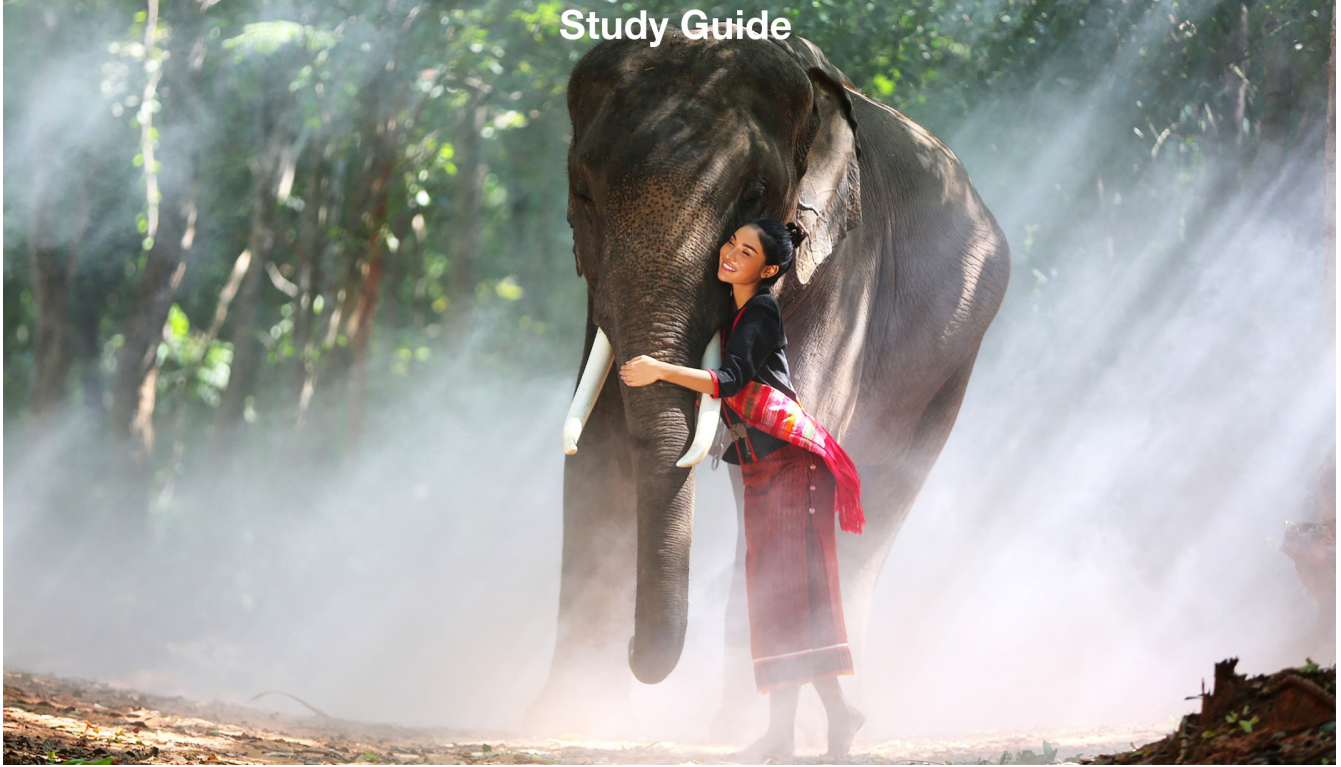


The Blind Men, the Elephant, and the Church

Gary Hargrave



A Traditional Indian Folktale

There is a familiar folktale about six blind men examining an elephant. This parable goes as follows:

There were once six blind men who stood by the road-side every day, and begged from the people who passed. They had often heard of elephants, but they had never seen one; for, being blind, how could they?

It so happened one morning that an elephant was driven down the road where they stood. When they were told that the great beast was before them, they asked the driver to let him stop so that they might see him.

Of course they could not see him with their eyes; but they thought that by touching him they could learn just what kind of animal he was.

