which I never seem to tire; and the secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled from the Scriptures."

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is considered one of the first novels ever written and was standard in most nineteenth century households, being read alongside the Bible. Bunyan chose an allegorical narrative to tell his powerful presentation of what it means to follow the narrow way of Christian salvation so that the lowest classes in English society would be able to understand it.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is told from the narrator's perspective, as if he were in a dream. In this dream, he tells the story of Christian, a man who lives in the City of Destruction. One day Christian is awakened to the realities of sin and judgment on his life, symbolized by a heavy burden that he carries on his back. He encounters a spiritual guide named Evangelist, who sets him on the path to salvation. He must first travel to the Wicket Gate and then on to the Celestial City. Unable to convince his family and friends to travel with him, Christian sets out on his own.

Shortly after leaving, he encounters Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who leads him astray by convincing him to take an easier route that almost leads to his drowning in the Swamp of Despair. Once he arrives at the Wicket Gate, he is permitted entrance, setting him on his real journey on a path referred to as the Way.

Next, he arrives at the Interpreter's House, where he visits many rooms and learns lessons about his newfound faith. Once enlightened, he continues traveling to the cross and tomb, where he understands the sacrifice that Christ made for his sins; the burden rolls off his back and into the tomb. Angels arrive and provide him new clothes to wear along the Way and a certificate that he must provide for entrance to the Celestial City.

At the foot of the Hill of Difficulty, he encounters Formalism and Hypocrisy, who had climbed over the gate to get on the Way but were eventually destroyed when they would not follow the narrow path. Christian stays on the path and eventually comes upon a shady arbor, where he falls asleep, loses his scroll, and later must retrace his steps to find it.

He next arrives at the Palace Beautiful, at the top of the hill, and is admitted in by a group of four

sisters. They examine his conscience and provide him with shelter and supplies for the journey, including a suit of armor.

As he travels down the hill into the Valley of Humiliation, he battles and defeats a notorious monster named Apollyon, who tries to kill him. He then proceeds through the dark and desert-like Valley of the Shadow of Death, which is haunted by demons, before catching up with his old friend, Faithful, and they exchange stories of their journey.

They are soon joined once again by Evangelist, who warns them about the wicked town of Vanity Fair, which they will soon enter. This town hosts a year-round carnival designed to tempt pilgrims to abandon their journeys. Upon arrival, they are mocked by the townspeople for their backward way of thinking and arrested under the false charge of inciting a riot. Faithful is tried, tortured, and burnt at the stake. Christian miraculously escapes and is joined by Hopeful, a recent convert from Vanity Fair, and they continue their journey together.

On the Way, they cross paths with By-ends and his friends and discuss whether it's wrong to use religion as a means to get ahead in the world. Christian and Hopeful reject By-ends and his company and enter the plain of Ease, where they are tempted by a smooth-talker named Lucre to come over and look at a silver mine. They do not succumb to temptation but pass him by.

Next they arrive at the River of God and experience some rest and relaxation. When they leave the comforts of the river, however, the road soon becomes rocky and hard, so they opt for an easier, smoother path over the fence. This bad decision leads to them getting lost and trapped in a storm and eventually captured by Giant Despair. The giant imprisons them in Doubting Castle and tortures and starves them while also encouraging them to commit suicide. Christian and Hopeful manages to escape when Christian remembers that he possesses the key of Promise, which can unlock any door in the castle.

The two pilgrims continue on their journey until they reach the Delectable Mountains, where they meet a group of shepherds and are shown a variety of wonders. The shepherds provide them a map to avoid traps along the Way and warn them to avoid the Flatterer.

Now in their final stretch to the Celestial City, they encounter a young man named Ignorance, who entered the path by a shortcut and not by the Wicket Gate. They engage in conversation with him about whether living a good life is sufficient to prove one's faith. Ignorance is unable to handle Christian's rebuke and leaves their company.

Eventually, they come to a fork in the road, and instead of reading the map the shepherds had provided, they take the wrong path and then are ensnared by Flatterer. They are rescued by an angel who punishes them for not heeding the warnings of the shepherds.

They manage to get back on the Way and then enter the Enchanted Ground, where they are warned not to fall asleep. To stay awake and alert, they discuss Hopeful's journey to becoming a Christian.

