



Hope  
+  
Healing

The Book of Tobit

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Heart of Mary Women's Fellowship

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# About This Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

*If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.*

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Today's Scripture

n/a

One of my favorite movies is *The Princess Bride*. The movie begins with an old man introducing the story to his sick grandson, describing the story as having everything: "Fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, true love, miracles..."

This particular Bible story is worthy of being made into a big budget blockbuster because like *The Princess Bride*, it has everything: drama, action, romance, a wedding, and yes, miracles. But there are some things that *Tobit* has that *The Princess Bride* doesn't have such as divine intervention and life lessons.

The Book of *Tobit* is a novel, a fictional story written when the Jews were oppressed by the Greeks. Even though the story is fictional, it reminded the audience at the time that God will eventually help those who suffer and that it's good to do the right thing even when you don't get immediately rewarded for it. While most of the books in the Bible are historical accounts, we can learn just as much from fiction as we do from history.

All the best stories have the heroes go on a journey that leads them to somewhere unexpected. Much like Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, Tobias is called to help his father in his time of need. He takes this journey with a friend who turns out to have a great hidden power. There's a big fish story that gives Tobias some things he'll need for the things he'll face later on. He saves a damsel in distress from a great danger and

they of course fall in love. After the wedding, Tobias goes home, saves his family, and they all live happily ever after.

One wonderful thing about a great story is that you can identify yourself with any character, whether it's the protagonist or a supporting character or even the villain. While the book of Tobit has no relatable villain, everyone else in the story is someone we can identify with. We can see ourselves in Tobit, who tries to do the right thing even when he gets zero approval for doing so, or in his son Tobias, who bravely journeys to help his father and encounters some crazy things along the way. We can see ourselves in Sarah, who longs for a husband, or in Anna, who is concerned for the safety of her son. Most strangely, we can even see ourselves in the angel Raphael. While it's true that we can never become angels, there are probably times in our lives where we decide on helping a friend or a stranger in need without asking for anything in return.

My prayer for you in this Bible study is that you find yourself in this story. While our lives aren't as glamorous as the movies, God often calls us to go on a journey that leads us to somewhere unexpected.

As JRR Tolkien said:

The Road goes ever on and on,  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

Let the journey begin, dearest sisters in Christ! I promise you, it will be a fun one!

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**“God often  
calls us on a  
journey... one  
that leads us  
somewhere  
unexpected,  
somewhere  
wonderful. .”**



Today's Scripture

Tobit 1; 2: 1-8, Matthew 6:1-4

The book of Tobit begins with establishing the time and place of the story. Welcome to Nineveh. Yeah, the place where Jonah had to go to. The first chapter is told in Tobit's point of view. You might notice how nostalgic he sounds when he described life in Israel. In contrast, Tobit approaches his life in Nineveh very matter-of-factly. Life gets especially hard for Tobit when he gets in trouble for doing what he felt was right. You see, Tobit would bury the bodies of fellow Israelites who were killed by the king of Nineveh. His property was taken away and he and his family were left poor. If it wasn't for the next king putting a family friend's son in charge of handling Tobit's "crime," Tobit would've had a life on the run.

In spite of getting in trouble for burying the dead, Tobit continues to bury his fellow Israelites. When he and his family return to Nineveh, Tobit endures the mockery of his neighbors who don't understand why he keeps burying the dead even though it was once grounds for his death in the past.

You may not realize it, but Tobit is being a real hero in this situation. He's always doing the right thing, even when doing so was considered illegal in the eyes of the government. Although Tobit was exiled from his homeland and endured a possible execution, he faced his situation with courage and the resolve to always do what is good no matter what. That, my dear sisters in Christ, is the definition of a hero.

We are very fortunate to live in a country where we are free to pray, go to church, and live out our lives in Christ without fear of breaking any laws. There are times, however, when we get mocked or criticized

# “Never let anyone tell you that the things you do for the Lord are worthless”

for doing the right thing. Think of the people who pray in front of abortion clinics. Some people even criticize those who pray in the wake of tragedy, as if prayers are meaningless.

Although it’s nice when people approve or admire the things that we do, we shouldn’t do things in order to seek attention. Never let anyone tell you that the things you do for the Lord are worthless or don’t amount to anything. Instead, meditate on this passage from the Gospel of Matthew:

“But take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in

the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” I feel like this passage can also reply to any charitable deed that we do in God’s name.

Today, I challenge you to do an anonymous kind deed. Reach out to a stranger you think is in need of your help. Do a chore you wouldn’t normally do without anyone asking you to. Write a kind note to someone in your office, but don’t sign your name on it. You may not see the rewards of your kindness, but know that it’s enough that God sees the kindness that you do.

## Study Questions:

**Q: Write about the kind anonymous deed that you did. How did you feel when you carried it out? Did you seek out recognition from others or were you content knowing that God was watching? Think of a time people made fun of you for doing the right thing. How do you think you can increase in fortitude (courage) to keep doing what is right without caring about anything else?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 2:9-14; 3:7-10, Job 38-39

It's the same question asked time and time again: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" This question is often called "The Problem of Evil." It's one thing when you get sick with a cold or you break a bone. But how do you make sense of the suffering that happens in the world?

People forget, because of how the world perceive Christianity, that there are many instances in the Bible where bad things happen to good people, most particularly seen in the Book of Job. When Job asks God why he is suffering when he has done nothing wrong, God doesn't answer Job's questions, but instead gives him a sense of perspective. Job's story is just one part of a much bigger narrative.

The way that we see the world is limited. We can't write off life as having no meaning based on the little that we see in our short lives. Like Tobit, we are also blind to the big picture. Tobit doesn't believe his wife when she says that she got a goat as a bonus gift on top of her usual wages for work and Anna retaliates by snarking at Tobit for what seems to be his punishment from God. "Where are your charitable deeds now?" she asks. Meanwhile, Sarah also deals with having a horrible reputation of killing her husbands on her wedding night when it was really the fault of a demon named Asmodeus.