The first one happened to put his hand on the elephant's side. "Well, well!" he said. "Now I know all about this beast. He is exactly like a wall."

The second felt only of the elephant's tusk. "My brother," he said, "you are mistaken. He is not at all like a wall. He is round and smooth and sharp. He is more like a spear than anything else."

The third happened to take hold of the elephant's trunk. "Both of you are wrong," he said. "Anybody who knows anything can see that this elephant is like a snake."

The fourth reached out his arms, and grasped one of the elephant's legs. "Oh, how blind you are!" he said. "It is very plain to me that he is round and tall like a tree."

The fifth was a very tall man, and he chanced to take hold of the elephant's ear. "The blindest man ought to know that this beast is not like any of the things that

you name,” he said. “He is exactly like a huge fan.”

The sixth was very blind indeed, and it was some time before he could find the elephant at all. At last he seized the animal’s tail. “O foolish fellows!” he cried. “You surely have lost your senses. This elephant is not like a wall, or a spear, or a snake, or a tree; neither is he like a fan. But any man with a par-ti-cle of sense can see that he is exactly like a rope.”

Then the elephant moved on, and the six blind men sat by the roadside all day, and quarreled about him. Each believed that he knew just how the animal looked; and each called the others hard names because they did not agree with him. People who have eyes sometimes act as foolishly.¹

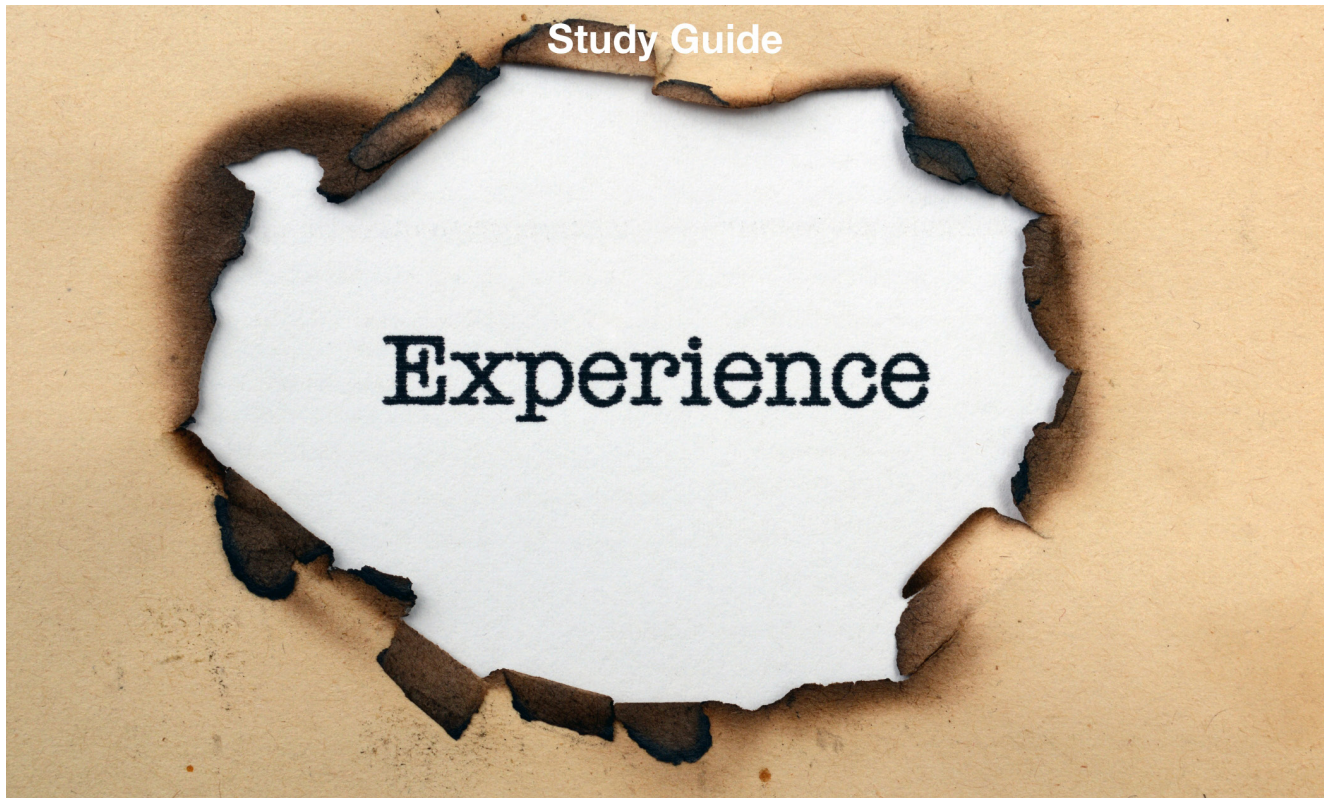
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1. “The Blind Men and the Elephant,” folktale from India retold by James Baldwin, <https://americanliterature.com/author/anonymous/short-story/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant/>.