Next they encounter Atheist, who denies the Celestial City exists, claiming to have been searching

for it for a long time. Christian and Hopeful avoid his trap and once again cross paths with Ignorance, whom they earnestly try to help without success as Ignorance grows frustrated and leaves again.

As Christian and Hopeful approach the land of Beulah, which borders the Celestial City, they are refreshed again for the remaining journey ahead. To reach the city, they must first cross the River of Death, which is to die. The depth of the river changes to reflect the doubt or faith of the person who enters it. At first Christian is overwhelmed by doubt and nearly drowns, but Hopeful reminds him of Christ's love. Reminded and revived, they both now have the confidence to cross over and are met by angels, who escort them the rest of the way.

At last they arrive at the gates of the Celestial City and are surrounded by a choir of angels with trumpet fanfares. They provide their certificates to the King and are transfigured at they enter the city and are welcomed by the joyous celebration of its residents.

The story ends with Ignorance arriving at the gate, but because he doesn't have a certificate to provide to the King, he is bound and taken to hell. With the pilgrim's progress to heaven now complete, the author awakes from his dream.

# Places Summary



## **CITY OF DESTRUCTION**

The City of Destruction is Christian's hometown and is a symbol of the entire world, with all its sins, corruptions, and sorrow and with no hope of salvation. He decides to flee when he learns that the city will be destroyed by the wrath of God, setting him off on his pilgrimage to the Celestial City.

## **SWAMP OF DESPAIR**

The Swamp of Despair is the first obstacle Christian faces on his way to the Wicket Gate. Here, pilgrims are likely to become so overwhelmed with conviction over their sin that they enter a state of depression and discouragement and get bogged down and trapped in the mire.

## **VILLAGE OF MORALITY**

The Village of Morality is run by Mr. Legality and his sons. Mr. Worldly Wiseman recommends that this is the best place for Christian to go in order to quickly rid himself of his burden as well as a wonderful place to stay and raise a family.

## **WICKET GATE**

The Wicket Gate is the only entrance to the Way, which puts pilgrims on the narrow path to the Celestial City. The gate represents Christ, and passing through it represents one's conversion.

## **HOUSE OF THE INTERPRETER**

The House of the Interpreter has many rooms, where Christian learns many metaphorical lessons about his new faith that spur him to religious thinking.

## **THE CROSS**

The Cross is located on higher ground, and at the foot of it is a tomb. When Christian approaches the Cross, the burden on his back rolls off and into the tomb.

## **HILL OF DIFFICULTY**

The Hill of Difficulty stands between Christian and the Palace Beautiful and must be climbed in order to get there. The hill represents many things in the life of a believer, including opposition, persecution, temptations, physical difficulties, overcoming sinful habits, forgiveness, etc.

## **PALACE BEAUTIFUL**

The Palace Beautiful is at the top of the Hill of Difficulty and is where four sisters live (Discretion, Prudence, Piety, and Charity). They examine the conscience of passing pilgrims and provide them shelter and supplies for their journey, including a suit of armor.

## **VALLEY OF HUMILIATION**

The Valley of Humiliation is located at the bottom of the Hill of Difficulty. Here, Christian is attacked by a fiendish monster named Apollyon. The Valley of Humiliation is a point in time when we throw down our pride and recognize that we are nothing without God.

## **VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH**

The Valley of the Shadow of Death is a darker and more fearful place than the Valley of Humiliation. Christian proceeds through the dark and desert-like valley haunted by demons and finds that his best defense is prayer. The Valley of the Shadow of Death represents the trials, temptations, and tribulations we go through in the Christian life.

## **VANITY FAIR**

Vanity Fair is a wicked town that hosts a year-long carnival designed to tempt pilgrims to abandon their journeys. Christian and Faithful are mocked by the townspeople for their backward way of thinking and arrested under the false charge of inciting a riot. Faithful is tried, tortured, and burned at the stake.

## **RIVER OF GOD**

The River of God is a peaceful place that's adorned with beautiful meadows full of lilies on both sides of the river and is green all year long. There are all kinds of fruit, and Christian and Hopeful eat the leaves to prevent sickness as well as to provide other medicinal benefits.