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**"God is not indifferent to our problems. We just need to change our perspective."**

Even though Tobit is literally blind, all the characters in today's passage are acting blind in some way. Tobit let his blindness turn him paranoid and Anna is too focused on making sure that she can provide for her family that she has no compassion for her afflicted husband. Sarah's maid is blindly accusing Sarah of something that she didn't do and we can assume, based on how often we've loved and lost before, that Sarah is probably blinded by her grief at having lost the chance to live a happy life with a good husband seven times.

How often do we get so blinded by our own problems or our busy lives or our failed relationships that we forget God or forget to be compassionate towards others or forget to have hope for the future? Why is it so much easier to blame God's negligence and perceive him as being indifferent rather than try to break out of the tunnel vision of our anger and sadness and look at things from a different perspective?

It's easy to give into the lie that our problems are too much for us to handle. It's easy to think that the world is out to get us. It's easy to believe that the universe is indifferent. But here's the truth, sisters in Christ. God is not indifferent to our problems. We just need to change our perspective.

I used to think that I would be stuck in a rut, that I would never find work after college, and that I would always be a prisoner of my anxiety. I'm the kind of person who tends to let her emotions overwhelm her. But through my relationship with Christ, I have found the strength to get past the things that triggered my anxiety and the wisdom to stop myself before I let my emotions get the better of me. It's not something that happened overnight or even something that I do on a regular basis. It's all part of a learning process.

The same applies to dealing with our daily frustrations and problems. We can't sit around feeling sorry for ourselves. We need to gain a better perspective and find a way to look past our problems and remember that God is always there with us. Today, I hope that you offer up your frustrations and things that you feel are blinding you.

# Study Questions:

**Q: What are some ways that you tend to blind yourself? Do you tend to make mountains out of mole-hills or act selfish when things don't turn out the way you expected? How do you think God can help you with that? What are some ways that you are blind to others? How do you think you can improve on being more considerate?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 3: 1-6, 11-15

Matthew 14:22-33, Psalm 22

I'm gonna start this meditation off with an excerpt of Hamlet's soliloquy from Act 1, Scene 2 of the play.

"O, that this too too solid flesh would melt  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!"

When you feel despair or depression, it's not just a sad feeling. It's a sense of hopelessness, the kind that Hamlet expresses here and the kind that Tobit and Sarah express in their longing for death. One of my favorite musicals describes despair as "the moments when you're in so deep, it feels easier to just swim down."

Despair feels exactly like drowning. You get pulled by all these negative thoughts that you can't stop no matter how hard you try and nothing you do can get these thoughts out of your mind. Some people feel like it's easier to just let those thoughts take over and give into the desire of suicide. In fact in today's passage, Sarah contemplates hanging herself, but chooses not to in order to preserve her father's reputation.

This isn't an easy thing to talk about, sisters in Christ. You probably know someone who has gone through this kind of despair or have experienced this yourself. The first thing to do when you or someone you know

feel like drowning is to call for help. For me, it started with prayer, which eventually led to me going on retreats and volunteering. I'm not just saying that you can pray away depression or anxiety, but finding a way to ground yourself back into reality is the first step to getting out of despair's undertow. Some people go through counseling or call up a crisis hotline in times of need. The point is there are ways for those in despair to find help.

If you or someone you know is feeling that pull of despair, reflect on these passages and know that you are not alone in how you feel. Jesus cried out the words from Psalm 22 when he was on the cross and Peter lost sight of Jesus when he tried walking on water in the middle of a thunderstorm. We may feel like we are drowning during our moments of despair, but our lifeguard has the ability to walk on water and knows what it's like to drown in sorrow.

Things won't get better overnight. Getting out of despair, anxiety, and depression is a process. Just know that it does get better.

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**You are not alone.**

## Study Questions:

**Q: Think of times when you experienced despair? Have you completely healed from it or do you still feel the emotional scars? Why do you think people have such a hard time dealing with heavy emotions such as despair and sorrow?**

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# Tobit

Day 3 // To Thine Own Self Be True

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 4, James 2:14-26

And so the journey is about to begin for Tobias. One interesting thing about my favorite movies is that things start out badly for the heroes, but when they begin the journey to try and change the bad situation, there's that first glimmer of hope that tells everyone that things are gonna start to get better.

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**“This above all:  
to thine own self  
be true. And it  
must follow, as  
the night the  
day. Thou canst  
not then be  
false to any  
man.” (Hamlet)**

But before the hero begins the journey, the mentor gives him advice for the road ahead. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy is told to follow the yellow brick road. In *Star Wars*, Luke learns how to use the Force. For Tobias, his father gives him advice that isn't just about the journey but about life as a whole.

It's very similar to this monologue from *Hamlet* where Polonius advises Laertes “This above all: to thine ownself be true, And it must follow, as the night the day. Thou canst not then be false to any man.” However, there's a big difference between Laertes's monologue and the advice that Tobit gives to Tobias. Laertes's actions contradict the advice that he gives whereas Tobit can back up the advice that he gives to his son because he lived his life always doing the right thing.

It's one thing to say good things, but it's another to actually follow through

on what you say. I remember when I thought I would go into a retreat with humility only to learn what humility actually meant. It's one thing to have the idea of a good deed or a virtue, but when you actually live out a virtue, it's not an instant feel-good experience. It's a lesson hard learned.

Like today's passage from the letter of James says "Faith without works is dead." Take note of how all of Tobit's advice consists of actions instead of empty platitudes. One issue I had back when I was addicted to self-help books is that while they were motivating, they never said exactly how one can accomplish the things they promised. At some point, you need to take action and see how the things you learn apply to real life.