Everyone Has a Different Viewpoint

This is a great parable for us as Christians because we tend to evaluate Christianity as a whole based on our own individual viewpoints. Yet if you conducted a survey of Christians worldwide, you would find a wide range of feelings, opinions, and understandings about multiple entities, multiple functions, and multiple cultures. And within each entity, function, or culture, you would find that not every individual has had the same experience. Experiences

differ from person to person. To put it in the context of this parable, your experience with your part of the elephant will differ from someone else's experience with another part of the elephant. Your experience is not wrong by virtue of being your experience. But it is also not the definition of the whole, nor is it the reality of everyone involved.



Relating to Multiple Experiences

There are some people whose experience with their part of the elephant has been painful. They have been hurt by experiences they have had in a church or fellowship. Those experiences for them are very real, and so we cannot make light of the problems that people are having. We need to find solutions to problems. We need to find out exactly what happened to people, when it happened, and hopefully why it happened. It is not enough to know what happened. If we are going to correct problems, we need to find out why things went wrong. We must provide help and healing for people who have had experiences that were hurtful.

We also know that many people have experienced great blessings and impartation in the Church. Therefore, as well as learning why things go wrong, we need to find out what makes things go right. Can we duplicate the positive experience? Can we make that happen again? Can we purposefully do things that are a blessing?

It always amazes me how wonderful it is when I get together with other members of the Body of Christ. Being with others to seek the Lord together gives me the opportunity to be in His presence in a way I could not do on my own. In the prophecies of the Messiah, we

read, “I received these wounds in the house of my friends” (see Zechariah 13:6). It is in our relationships that we are vulnerable to being hurt. It is also in our relationships in Christ where we can have an overwhelming sense of family and love. We cannot focus on one aspect to the exclusion of all the other aspects. They are all important. In fact, there are some extremely important issues that need to be addressed.



Communication and Confirmation

That is why there must be communication. Every member of the Body of Christ needs to feel like there is a freedom to communicate. We must be able to bring everyone’s perspective to the family table. At the same time, we need to find confirmation because everything that everyone says is not necessarily right. Nor is everything wrong. So how do we confirm it?

There is an answer in the Scriptures. Read Acts 15. This chapter describes the time when leaders of the first century Church came together to answer the question: “What do we do with the Gentiles who are becoming believers?” It was one of the biggest issues the Church has ever dealt with. And it was dealt with by men and women who brought themselves together and laid out their experiences. The apostles talked about what they had seen and shared their observations of what the Holy Spirit was doing in the Gentiles. Others said that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised. After everyone had their say, James spoke a Word from God that became the plumb line for everyone to follow. But it was not just James speaking; it was everyone bearing witness that it was a Word from God. Then they relayed the message to all the churches: “This is what we believe is the leading of the Lord.” We are still living under the decision they made back then. And that confirmed Word is still working today.