## **DOUBTING CASTLE**

Doubting Castle is located off the narrow way that Christian and Hopeful take when they think they have found an easier path. Its master is Giant Despair, and he and his wife, Diffidence, capture, imprison, and torture the pilgrims until they manage to escape. The dungeon of Doubting Castle is a miserable, unforgiving place representing the doubts and fears of those who feel trapped under the weight of their sin.

## **DELECTABLE MOUNTAINS**

The Delectable Mountains contain gardens, orchards, vineyards, and fountains of water. There are four shepherds who reside there (Experience, Knowledge, Watchful, and Sincere) who show Christian and Hopeful a variety of wonders, provide them with a map to avoid traps along the Way, and warn them to beware of the Flatterer.

## **ENCHANTED GROUND**

The Enchanted Ground is a place where, if pilgrims fall asleep, they might never wake. It represents a time in our lives when things are going relatively easy and smoothly and we become spiritually complacent.

## **THE COUNTRY OF BEULAH**

The Country of Beulah is a place of safety that borders Heaven and is within sight of the Celestial City, where angels commonly walk. It is a land of abundant provision and far beyond the reach of the temptations of this life. Christian and Hopeful stop there to rest before entering the River of Death.

## **THE RIVER OF DEATH**

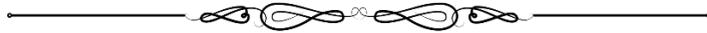
The River of Death is a deep and foreboding river that Christian and Hopeful must cross to reach the gate of the Celestial City. The depth of the river changes to reflect the doubt or faith of the person who enters it.

## **THE CELESTIAL CITY**

The Celestial City on Mount Zion, or Heaven, is the final destination for Christian and Hopeful. Once admitted through the gate by the King, or God, they are surrounded by a choir of angels with trumpet fanfares and are welcomed by the joyous celebration of its residents.

# Session 1: Chapter 1

## Fleeing the City of Destruction



1. A pilgrimage is often defined as a long journey to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion. How is our spiritual life similar to that of a pilgrimage or journey? In what way does God invite us into a pilgrimage with Him in Matthew 7:7–8?

2. In his dream, Bunyan sees a poor, ragged man standing off by himself in the fields, a heavy burden on his back and a book in his hand. According to Isaiah 64:6, what do the rags the man is wearing represent in this story?

3. Read Psalm 38:4. What does the heavy burden the man is carrying represent?

4. What book is the man carrying, and what happens to him after reading it? Read Hebrews 4:12 and Romans 3:19–20. How would you describe the piercing power of God’s Word?

5. The man tells his family and friends of the coming destruction and the need to flee immediately. At first, they treat him as though he's sick or perhaps mentally ill. Eventually they become angry with him, mock him, and ignore him. Why do some people respond not only with indifference but with outright antagonism toward those seeking God? How should we respond to those that try to dampen our spiritual interest?

6. One day as he's walking alone, reading his book, he's overcome with his spiritual burden and begins to cry aloud. A man named Evangelist approaches him to see what is wrong. Who does Evangelist represent? What two reasons does the man give for being unwilling to die?

7. Evangelist advised him to "flee from the wrath to come." Match the following verses with the correct allegorical representations found in the story.

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| ___ Wicket Gate       | a. Psalm 119:105   |
| ___ The Light         | b. Matthew 7:7–8   |
| ___ Knock on the Gate | c. Matthew 7:13–14 |

8. Do you think many people come to God today out of conviction or simply in hopes of having their problems solved?

## In Pursuit of Christian



1. Why do you think Bunyan describes Christian's world as "The City of Destruction?" Do you think that's an accurate description of our world today? Why or why not?

2. The word obstinate means to stubbornly refuse to change your opinion despite being persuaded. How would you describe Christian's neighbor Obstinate? According to Jeremiah 6:10, who would he represent?

3. Review the arguments Obstinate uses to discourage Christian below. Which do you think would have been the most difficult for you to hear if you were Christian?

- A. Reminding you of everything you're giving up
- B. Speaking sarcastically and belittling God's Word
- C. Being talked down to and called names
- D. Questioning your judgement or intellect for following Christ

4. The word pliable means easily bent or flexible. How would you describe Christian's neighbor Pliable, and who would he represent? Pliable has no burden on his back yet still follows Christian. Why?

5. Read Luke 9:62. What does Christian mean when he says he can't go back because "he put his hand on the plow"? What is the danger in looking back to our previous life?