I have a friend who works as a nurse. She did excellently in school, but found herself struggling to adjust to actually working. Being a nurse has a lot of demands and my friend had particular problems with multitasking. In an effort to improve her work ethic, my friend put efforts into improving her multitasking skills by focusing on one task that she can improve on first and then try and improve her skills at another task until she was able to multitask. Her dedication caught the attention of her supervisors and coworkers and she felt very proud that she found a way to improve herself in her career.

By taking action, my friend was able to improve herself and live out the things that she learned in her studies as well as in her faith. The best way that we can be true to ourselves is to act as our most authentic selves. That means being open to change and taking actions that will help improve ourselves.

# Study Questions:

**Q: What are some ways you feel that you can put your faith into action? What are some skills or virtues that you think God can help you improve on?**

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# Tobit

Day 4 (Part One) // Angels Anonymous

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Today's Scripture | Tobit 3:16-17, 5

I used to watch this show called *Touched By An Angel*. The concept of the show was that angels from Heaven played a more direct role in helping humans solve their problems. One episode of this show challenged the angels to help a group of people without revealing that they were angels, which is what the archangel Raphael decides to do in this story.

Raphael poses as a distant relative of Tobit's family and offers to be Tobias's traveling companion since he knows the way to get to Media. Tobit is more assured that Tobias will be safe, knowing that he's traveling with someone the family can trust. The name that Raphael assumes, Azariah, means "God has helped," which means that Sarah and Tobit will end up being saved, but not in the way that they expected.

You'd think it would've been easier if Raphael just healed Tobit's eyes then and then went to Media to banish the demon Asmodeus, but if that happened, wouldn't be a story. Help never comes in the ways that we expect. As we see in today's passage, God had a bigger plan for Sarah, Tobit, and Tobias. He knew that Tobias was actually the right husband for Sarah, but Tobias has to journey to Media in order to meet Sarah. The only motivation that Tobias has for going to Media is to get his father's money owed by a family friend. And the only way to keep Tobit from going to Media himself was to allow him to suffer blindness.

When our prayers are answered, they more often than not manifest in ways that we don't expect. I never expected to move from New Jersey to California and eventually end up in Texas, but after ten years of living in Texas, I can't imagine my life without the changes that I've experienced. The one time that my prayers ended up answered exactly as I asked them was when I asked God to allow me to have two dates

with this guy I met one summer. I actually ended up disappointed because I wanted more than two dates, but the guy never called me after the second date.

I realize now that God has a bigger plan for me than what I can see. I may be single right now, but I've learned something from the comedy of errors that I call my love life. I learned to value myself and not depend on a guy for my own happiness. Would it be easier for God to just have me bump into my future soul mate like they do in romantic movies? Sure, but then I wouldn't have a good story to tell. I wouldn't learn anything by just getting what I asked for.

There's a reason why some of our prayers go unanswered or don't get answered in the way that we expect. Have you ever known a child who always got whatever he asked for and then threw a tantrum when he didn't get what he wanted? What's the word we usually use to describe such a child? Oh yeah. Spoiled!

God is not the kind of God who would spoil His children. Instead, He helps us through secondary causes and leads us on a journey that brings us to the last place that we expect. As it's often said, God draws straight with crooked lines.

So don't complain when God doesn't answer your prayers the way you want Him to. Know that he is already sending people your way, your own personal angels who will guide you to what you actually need.

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**“God’s plans  
are bigger than  
we can see.”**

## Study Questions:

**Q: If you've ever had to work with kids (babysitting, teaching, being a mom), how do you deal with temper tantrums? How do you think that parallels our relationship with God? Contemplate a time when you feel like a prayer was answered exactly as you expected. How different was it when you had a prayer that felt unanswered but actually manifested in an unexpected way?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 6: 2-9, Luke 9:1-6

My brother loves playing video games like Final Fantasy. One element of games like Final Fantasy is that the characters often gather items like fish or clothing materials or things that would later be used to create weapons. In today's passage from Tobit, Tobias catches a fish and Raphael tells Tobias to save the gall, heart, and liver since those parts can be used for medicine. Tobias follows Raphael's instructions, but also saves the parts of the fish that he can eat for the road ahead.

Raphael explains that the heart and the liver can be used to help someone afflicted by an evil spirit while the gall can be used to restore sight to the blind. Tobias could've gone back home at this point since he has the cure for his father's blindness. However, his duty to his father came first.

There's a similar passage in the New Testament in which Jesus instructs his disciples about what to do when they go out to heal the sick and exorcise demons. "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them." Luke 9:3-4

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**“Take what  
you need for  
the journey,  
and leave  
everything  
else behind.”**

It's a little different from the instructions that Raphael gave to Tobias, but the sentiment is the same. Jesus is asking his disciples to prepare themselves for the journey ahead. Since the disciples have Him, they didn't require anything else. Tobias in a similar way, just took what he needed and left behind what wasn't necessary.

My mom always likes to remind everyone to make sure that we brought everything we need with us whenever we travel. It's annoying and makes her come off as a nag, but when we get to our destination and I realize I forgot my hair dryer, she gives me that "I told you so" look. Moms always know best, after all.

If you make time to pray today, ask God to be your compass on this journey we call life.

## Study Questions:

**Q: What do you need to take with you on your journey? Do you need to take more things with you or do you feel that you can get by with what you have now? Do you consider yourself to be an organized person or do you feel like being organized restricts you? Or are you too organized and inflexible? What are some ways you think you can find balance and be organized while still being flexible to the unexpected?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 6:10-18, Ruth 2

In these days when we can find a date with the quickness of a swipe or a tap or a click, it seems like finding a genuine relationship is next to impossible. I think we can relate to the fear that Tobias has about entering into marriage with Sarah. Although most of us aren't exactly afraid of dying on our wedding night, we always carry a small fear whenever we enter into a new relationship that something will go wrong. This can often lead to us sabotaging ourselves without even realizing it.