The Purpose and Focus of the Church

Each attendee in that early Church meeting had his own idea—his own part of the elephant—but each one put the direction of the Lord above his own viewpoint and became of one mind with the other believers (Acts 15:25). This is what Paul directs us to do in 1 Corinthians:

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:9–10)

We cannot avoid the need for oneness. It is an absolute mandate of the Spirit that we must find the way to walk in oneness. And the only way to do that is to be led by the Spirit and move according to the principle of confirmation. If we do that, we can become of one mind, but we must be dedicated to the process.

We must be dedicated to the voice of the Lord and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We cannot be moved or swayed by our own ideas and concepts. We must trust in the principle of confirmation. God is able to speak to us. He is able to show us what we need to do and what direction we should go. Therefore, we must break through into the ability to function prophetically as the Scriptures direct us (1 Corinthians 14:29; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

Our focus must be on the Lord and follow His leading. Think about the wilderness. The children of Israel solved many problems while they were in the wilderness. They solved the problem of having no food and water, the problem of rebellion, and the problem of having no leadership. But what happened when they solved all those problems? They were still in the wilderness. They still had to do what God told them to do, which was to take the land of Canaan. Likewise, it is very important that we also find our problems and have God give answers to those problems. We must fix things that are broken, and we must find out how to

move in things that are not broken, so we can repeat what is working. But the best way to do that is to keep in our hearts and minds that our purpose in Christ is to see the Kingdom of God come in the earth. Our purpose is to walk in the Lordship of Christ. Our purpose is to be mature sons of God in this day.



What Is Maturity?

Paul teaches about maturity in Ephesians 4, and we usually emphasize the verses about attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, growing up in all aspects into Him (Ephesians 4:11–15). But the verses before and after that are extremely important for how we do what God is wanting us to do as mature sons. This is clear at the beginning of the chapter.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.
(Ephesians 4:1–7)

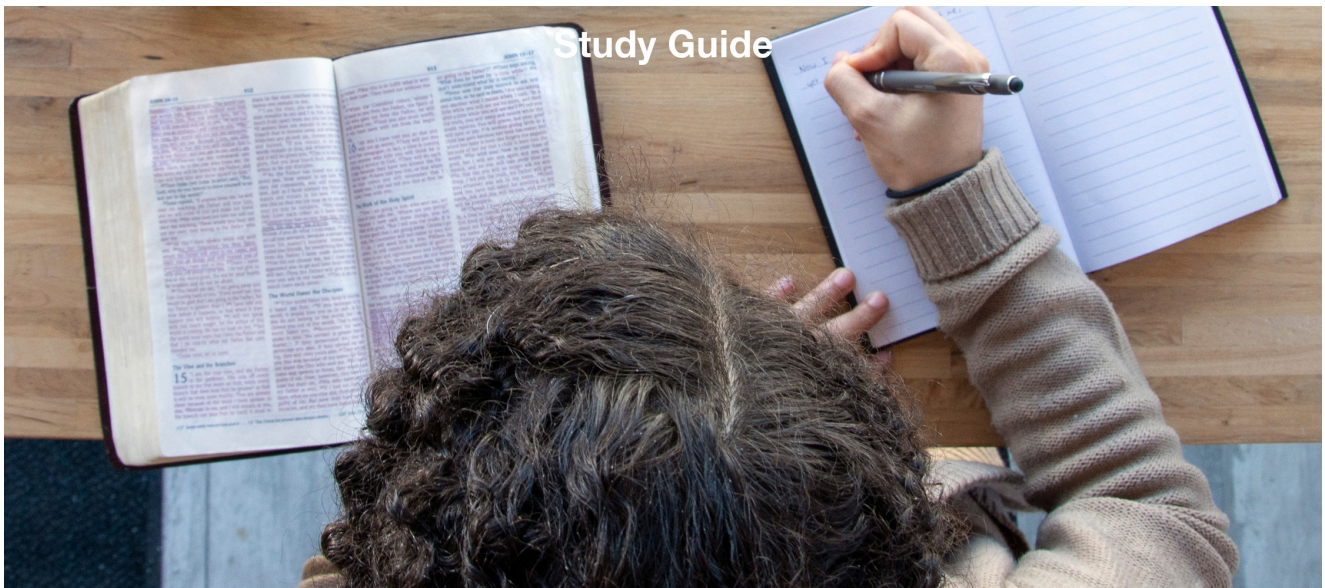
Paul keeps emphasizing the oneness. There is one hope; there is one Lord; there is one Spirit; there is one calling; there is one way that we should be walking together. And the only way to do that is to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To each one of us is given this gift of grace, this gift of relating together as a Body. As we read in Acts 15, the issue the early Church sought answers for dealt with the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers. And issues that churches today seek answers for are often about