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**“There is nothing on earth more to be prized than true friendship.” (St. Thomas Aquinas)**

In the summer, I was asked out on a date from someone I met at church, but when he called to tell me he was coming to pick me up, he mentioned that his family was in an emergency situation. I told him that we can have our date another time and to stay with his family. However, I ended up crying after ending the call because I saw that minor obstacle as an omen that things weren't going to work out with this guy. I was ready to give up on him before he could ever get a chance to prove himself.

It wasn't until I talked to some friends that I realized how selfish I was acting. I was punishing this guy for something completely out of his control. While I was able to go out on that date a week later, the cynicism I had ended up costing me in the long run because the guy never called after our second date and I haven't seen him around since that summer. Something I learned from that experience, however, is to not make dating an all-or-nothing situation. In the passage from Ruth, we see that Ruth is grateful for Boaz's

kindness, but doesn't think there is anything more behind his actions. She accepts his kindness at face value. Never does she think that she owes him anything more than her gratitude. I also learned the importance of having friends to confide in when you're dating.

Once Tobias was assured that things will work out with him and Sarah, he was completely open to marrying her. In a similar way, it's not until Ruth realizes how important Boaz is that she starts falling in love with him. Both of them relied on the help of wise friends.

Proverbs 12:26 says "The just act as guides to their neighbors, but the way of the wicked leads them astray." Make sure that your friends help you out in your relationships by keeping you from being emotionally overwhelmed or expecting too much. Good friends will also be honest with you when they know that something is wrong.

# Study Questions:

**Q: Do your friends help you understand your relationships better or do they tend to sabotage things or put you into a mindset in which you end up sabotaging yourself? Do you have friends who seem to flatter you and just tell you what you want to hear or do your friends have a good balance of support and honesty? Someone I follow on Twitter said "Don't just surround yourself with people who validate what you already think you are. Real support is honesty." How can you balance out honesty and validation in your friendships?**

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# Tobit

Day 6 // It's a Love Story

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 7, Ruth 3:7-11

Was there ever a time in your life when a song seemed inescapable? It happens when a song becomes a big hit. For a while, there was a time when I couldn't escape the song "Love Story" by Taylor Swift. I'm a self-proclaimed Taylor Swift fan, but even I got sick of seemingly hearing that song wherever I went, especially whenever I felt cynical about my future relationships.

Of course, my favorite quote from CS Lewis reminds me about what happens when you try to give up on love completely:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."

It's good to have expectations and standards when it comes to dating, but don't demand more than what your significant other can give. Don't try to push things too far just because you want intimacy or marriage. Be relaxed and give the person you're dating the benefit of the doubt. And don't be too disappointed when things don't work out be-

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**"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and broken. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change." (C.S. Lewis)**

cause it means that there's a good chance the next guy you date will be better.

Don't let your relationships define and consume you and don't think that you're entitled to a relationship just because you act nice to a guy. Many women hate how guys feel entitled to having a date when they act nice to a girl, but they don't realize how often they try to do the same to men. Don't be a perfectionist and try to find meaning behind every minute action that happens when you date.

Notice how level headed Tobias and Ruth are when they pursue the ones that they hope to marry. Tobias is unafraid of possibly being killed on his wedding night because he knows that he is Sarah's kinsman-redeemer. Ruth braves the night in order to declare her love for Boaz. She, essentially, proposes to him, declaring him her kinsman-redeemer.

Don't be afraid of whatever bad things may happen to you, no matter what kind of relationship you're in. Every relationship has its problems. But it helps to know that God is always with you, no matter what happens.

# Study Questions:

**Q: How have your relationships affected the way that you treat your friends and family? What kind of mindset do you have when you approach relationships?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 8:1-9, 1 Corinthians 6:13-20,  
Matthew 7:7-12

"The basic error of mankind has been to assume that only two are needed for love: you and me, or society and me, or humanity and me. Really it takes three: self, other selves, and God; you, and me, and God. ... One cannot tie two sticks together without something outside the sticks."- Fulton Sheen

The first time that I heard today's passages, I was at my friend's wedding. The priest at their wedding complimented my friend on her choice of readings and I couldn't help but agree with him. It was my first time ever hearing a passage from Tobit, so right off the bat, I knew that my friend and her husband had something different in mind from the typical feel good sentimentality most couples want. Usually, at weddings, you would hear 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 and not the very blunt truth from 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 that my friend chose.

Our relationships are not within our control, nor do our partners take complete control of us. Instead, it's a team effort involving both partners and God. In these days where people focus more on extravagant weddings rather than putting an effort into making the marriage work, Tobias and Sarah take a wise step in asking God to enter into their marriage before they consummate it.

How many of us single ladies have a list of things we want in a boyfriend that's so long and specific that no actual person can measure up? It's very much like this song called "6-2" by Marie Miller which includes these lyrics:

"No I'm not particular

“Knock on the doors that slam in your face and you might find them opened.”

But could he have blue eyes  
Just like the sky  
And blonde hair  
Wavy and light  
And 6 foot 2 is my favorite height  
But Lord I don't care what he looks like.”

If you're single, reflect on the Gospel of Matthew shared here. God knows what you have in mind, but when you talk to him about what you seek in a future husband, He will work with you and lead you to someone who not only fits what you want, but everything that you need as well. Just don't get consumed with wondering what your

future husband looks like or what kind of person he is. God is handling it. All you have to do is ask Him and have faith that He will lead you to the right man.

If you're already in a relationship or married, the passage from the Gospel of Matthew can still apply when you connect it with the passage from Corinthians. You're in a relationship, but don't forget that God is a part of it and the purpose of having a godly relationship, married or not, is to ultimately glorify God through your relationship. Ask God to help you with your relationships and He will. Seek ways to improve your relationships and you will find them. Knock on the doors that slam in your face and you might find them opened.

## Study Questions:

**Q: What are your standards when it comes to relationships? Do they focus on the character of your significant other or is it more superficial? How do you think God contributes to marriages and other relationships? Is God part of the relationships that you have now?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 8:9-21, John 2:1-12

Today's passage feels like something out of a sitcom: Sarah's relatives decide to dig a grave just in case Tobias dies on his wedding night like Sarah's other husbands. The maid opens the door of Tobias and Sarah's bedroom and finds them sleeping together, which means everything's okay. After praising God that what they feared did not happen, they filled up the grave they dug out for Tobias and then the next day throw a party for Tobias and Sarah that lasts two whole weeks!

Usually, in Hebrew tradition, a wedding party would go on for just one week. It would explain why the wine running out at the Wedding at Cana was a bad thing because, judging by what the headwaiter said, the miracle took place towards the latter half of the week.

I always felt that if I ever get married, I want the Gospel to be today's passage from the Gospel of John. I'm not someone who constantly dreams of the perfect wedding (although I do have a wedding Pinterest board like every other girl who uses Pinterest), but I always loved the Wedding at Cana because it's a microcosm of what I feel life is like for married couples and for those who enter into religious life.

Every relationship starts off with a "honeymoon period," a period of complete bliss where problems seem so far away. I learned, from studying other vocations, that this same initial bliss happens for priests and nuns, too. However, there comes a point when people hit a dry spot, in other words, when the wine of our love runs short. It is then that Mary's wise words come to mind: "Do whatever he tells you." Those five words sum up all the prophets that came before Jesus.

When we find ourselves at a spiritual high, we need to be grateful and enjoy the closeness that we feel, knowing that it won't last forever. When we find ourselves in times of spiritual dryness, follow Mary's words. No matter what vocation you're currently in, be like Mary and center yourselves to do God's will before anything else.

Our relationship with God is very much like the vows that couples exchange with each other: "To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part." But unlike marriage, our relationship with God continues even after we die. Let God be with you in the good times and bad times, in sickness and in health, in the darkness and in the light.

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**“Before anything else, be like Mary. Center yourself to do God’s will.”**

## Study Questions:

**Q: Many people compare having a relationship with God to a marriage. Do you see the similarities? How do you think having a personal relationship with Christ can be like the relationships we have with other people? Who do you identify most with in the Wedding of Cana? Do you see yourself in Mary or with the bride and groom? What about one of the apostles or the waitstaff? Write your reflection on the gospel passage.**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 9, 10:7-14, 11:1-8

More often than not, the road home is, for me, quicker than what it took for me to get anywhere else. This was particularly true when, during my internship, I went with the other interns to a football game that took place out in the boondocks. I'm talking small town redneck Texas kind of place. We were there to report on a local high school football game and promote the station. However, due to the day being short and my interns and me being the only ones bitten by mosquitoes, we high tailed it out of the boondocks by half time and laughed all the way home.

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**“We are each  
others  
companions  
on the  
journey to  
heaven.**

The same goes for Tobias, Sarah, and Raphael. After getting the money that Sarah's relatives owe his father, Sarah's family bids Tobias and his traveling party "bon voyage." I especially love Raquel's advice to Sarah to respect her new in-laws. Although I love Pope Francis's frequent jokes about mothers-in-law, like it or not, in-laws are "as much your parents as the ones who brought you into the world." I'm not married, but I know the idea of having a family that consists of people that aren't your blood relations. I have many people in my life who I feel are my brothers and sisters in Christ.

We aren't shown what happens to Tobias, Sarah, and Raphael on the journey back to Nineveh except for Tobias planning to use the fish gall to help cure his father. But really, most good stories know to show only what is necessary. I think one reason that the way back home is faster for heroes than getting to where they went in the first place is because getting home is a matter of working backwards. And since they took

care of all the obstacles that blocked them from getting to their first destination, the path is clear for the way home.

As a cradle Catholic, I find conversion stories to be the most fascinating thing about being Catholic. One thing that conversion stories have in common is that the people involved would search for happiness and belonging through many things, but it's not until they find God that they finally find what they are searching for. As Saint Augustine said "You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." For those who convert, the journey home is actually just the first chapter that begins their life in Christ. It's like how a movie finishes with an open ending, leaving room for a possible sequel.

I have a friend who's going through her own conversion story. What's great about our friendship is that I get to introduce her to things that I learned about my faith from college and I get to learn things about my own faith from her as well. The best thing about being Catholic is that no matter where you are on your journey, you are connected to your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, which means that you are never alone.

## Study Questions:

**Q: If you're a convert, how do you think your journey to recognizing Christ has changed your life? What do you think you can learn from those who have grown up with the faith? If you grew up Christian, what do you think of conversion stories? Do you still stay strong in the faith or have you drifted away from it?**

**What do you think you can learn from converts?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 10:1-7, Isaiah 43:14-21

I'll be honest when I say that I find it hard to relate to Anna when it comes to worrying about my loved ones when they travel. My brother spent an entire summer studying abroad, but I was still able to keep in touch with him. But I do know that there are parents out there who deal with the horror of their child being missing. I can't imagine that kind of pain and anxiety and I feel glad that my parents never had to experience that.

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**“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new!”**

On the other hand, I do understand what it feels like to be impatient. I also know what it feels like to make a mountain out of a molehill. Today's passage from Isaiah reminds us “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

Impatience and anger are both forms of short-sightedness. While Tobit is assured of Tobias's safe return in spite of his physical blindness, Anna is equally blind due to her anxiety and impatience. Like Anna, we may not see the blessings in our lives due to our own myopic attitudes. Sometimes, we tend to make the biggest deals out of prob-

lems that aren't actually that big a deal in the long run. Or we can be like Tobit and ignore our problems and pretend that they don't exist.