our relationships together. This is something that we as Christians need to improve on. And the way we improve on it is to give our hearts to walk in the Word and to do it. Where we find ourselves failing in that, we repent, but we press on to see the change in us that is necessary. If we want things to be different in the Church, that means we as individuals must be different. Change has to come through us.

Now read from Ephesians 4 starting at verse 22.

That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:22–32)



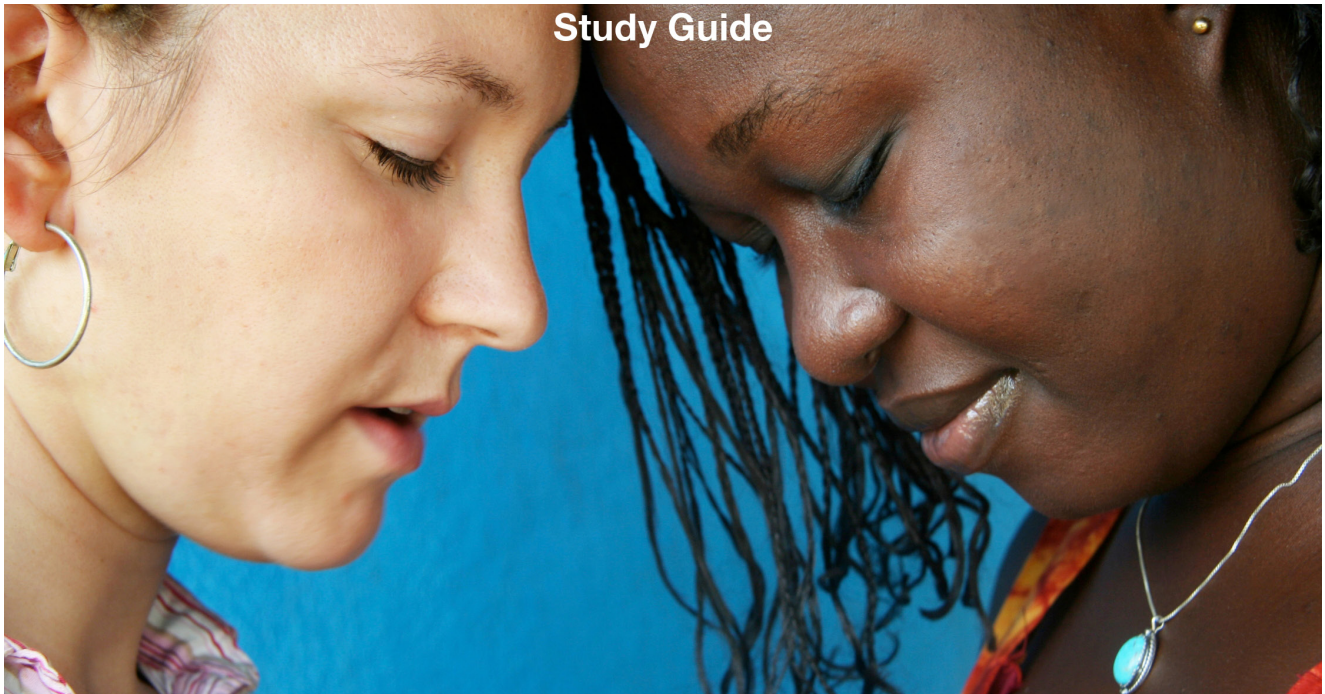
Following the Scriptures

These verses in Ephesians are a plumb line for how we are to walk in a Christian relationship with the Father, with one another, and with Christ as the Lord. All these aspects are

absolutely necessary for us to do. The ways of relating and behaving as outlined in the Scriptures need to be studied and followed if we are to correct the violations of those things.