The passage from Isaiah reminds us that God is already making things happen. We just can't see them yet. It's hard for us to see the changes in our lives when we only consider our immediate circumstances. Change always starts in the interior and slowly manifests in our lives. Most of us are used to having some kind of sign that marks our progress, like grades or promotions. But God doesn't measure success in the same way that we do. Instead, the only way that we can measure change with God is if we do His will in contrast to not doing His will. Nothing more and nothing less.

One instance of this was when I went out with my friends and I saw someone who reminded me of a person who hurt me in the past. I'm not sure if it was actually that person or just a doppelganger, but it was years since I last saw this person who hurt me. When I thought about how I would feel if it was actually that person, I felt nothing. After years of nightmares, I realized that God had set me free from the anger, anxiety, and fear I felt towards this person because I forgave them. It's a moment of growth that I'll always feel grateful for.

Today, offer up prayers for all the missing children and their families as well as for those in your life who you feel have hurt you in the worst possible way. I pray that God gives you the grace to help you let go of all the pain that you have in your heart.

## Study Questions:

**Q: Have you ever felt stuck in a rut or saw yourself as being stagnant when in reality you were going through a major interior change? Think of a time when someone said that you have changed but you didn't feel like you did. What are some areas in life that you wish you could change? What do you think you can do to start making changes, even if they start out in a small way?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 11:9-18, John 9

One of my favorite Disney movies is Tangled. It's a retelling of the fairy tale Rapunzel. One of the themes in the movie is that Rapunzel and Flynn have accepted a certain way of life. Rapunzel thought that she would always be trapped in her tower while Flynn thought he would find fulfillment once he's rich. By the time that Flynn helps Rapunzel watch the lanterns that get sent up to the sky, they both realize that they can no longer live with their old perspectives and find a new dream: finding love with each other.

Today's passages both involve a man being cured of blindness and gaining a new perspective in the process. Tobit gets cured of his temporary blindness and praises God's mercy, while Tobias tells his family about his journey and introduces them to Sarah. In the Gospel of John, the man who was born blind is cured of the blindness that plagued him all his life and deals with the scrutiny of his parents and the Pharisees.

Both Tobit and the man born blind understand that God was the one who cured them of their affliction. What I like especially about the passage from the Gospel is that the man born blind recognizes Jesus as the Son of Man but the Pharisees, in spite of their claims that God listens to them because they are devout and do His will, are spiritually blind, refusing to see Jesus as their Messiah.

Another similarity between the two passages in today's reflection is that

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**“We may not always get an answer for the things we don't understand, but our faith gives us hope that someday, we will.”**

God used the fish's gall to cure Tobit of his blindness and Jesus used clay and spit to cure the man who was born blind. Something I learned from reading the works of St. Thomas Aquinas is that God works through secondary causes. The idea of divine intervention or the deus ex machina is always a possibility, but for whatever reason, God, more often than not, works through something in order to accomplish a miracle.

Think of it this way. If Rapunzel was just taken out of the tower to her actual parents, she may never have known that the woman who kidnapped her was never her real mother or have fallen in love with Flynn. If Flynn didn't have his crazy adventure with Rapunzel, he would've stayed a selfish thief, caring for nobody except himself. Through the adventure that Rapunzel and Flynn have, they both realize how limited their perspectives are and how much they need each other.

I'm the kind of person who believes that everything happens for a reason, even the stuff that doesn't have an easy explanation. It doesn't mean that I always get an answer for the things I don't understand, but my faith in God gives me hope that someday, I will understand. A friend of mine told me "If you haven't found your answer, you haven't looked in the right place, you haven't listened, or you listened, but didn't accept the answer."

Today, ask God to open the eyes of your heart. Ask Him to help you find the answers to things you don't understand or to help you accept peacefully the things that are seemingly unimaginable.

# Study Questions:

**Q: Think of a time when you felt like you were acting blindly. How did your perspectives on that situation change? What are some unresolved issues that you have in your life? How do you think having faith helps us with what we don't understand?**

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# Tobit

Day 10 // Grateful & Generous

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 12:1-10, Psalm 92, Isaiah 58:3-7,  
1 Kings 17:10-16, Mark 12:41-44

When Tobit and Tobias talk about paying "Azariah" the money he is due for traveling and all the help he has done for the family, Tobias decides on giving his traveling companion half of the money that he received from Sarah's family at the wedding. If any of you have gone to a wedding, you might have participated in the "money dance," in which the partygoers give a dollar to the bride and groom for the honeymoon and for times ahead. What Tobias plans to give Raphael is probably a lot more than that.

**"Because of her willingness to be generous, she is rewarded."**

Have you ever wanted to repay a friend for their kindness by giving them something in return? I often try to make an effort to remember my friends' birthdays without checking Facebook and send them some kind of gift, even if it's just a birthday greeting or a nice picture. There are many ways to show your friends gratitude for the things they've

done for you. First, figure out your love language and then figure out which love language your friends would respond to the most. It'll definitely help when it comes time to get them a present!

Raphael chooses to show his gratitude to Tobias and Tobit by giving them some advice. He reminds them to give gratitude to God, to keep doing good, especially through prayer and fasting, and to be generous through almsgiving.

Let's break down each of the things that Raphael advises and see how we can apply them to our own lives. A good way to begin praising God and offering him our gratitude is through our morning prayers. Every

morning, I pray the Morning Offering from the Divine Office, also known as the Liturgy of the Hours. Psalm 92 is one of the Psalms prayed in this daily prayer. There are other types of Morning Prayers as well, including this one. There are also other prayers in the Divine Office that you can pray throughout the day. (Which means if you're working the night shift, feel free to offer up a Night Prayer!)

We normally associate prayer and fasting with the season of Lent, but there is an old tradition of abstaining from meat for every Friday throughout the year and it's a practice many Catholics still stick to today. If you have dietary issues like me, try fasting from something else that takes up more time than it should or a bad habit that you want to kick. Try fasting from the news or from social media or gossiping.