One source of problems is our failure to rehearse the elementary principles and teachings that we already have. They are not difficult; they are simple. They may be difficult to walk in at times, but if we are reminded of these things, then it encourages us to go before the Lord, get these principles in our minds and spirits, and walk in them. That is the purpose behind Church liturgies. It is to go through the same scriptural teachings regularly as a way of getting them into our minds and spirits.

The point is not to have a liturgy. The point is to have the spiritual training we need. We have enough of the Word, but we do not have enough application that puts it all together in such a way that provides effective training. Pastors still need more training in how to do the job of pastoring a church, how to lead, how to relate to each other, and how to counsel according to scriptural principles. All of us need more training in the scriptural principles of family relationships: how we should speak, how we should act, and how we should treat one another.



The Necessity of Humility

There must be a brokenness and humility on our part so that we can hear and see what we need to hear and see. We do not want to be like the blind men, just focused on our little part, and then disagreeing with everyone who does not see it our way. We must have a sensitivity to one another to realize that another person's experience is very real to that person. Again the Scriptures are clear on how we are to relate. We weep with those who weep. We mourn with those who mourn. And we rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). We are a family. Therefore, "be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Many people need a real healing. Many people need a real deliverance and release. But people will not be free until we break the spirits that hold them in bondage. There needs to be a process of showering ourselves in the blood of Christ. There is one sacrifice for our sin. But it is up to us to wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). The fact that the provision is available does not help us. It only works if we access it. We must reach into what is available and see it become real and alive in our lives. If we are to solve our problems, we must see the whole elephant and follow the Scriptures on these principles of communication, confirmation, oneness, maturity, and right relating.

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Contact us by sending an email to silvana@hargraveministries.org

All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB1995).

ABOUT GARY HARGRAVE



GARY HARGRAVE has a passion for leading people into spiritual maturity. Gary effectively ministers the life-changing truth of God's Word through Bible teaching and prophetic revelation that emphasizes the Lordship of Christ.

Gary embraces the teachings and insights of the Hebrew Scriptures as the essential foundation of God's Kingdom and the roots of Christian faith.

By cultivating spiritual maturity in Christians, Gary is deeply committed to teaching and inspiring unity in the Body of Christ and between Christians and the Jewish people.

Throughout decades of ministry, Gary has worked closely with leaders in the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities to build relationships based on commonality and understanding. He frequently leads study tours to Israel in the land of the Bible.

Gary is the host of a weekly podcast entitled *Growing In God* and is the founder of Shiloh University, an accredited online Bible college and seminary.

Gary and his family reside in Hawaii.

For other insightful resources by Gary Hargrave, including podcasts, books, articles, videos, and other educational materials, please visit: www.HargraveMinistries.org.

ABOUT HARGRAVE MINISTRIES

The calling of the Lord upon this ministry is to lead people into spiritual maturity by revealing biblical truth. **Our passion is to see the Kingdom of God manifest on earth** as the Body of Christ grows in unity, power, and love.

Everything we do flows from the revelation of the Jewish foundations of our Christian faith. It is our desire and privilege to bless the land and people of Israel. Our Israel outreach includes our ability to:

- **Feed the poor and break the cycle of poverty in Israel**
- **Support the orphans and widows of fallen Israeli soldiers**
- Provide physical and emotional care to **child victims of terrorism**
- **Build bridges between Christians and Jews with biblical study and research**
- Support archaeology and preservation of the **biblical City of David**
- Provide 24/7 **care for Holocaust survivors**
- **Help persecuted Jews around the world return to Israel and start new lives**
- Plant trees to **reforest Israel** and help create **"The Gospel Trail"** between Nazareth and Capernaum

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