Finally, Raphael gives advice about almsgiving. When you read today's passage from 1 Kings, keep in mind that the widow was a very vulnerable, poor woman. It seems almost laughable that a woman who is living during a drought and down to her last meal is asked by Elijah for water and a cake. And yet, because of her willingness to be generous, she is rewarded. There's a similarity in the Gospel of Mark. The wealthy people were making a show of their generosity, and yet this widow enters in and Jesus gives His attention to her because she is willing to give everything she has. Listen to this homily from Bishop Robert Barron that reflects on the passage from 1 Kings and the Gospel of Mark.

Find ways to live out Raphael's advice in your own life. Try to put the actions of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving into your daily routine whether it's Lent or not.

# Study Questions:

**Q: What are ways that we can fast daily even when it's not Lent? If you've ever fasted, how has it changed your perspectives on patience and gratitude? When is your preferred prayer time? Do you try to pray throughout the day or do you pray in the morning and evening? How do you think you can give alms or do something kind on a daily basis?**

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# Tobit

Day 11 // Angelic Revelations

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 12:11-22, Luke 2:8-20, Acts 1: 6-12

We have different ideas and images of what angels look like. We usually think of them as fantastical creatures, either peaceful looking cherubs or young, handsome men with wings, or young men in ancient armor. Actual angels, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, are souls without a body. They have as much knowledge and intuition as any other human being, but they can get past the processes of abstract thinking that we have to go through. Raphael is one of the seven archangels (the other two being Michael and Gabriel), "who stand and serve before the glory of the Lord."

**Go forth. "Do not fear, peace be with you!"**

So you can imagine that when people actually see an angel in the Bible, they have every right to react with fear because the angel is the closest thing to seeing God that they'll get to see in their lifetime. Thankfully, much like the angel Gabriel, Raphael tells Tobit and Tobias "Do not fear; peace be with you!" He tells them that he was sent to help fulfill God's will, to give gratitude to God, and to write down what happened so that they will remember. Then, he ascends back into Heaven. Tobit and Tobias follow through on Raphael's words because of all that they have experienced.

When I read this passage for the first time, I was reminded of two events in the life of Jesus: one was when an army of angels appeared to a group of lowly shepherds and the other was when angels appeared to the Apostles after Jesus ascended into Heaven. Whenever I think of the first Gospel passage, I think of my favorite part of A Charlie Brown Christmas, when Linus reminds Charlie Brown what Christmas is really about.

Inspired by the Gospel, Charlie Brown tries to find the beauty in the little tree that he bought from the Christmas tree lot. His efforts to decorate the tree inspire his friends to help him and in the end, they all join together singing "Hark the Herald Angel Sings."

In Praying the Rosary for Inner Healing, Fr. Dwight Longnecker comments on what he calls the practicality of the Ascension. Jesus had to go back to Heaven because he couldn't remain on earth forever. Besides that, the Apostles couldn't stay in a spiritual high forever, either. All too often, we get caught up in wanting to experience spiritual high than have a genuine, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

What these two Gospel passages have in common is that once people hear the Good News, they go out and apply what they learned, living out the Gospel instead of saying one thing and doing another. As Fr. Dwight Longnecker said "He allows us to share in his glories of victory and his return to heaven, but that is only to charge our batteries and inspire us to continue his work on earth." This is why sometimes, the Mass closes out with "Go forth spreading the Gospel to the world."

Let those words enter into your heart today, sisters in Christ. Go forth! Spread the good news!

# Study Questions:

**Q: Do you have an addiction to spiritual highs? How do you deal with spiritual dryness? Have you ever felt like an angel came into your life and helped you out? Send a hug to your guardian angel in your prayers today!**

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### Today's Scripture

Tobit 13, Psalm 118, Matthew 2:1-12,  
Revelation 20-21

There are three parts to the long prayer seen in today's passage from Tobit. The first part praises God for His mercy and sings out in gratitude. The second part is a prophecy and blessing for Jerusalem. The last part combines the first two parts and praises God and longs for the restoration of Jerusalem.

It's not surprising that thankfulness for God's mercy is said first because gratitude and mercy go hand in hand. We can't be grateful without something to be grateful for and someone to thank. All gratitude and mercy begins and ends with God. It's very much like a prayer said at the beginning of Adoration:

"O Sacrament most holy!  
O Sacrament divine!  
All praise and all thanksgiving  
be every moment Thine."

When I read Tobit 13:11 and think about the bright light shining from Jerusalem and how many nations will come to the city bearing gifts, I think of the coming of Christ in the Nativity. Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, kings from foreign nations travelled to pay him homage.

The last third of this chapter (v. 12-18) parallel the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 20, those who sided with the devil are cursed, thrown into a fiery eternal "home." Those who are faithful to God, however, are welcomed into a new Heaven and a new earth.

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**"All gratitude  
and mercy  
begins and  
ends with God."**

Notice the similarities between the way that Tobit describes the gates of Jerusalem and the way that John describes "The New Jerusalem" in Revelation. A city made of gold and precious stones. John goes on to say that the gates of the New Jerusalem will never be closed and that there would be no need for a temple because everyone is already in the presence of God.

We may not be able to go to Jerusalem, but we can be in the presence of God through prayer, especially if we go to Adoration. In Adoration, a consecrated Host is held on display inside a monstrance. Hard as it is to believe, Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

"It is highly fitting that Christ should have wanted to remain present to his Church in this unique way. Since Christ was about to take his departure from his own in his visible form, he wanted to give us his sacramental presence; since he was about to offer himself on the cross to save us, he wanted us to have the memorial of the love with which he loved us 'to the end,' even to the giving of his life. In his Eucharistic presence he remains mysteriously in our midst as the one who loved us and gave himself up for us..." (CCC Paragraph 1380)

If you get the chance, go to Adoration and meditate on today's passages. Then, at the end of your prayer time (I recommend spending an hour), pray the Divine Praises. I pray that you will receive many graces from spending time in His presence!

# Study Questions:

**Q: Do you credit the good things in your life to God? If not, what do you think caused the good things? What are your feelings towards spending time in prayer? Do you feel like it restores you or is it tedious? What are some ways you feel like you can improve on your prayer time?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 14:1-11

In almost every adventure story, there comes a point when the father figure or mentor dies, passing on all his wisdom to the hero. You see it in Star Wars, when Obi-Wan sacrifices himself to save Luke and when Yoda passes away in Return of the Jedi. In the sixth Harry Potter book, Dumbledore dies (in the distance you can hear a million Harry Potter fans screaming in protest) as part of a plan to take down Voldemort once and for all.

Tobit's advice for Tobias and Sarah is to move to Media because Nineveh and Assyria will be overtaken. He foresaw that the people of Israel will be scattered but eventually they will return to Jerusalem again.

A great example of a wise man whose words are still being followed today is St. Benedict, the founder of the practice of monasticism. If you've ever heard of Benedictine monks, the men of that order are spiritual descendants of St. Benedict. Laypeople can still participate in the Order of St. Benedict by associating themselves with a Benedictine community and becoming what are called "oblates."

Oblates, according to the official Benedictine Oblates website, don't live in a community or take any sort of vow. Instead, they are merely ordinary people who carry out the wisdom of St. Benedict in their everyday lives. Elizabeth Scalia of Aleteia is a Benedictine Oblate and she shared this with me: "The first word of the Rule of St. Benedict is 'Listen' and Benedictines take that very seriously and try to incorporate the attitude of 'listening' into every facet of our lives." Another thing associated with Benedictine Oblates is the idea of combining prayer and work. So let's look at how listening, prayer, and working apply to this passage

Let's look at how my friend's words apply to what's happened so far. Tobit gives Tobias and Sarah an example of someone who didn't listen to God and ended up paying the price. In contrast, Tobit, Tobias, Sarah, and Anna have all listened to God's will and their lives are much better because of it. Tobias and Sarah began their marriage with a prayer and have been rewarded with children. Finally, the two of them are given the task of burying Tobit and Anna and then leaving for Media.

There's a bit of Shakespearean elegance to the fact that even though Tobit is dying and Anna will eventually pass away, the legacy of their family will continue on through Tobias, Sarah, and their grandchildren. In a similar way, the ones we love never truly leave us because we carry their wisdom with us if we learn how to listen to them, pray for God's guidance, and then work to apply the wisdom from both our loved ones and God into our daily lives.

I hope that you look more into the Order of St. Benedict. If you're not convinced, he has a twin sister named St. Scholastica who founded a monastic order for women.

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**“The ones we  
love never truly  
leave us.”**

# Study Questions:

**Q: What are ways that you can actively listen in your daily life? Write about a time when actively listening has helped your relationships with other people. What was the best advice you've ever received from someone who has passed away?**

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Today's Scripture

Tobit 14:12-15, Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

At the very end of Return of the King, there are two major events that happen for Frodo and Sam. Frodo goes off to Valinor with the Elves because the wound that a ringwraith inflicted upon him hasn't completely healed, even after the adventure is over. Meanwhile, Sam stays in the Shire and lives out his life there. However, at the end of his life (according to the appendices in the book version of Return of the King), Sam goes to Valinor to be with his lifelong friend. Although Tolkien didn't intend to have any allegory in his works, the place of Valinor represents the idea of the grace of a happy death, dying peacefully.

There's a huge difference between the despairing thoughts of Tobit and Sarah when they begged God to take their lives and the happy death that actually occurs for everyone. For Tobias and Sarah, life goes on and they get to see God's promised fulfilled. Eventually, when it comes time for Tobias to pass on, he happily accepts it.

One of my favorite shows is Doctor Who, a sci-fi series about someone named The Doctor who is part of an alien race called Time Lords. He travels throughout time and space having all sorts of adventures with his companions. One part of the show is that when the Doctor ends up in a near-death situation, he has the ability to regenerate or change into an entirely different person. The first time that I saw a "regeneration" was when I watched the finale of the Ninth Doctor's season called "The Parting of the Ways." The Ninth Doctor explains the regeneration process to his companion, Rose Tyler and then tells her "You were fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. And you know what? So was I." He accepts his death with a smile and regenerates into the Tenth Doctor.

Another person who was given the grace of a happy death was St. Joseph, Mary’s most chaste spouse. Not much is known about St. Joseph aside from the fact that he was chosen to be the foster father of Jesus and accepted God’s will even though he was initially afraid. But given that he chose to fulfill his vow of marriage to Mary shows that he was devoted to her. He was also willing to make the long journey to Egypt to keep his family safe.

“The world is thy ship and not thine home.” (St. Therese of Lisieux)

Like Tobit and Anna, Joseph and Mary lived for a while in a land where they were refugees, foreigners, and worked together to raise their child in their faith. Not much is said about the life that the Holy Family led during their time in Egypt, but it couldn't have been easy for them, especially when after a certain amount of time, they had to leave Egypt for Nazareth. I lived in California for three years after spending my entire childhood in New Jersey and then moved to Texas, where I still live. Nowadays, though, I consider the times I moved to be a blessing. I learned new things from the places I lived in. I find it surprising whenever I find someone who spent all their lives living in one place because.

There's a song by Carrie Underwood called "Temporary Home" which reflects different ideas on what home means to different people. Ultimately, the song reminds us that this world that we live in is just a temporary home. As St. Therese of Lisieux said "The world is thy ship and not thine home." When it comes to my life, I don't wanna go down with the ship and follow the ways of the world. I pray for the grace of a happy death, which means sailing with my ship towards home: Heaven.

## Study Questions:

**Q: Think of a time when you lost a loved one through death. Did they die peacefully or was it filled with suffering? Or was it sudden? How did you deal with it? Are you afraid of death? How has today's passage changed your perspectives on death?**

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